

“Handling Complaints”

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Dealing with a complaining customer is a terrific opportunity to make a steady one...for life! And avoid all the lost business due to the “bad-mouthing” you will prevent. Follow these rules or something close to them.

1. Be prepared / get trained by someone practiced in this important activity.
2. Know the limit of your authority for expenditure in resolving the situation to the customer’s complete satisfaction.
3. Acknowledge the customer as quickly as possible...within 24 hours max.
4. Early on in your discussion, thank the customer for bringing the matter to your attention.
5. Listen carefully when getting the details from the customer giving this step your full and complete attention. If it is a small matter, satisfy the customer approving whatever financial accommodation it takes. If the matter involves big bucks (or exceeds your authority), tell the customer just that and give the assurance that you will respond again by a date certain.
6. Calendar the date you gave the customer to assure same is not missed.
7. Conduct whatever investigation is called for / make your decision / get the needed approval.
8. Re-contact the customer ahead of or on the date promised and convey your decision. Always attempt to implement a solution which requires the complainant to re-visit your store so you can use some special TLC in connection with that next visit to further cement the newly improved relationship. Note: It is assumed that you have satisfied the customer at this point. If not, another set of procedures s/b implemented now.
9. Follow-up later with a standard online survey request to compile a record of your effectiveness from the customers’ point of view (and further show that customer you really did care about helping them resolve the situation).
10. Keep a record of each significant complaint. File by name of complainant so that “professional complainers” may be later identified.
11. Follow through with the in-house personnel involved to provide the training needed to prevent recurrence of this type of complaint.

Reasons for satisfying customers who complain include the following:

1. Think about what it costs in advertising, sales promotions and on site POS to acquire a new customer and conclude the first sale. The complainant has already been acquired. Keeping this customer saves the cost of replacement.
2. Surveys show that only one in ten customers having a reason to complain actually lodge a complaint. The rest just quietly slide over to your competitor. Complaining customers alert you to whatever is going wrong thus enabling you to fix the problem and stem the flow of all those other unhappy customers to the competition.
3. Surveys also show that dissatisfied customers complain about you to their friends...about 13 of them on average. Satisfy the complainant and head off all that negative word-of-mouth advertising.

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