

How to turn unhappy customers into raving fans of your brand



groove
SUPPORT, SIMPLIFIED

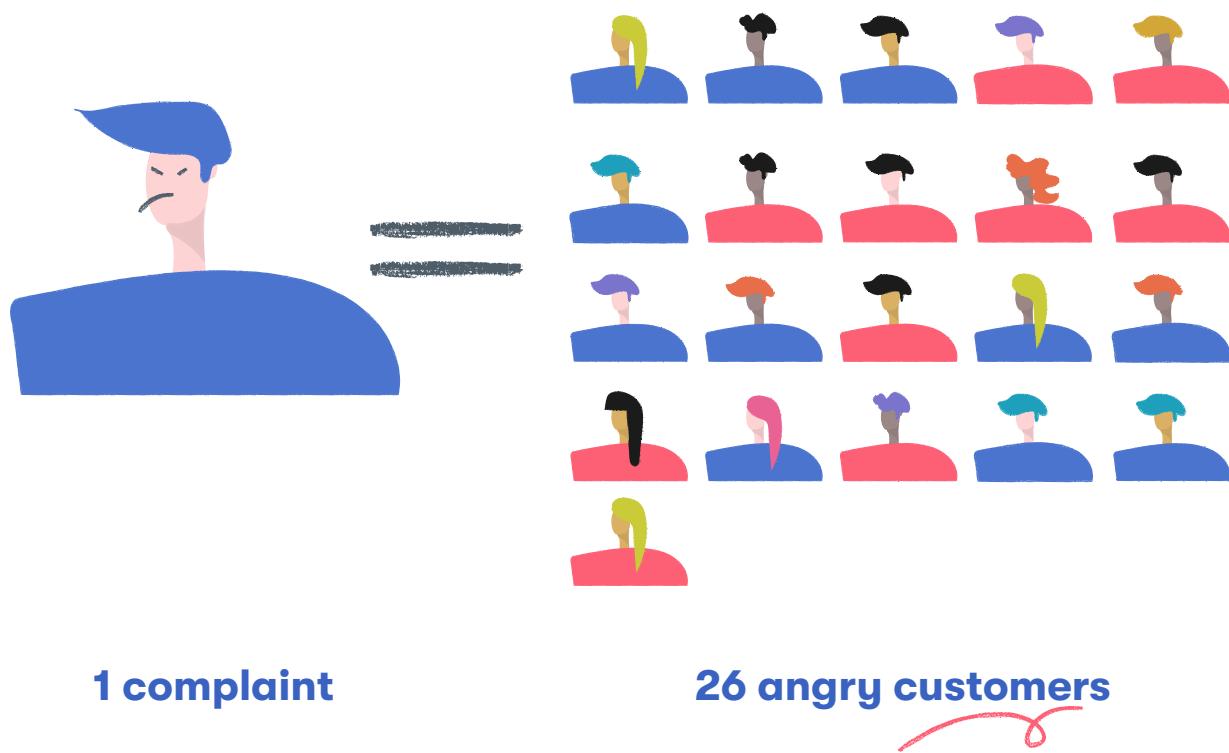
If you've been in business a while, you know what it's like to receive a message from an angry customer.

It's frustrating, to say the least. The really bad ones can ruin your whole day.

Usually, angry customers aren't mad at you. They just want to be heard.

That's why every customer complaint is actually an opportunity to fix problems that may be much bigger than you realize.

After all, for every one customer complaint, [26 other customers](#) probably feel the same way but don't say anything.



With that said, customer complaints are not created equal.

As our friend [Jessica Malnik writes](#), "When the customer is upset, you have 'one shot' to publicly diffuse the situation and create a better experience for the customer."

Here's how to respond in five of the most common support situations.

Scenario #1: A crisis

Sometimes you run into scenarios that affect many (or all) of your customers.

These include:

- Outages
- Security breaches
- Major product bugs

In these situations, it's time to pull out the crisis communications plan.

If you don't have one drafted already, work with your support, PR, and marketing teams to pull one together.

Your crisis plan is like reputation insurance for your company.

It's a pre-arranged set of actions and messages you can deploy at a moment's notice if a major disruption happens in your business.

We won't go into detail about how to create one here. But if you don't have a crisis communication plan, grab your support, PR, and marketing teams and use our [crisis communication handbook](#) to put one together.

Scenario #2: One-on-one support issues

Most unhappy customers fall into the "one-on-one support issue" category.

They're angry about an issue, but it's an issue that's only happening with their specific account, not with your customer base as a whole.

Your first goal with an angry customer is to de-escalate.

Here's a five-step process you can follow in this situation:

STEP 1: RESPOND QUICKLY

Your first response to the customer should happen within 24 hours, and even that might be too long. [According to HubSpot](#), 72% of people who complain on Twitter expect a response within an hour.

STEP 2: LISTEN TO THE CUSTOMER

Don't jump to conclusions. Instead, try to understand what's happening. The quickest way to take control and begin to turn around a negative customer experience is to actively listen.

STEP 3: REPEAT THE PROBLEM

This may seem like an unnecessary step. But so many situations escalate because of a misunderstanding between you and the customer.

Repeat back to the customer what you hear them saying. This step all by itself is often enough to calm an angry customer.

STEP 4: CLASSIFY THE PROBLEM

Did you and your company screw up? Is it a product bug? Is it a perceived injustice or misunderstanding with the customer?

Each of these situations calls for a different response.

If you screwed up, take ownership of the mistake and take steps to fix it.

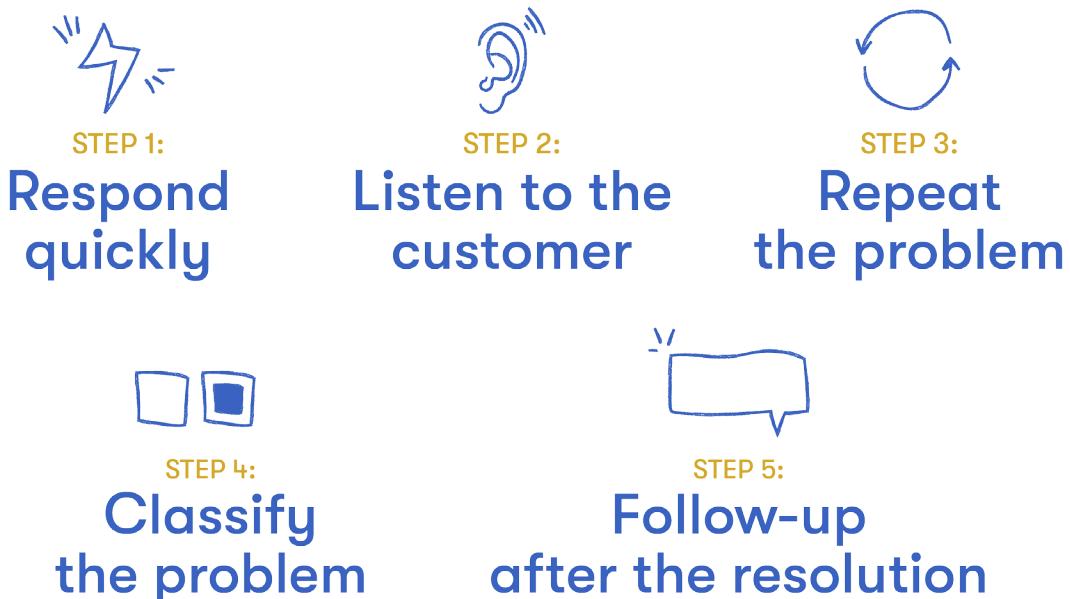
If it's a product bug, replicate the problem and document the issue as thoroughly as you can. Then, get it to your product team.

STEP 5: FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE RESOLUTION

Here's where doing things that don't scale can work to your advantage.

A couple of days after the customer issue has been closed, reach out to the customer just to check in and ensure their problem is truly resolved.

Even the most difficult customers will appreciate this gesture, and it can go a long way toward rebuilding trust between you and upset customers.



Scenario #3: Product feedback and feature requests

You're always going to have customers who ask for features you don't have.

The key insight here?

Feature requests usually come from power users—people who already value your product.

They're trying to help you make the product better, and the right response is to acknowledge that you appreciate their ideas and suggestions.

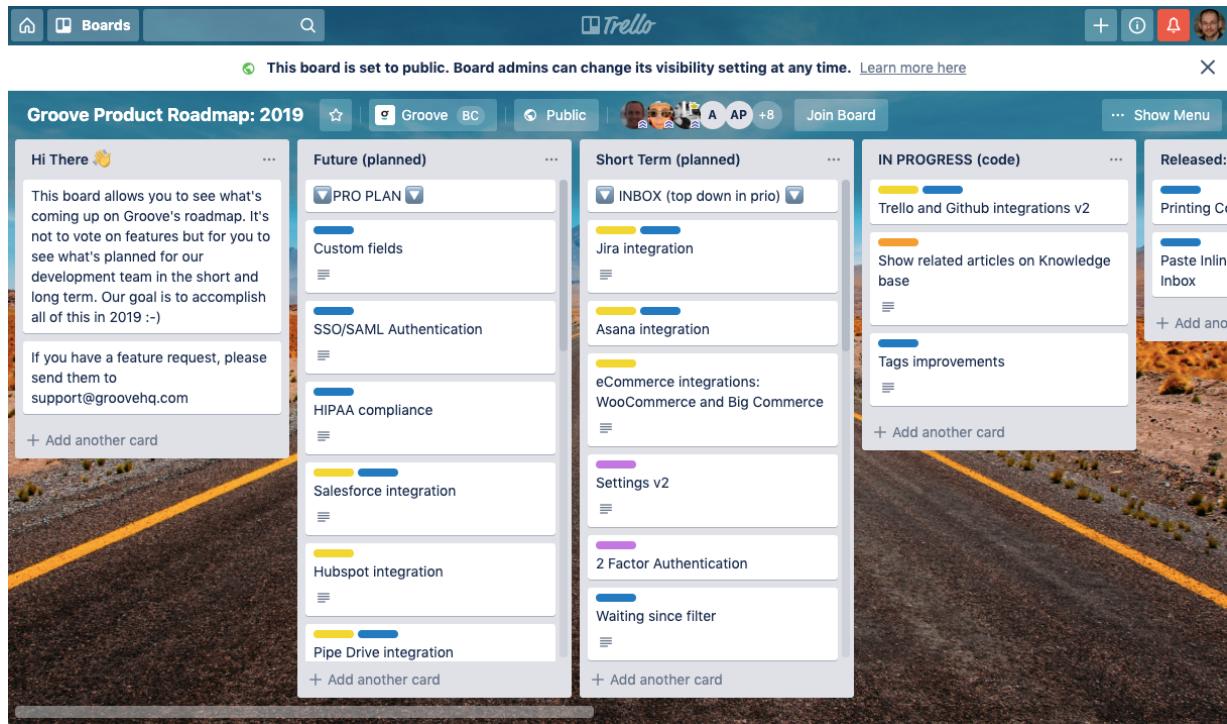
That's true even if you have to tell them their suggestion isn't going to make it on the list of planned features.

As you get more product feedback, set up a system where you can send requests to your product team on a regular basis.

At Groove, we count requests in an internal Trello board. Each time we get the same request, a tracking card gets a "vote," to help us see how popular the

different requests are.

If we commit to building a feature, we add it to our [public roadmap](#).



When users write in about a feature that's on our roadmap, we can let them know we're already working on. We also share a link to the board so they can track its progress for themselves.

This lets them know we're listening to them. It also keeps us accountable for developing the features we've committed to on our roadmap.

Scenario #4: The support ‘regulars’

Most companies have a few support “regulars,” people write in once a week with a problem, question, suggestion, or (seemingly) just because they wanted a distraction from their normal work.

They never seem to be satisfied no matter how many times you address their concerns. As soon as one problem is solved, they'll email you about something

else, and the cycle continues.

For customers who never seem satisfied, try to find the root issue behind all their support requests.

A simple framework you can use with them is the 5 WHYS approach, a problem-solving approach made famous by Toyota as part of the Toyota Production System.

To use this framework, simply keep asking “why” until you get to the root cause of the customer’s issues.

A customer is unhappy because company won't offer discounts for their new product.

1. Why is customer unhappy?

The customer wants a discount.

2. Why does the customer wants a discount?

The customer wants the product.

3. Why does the customer wants the product?

The product will help the customer with their business.

4. Why can't the customer purchase the product at the full price and write it off as business expenses?



No sales.

5. Why does the customer have no sales?

The root cause.

There is nothing magical about the number five, by the way.

Just keep asking “why?” until you get to an answer that is clearly the “real” issue.

You’ll know you’ve found it when you get to an answer that’s the first link in the chain of events that causes the current frustration your customer is feeling.

You’ll also know if you ask “why” one more time and the answer becomes trivial or nonsensical.

For example, here’s an example I overheard the other day between a friend and her teenage son.

This examination only takes three questions , not five, to find the root cause.

▼
1. Why didn’t you eat lunch?

**Because I was trying to finish my homework
before my 1 o’clock class.**

▼
**2. Why were you trying to finish my
homework before your 1 o’clock class?**

Because I didn’t do it last night.

▼
3. Why didn’t you do it last night?

Because I was playing video games. ← ROOT CAUSE

▼
**4. Why were you playing games last night
instead of doing your homework?**

I don’t know.

See if you can find the root cause behind the constant problems your regular support customers are having.

It may simply be that your product isn't right for them. If so, there's nothing wrong with letting them know you're not right for their needs.

Scenario #5: Antagonizers, instigators, and jerks

These are customers you usually see on social media channels rather than in your actual support inbox. They thrive off controversy and they love the response they get from picking a fight in a public forum.

If left unchecked, these customers can create chaos.

So, keep your head, respond in polite but professional terms to diffuse the situation.

(We'll share a fantastic example of this in a moment.)

Finally, there are the jerks. These are customers who:

- Make personal attacks on people, not problems
- Give mostly non-constructive feedback, including excessive use of profanity
- Are prone to spiteful outbursts, both privately and on social media

The best thing to do in these situations is to [gracefully part ways with the customer](#).

Here's an example I love of a company doing just that:



Little Italy Restaurante

November 10, 2015 · Anchorage, AK ·

This has been pondered for days now: should I write this post and HOW should I write this post?

Over the weekend we received a complaint about one of our delivery drivers. The customer wasn't simply complaining, he was ranting and foul. He informed us our driver was an idiot and strung out on drugs and was FURIOUS!

It was calmly explained to him, no, this driver is not on drugs....nor does he drink....he is autistic and has a slight speech impediment. The customer called the phone person a liar, had a few more choice words for her and hung up.

When the driver returned, he came into my office a little shaken because the customer was angry (he had mixed up the pouch of food but quickly retrieved the correct order from his car. Mistakes are made all the time in the course of a business life, and when we make them we do our very best to correct the problem immediately.)...that didn't satisfy this man....he berated him and then called him a name I won't even elude to here.

It isn't the first time I've had a comment about this employee, but normally, as soon as I explain, they are always VERY understanding that the mannerisms had a reason.

This driver has worked for us for two years. He is a seriously accomplished University student, has an amazingly inquisitive personality, a wicked sense of humor and one helluva work ethic!

You would think, in the year 2015 the majority of the population would have learned or at least heard about autism. I understand that there is a large portion of our population that is content to remain uninformed and uneducated, but that doesn't give them the right to take that ignorance and turn it into a foul mouthed rant on two of my employees!

Therefore, we have fired this customer. That address, that name and phone number will be tagged with a DO NOT DELIVER DO NOT ACCEPT ORDER message.

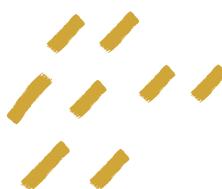
..... And won't that customer be surprised later in life to learn that his "idiot strung out" delivery driver long ago turned out to be the physicist, microbiologist or chemical engineer who could quite possibly make a discovery that will save his sorry *** someday.

Just sayin'.

Thank you for allowing my own little rant here.

33K

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