

# **Customer Service Basics**

## ***Introduction to Customer Service***

“There is only one boss, and whether a person shines shoes for a living or heads up the biggest corporation in the world, the boss remains the same. It is the customer! The customer is the person who pays everyone’s salary and who decides whether a business is going to succeed or fail. In fact, the customer can fire everybody in the company from the chairman (CEO) on down, and he can do it simply by spending his money somewhere else.

Literally everything we do, every concept perceived, every technology developed and associate employed, is directed with this one objective clearly in mind – pleasing the customer.”

Sam M. Walton, CEO Wal-Mart

Credo from Sam Walton the owner and CEO of Wal-Mart – an international chain of department stores and the most successful company in retailing in the world.

## ***Customer Service in the 21st Century***

Ask any CEO of a company, president of a bank, manager of an office, minister or staff person and they will tell you HOW IMPORTANT the customer is to their operations and success. In meeting after meeting, heads of industry, the service sector, utilities, and government try to convince the audience how much they believe in customer service.

“It is our mission, it is our number one priority, it is our goal, it is why we are in business, etc...,” often prove to be mere epitaphs. Unfortunately, these same “customer friendly” executives go back to their offices, de-employ office staff, fail to initiate a customer service improvement plan and send memos out saying customer complaints are unjustified and overblown.

## ***The Three Key Elements***

### **Expand Your Definition of Service**

How you define service shapes every interaction you have with your customers. Limited definitions of service based on an exchange of monies for goods or service misses the overall point of customer service. “Service” should provide the customer with more than a product or action taken on his/her behalf. It should provide satisfaction. In essence, the customer should walk away pleased at the result of the transaction – not just content but actually happy. A happy customer will continue to be a buying customer and a returning customer.

### **Who are Your Customers?**

Customers, buyers and clients want to pay a fair price for quality service or products, and feel satisfied they have paid for a service/product and received what they have paid for in return. They also want someone to take care of them. They need someone to understand their needs and help answer them. They need someone to hold their hands and walk them through a process. Customer service starts with the ability to listen to the customer and find out through polite questioning what he/she needs or wants.

Customer service and contact with a client mean that the customer will be heard and his/her problems will not go unanswered or ignored. It also means getting to know your client, his/her likes-dislikes, ideas, background, etc.

The other most important aspect to do is to listen to what the customer is saying. If people do not understand what is motivating the customer, they will not be successful in handling them. Do research on customers, their habits, and what they want and expect.

Most customer service is defined by how a company or organization treats “external customers,” but there is “internal customer service” as well. While this manual mainly addresses “external customers,” expanding your definition of customer service to include co-workers will lead toward even greater success. Remember, the internal customer chain is just like the external, we are all customers both inside and outside the company or organization. As a Wall Street Journal article succinctly put it, “Poorly Treated Employees Treat Customers Just as Poorly.”

## **Develop a Customer Friendly Approach**

One commonality among all companies or organizations that provide good service is the development of a system and attitude promoting customer friendly service. By “customer friendly” we mean viewing the customer as the most important part of your job. The cliché, “The customer is always right” is derived from this customer friendly environment.

Two critical qualities to the “Customer Friendly Approach”:

- Communications
- Relationships

The two main tasks of successful customer relations are to communicate and develop relationships. They don’t take a huge effort, but don’t happen instantaneously either. Positive dialogue/communication with your customers and developing ongoing relationships with your customers are perhaps the two most important qualities to strive for in customer service.

## ***What Customer Service Means***

As mentioned earlier, customer service means providing a quality product or service that satisfies the needs/wants of a customer and keeps them coming back. Good customer service means much more – it means continued success, increased profits, higher job satisfaction, improved company or organization morale, better teamwork, and market expansion of services/products.

Think about it places where you enjoy doing business – stores, petrol stations, suppliers, banks, etc. Why, aside from the actual product or service they provide, do you like doing business with them? You probably find them courteous, timely, friendly, flexible, interested, and a series of other exemplary qualities. They not only satisfy your needs and help you in your endeavors but make you feel positive and satisfied. You come to rely on their level of service to meet your needs and wants.

On the other hand, let’s review a business you dislike patronizing maybe even hate utilizing but in some cases do so out of necessity. Maybe it is the Police when you need a new driver’s license or maybe it is the local store that carries a product you need but who offers lousy

service when you purchase. In both of these cases we are willing to hypothesize that the customer experience is marred by long lines, gruff service, inefficient processing, impolite and unfriendly clerks or salespeople, lack of flexibility, and no empathy for your customer plight. In these cases you feel abused, unsatisfied, and taken advantage of – in essence, your experience is wholly negative.

Unfortunately, in the cases we outlined above there is no competition for the services/products offered or you would gladly not consider using either the Ministry of Transport or the rude department store. This is the advantage of a monopoly on a good or service because in a competitive marketplace, the unsatisfied customer shops elsewhere.

Remember, good customer service results in consumer satisfaction and return customers and growth in business. Poor customer service, except for monopolistic strongholds, generally results in consumer dissatisfaction, lack of returning customers and dwindling business.

## **Customer Service Qualities**

**Customer Service = Accountability + Delivery**

### **Professional Qualities in Customer Service**

Professionals who constantly deal with customers (inside and outside the company) need to strive for certain qualities to help them answer customer needs.

The professional qualities of customer service to be emphasized always relate to what the customer wants. After years of polling and market research, it turns out customers are constantly internalizing their customer service experience. What this means is they are grading your customer service during each transaction but you rarely know it. While there are a multitude of customer needs, six basics needs stand out:

- Friendliness – the most basic and associated with courtesy and politeness.
- Empathy – the customer needs to know that the service provider appreciates their wants and circumstances.
- Fairness – the customer wants to feel they receive adequate attention and reasonable answers.
- Control – the customer wants to feel his/her wants and input has influence on the outcome.
- Information – customers want to know about products and services but in a pertinent and time-sensitive manner.

It is also very important for customer service employees to have information about their product or service. Service providers who answer, “I don’t know” or “It is not my department” are automatically demeaned and demoted in the mind of the customer. These employees can end up feeling hostile as well as unequipped. Customers want information, and they disrespect and distrust the person who is supposed to have information but does not.

## **Good Information is Often Good Service**

Employees need to be empowered to satisfy customers. Employees will give bad service to customers if they themselves receive bad service and little feedback from their managers and supervisors. Remember: external customer service starts with internal customer service.

# Simple Actions Huge Returns

- Customers will spend up to 10% more for the same product with better service.
- When customers receive good service they tell 10-12 people on average.
- When customers receive poor service they tell upwards of 20 people.
- There is an 82% chance customers will repurchase from a company where they were satisfied.
- There is a 91% chance that poor service will dissuade a customer from ever going back to a company.

It is often not what you articulate but how it is presented. What you wear and how you express yourself has a lot to do with how what you say is received.

Have you ever noticed how a person who is dressed-up, even in older or out-of-style clothing, always commands more authority and respect? The impression they make and what they have to say is enhanced by their personal presentation, facial and hand gestures, as well as the substance of what they have to say. As it turns out, substance is only part of the equation of being persuasive and influencing perception.

On one level this seems unfair and superficial because what a person says and how they behave should be more important than if they are well groomed, smiling and dressed-up. Yet visual perception plays a vital role in human impressions and reactions. For reasons psychologists do not always understand, nature and learned behavior have taught humans to perceive neat, smiling, well-presented individuals in a more commanding manner.

It is clear that just looking good will not produce the desired level of customer satisfaction.

- Smiling – there is nothing like a smile and pleasant face to greet a customer, especially if he/she has a complaint. A smile and polite conversation can immediately disarm a disgruntled customer. Facial expression sets a positive tone before you even begin speaking. A relaxed or pleasant facial expression is the ideal most of the time.
- Eye contact – always look into your customer's eyes. Directly address customers.
- How you look – personal grooming has a big impact on your customers. Dirty hands, messy hair and poor dress can mean the loss of an otherwise happy customer. When interacting with customers, dress neatly and in a professional manner so as to command respect and to let customers know you take seriously your position.
- Shaking hands – when shaking hands with a customer a firm and professional handshake is expected. This part of the greeting is now common among both men and women in a professional environment.
- Be attentive - when listening to a customer, slightly lean towards your customer and nod your head ever so slightly to indicate you are listening.
- Tone of voice – always convey friendliness and amicability. Do not raise your voice in frustration or anger no matter how difficult or tiresome a customer may behave.

- Hand gestures - use hand movements to emphasize what you say (even on the phone) and to emphasize your feelings.
- Personal space – this is the distance that feels comfortable between you and another person. If another person approaches you and invades your personal space, you automatically move back without thought. You are uncomfortable. Leave adequate distance between you and your customer. Adequate space is important to making customers feel secure and unthreatened.
- Posture – slumping in a chair or leaning against a wall while interacting with a customer are sure signs you are not interested in the customer. Your pose or posture should express attention, friendliness, and openness. Lean forward, face the customer and nod to let them know you are interested.
- Observation - notice how your customer behaves and what he/she reacts positively to while you are providing service.

Remember, the little, interpersonal actions noted above mean a great deal in the area of customer relations. They can change customer perceptions and ultimately affect the success of your customer relations efforts.

## ***Conversations Over the Telephone***

### **It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It**

The moment you pick up a telephone, body language and visual perceptions disappear and your tone of voice becomes dominant.

Almost the entire message you project to the customer over the phone is derived from tone of voice and attitude.

For example:

- A flat tone of voice says to the customer, “I don’t like my job and would rather be elsewhere.”
- Slow pitch and presentation say, “I am sad and lonely – do not bother me.”
- A high pitch, rapid voice says, “I am enthusiastic and excited!”
- A loud voice says, “I’m angry and aggressive.”

### **Telephone Etiquette**

Telephone etiquette, unlike more varying body language, can be uniform and is not culturally based. The telephone is often the first or last place a customer comes in contact with an organization or company. Being telephone friendly is one of the least expensive and cost-effective ways to deliver better customer service.

### **Answering the Telephone**

How a company answers the phone can tell the whole story of how they treat customers and employees. The correct phrase said in the right order in a positive tone leaves a good impression and starts the customer-client relationship off on the right foot.

Pick up the phone in three rings. More than three rings signals chaos in your office or inattentiveness on the part of your company or organization.

Greet the caller, e.g. “hello”, “good morning”. Good manners shows you respect the caller.

Give your name, e.g., “Hi, my name is Emma”. This is a courtesy that serves to personalize the customer service experience as well as allowing the customer to hold you accountable for your level of service. He/she now has a point of reference and someone to contact when he/she calls back.

Ask the customer if or how you can help. Asking to help tells the customer you are there to serve his/her needs and to solve his/her problems. This also leaves the customer with a positive impression.

Put it altogether and you have a good example:

“Good morning, thanks for calling the Insect Farming and Trading Agency, my name is Emma, how may I help you?”

The greeting is key, it sets the tone and style of the whole interaction.

## **Troubleshooting**

Some things which may upset a customer are simply unavoidable. Here are some tips on how to best handle these situations.

### **“Putting a Customer on Hold”**

Ask the customer if you can put them on hold; wait for them to say “yes” or “no” and then explain it will only be for a short period of time.

Explain to customers why you are putting them on hold.

Thank customers for holding.

### **“Transferring a Call”**

Ask the customer if they mind being transferred; wait for them to say “yes” or “no” and explain why they are being transferred and to whom.

### **“Taking a Message”**

Explain your co-workers absence in a positive light but do not be too specific. Explain that your co-worker is in a meeting, conference, briefing, or training. Do not say he or she is gravely ill, is too hung over to come to work, never called in today, can’t be found, that you do not know where he or she is, or that he or she “was just here”.

Give a reasonable estimate of when the co-worker will return.

Offer to help the caller, take a message or transfer to another staff member.

If a co-worker is on holiday and will not return to the office for some time, it is permissible to say that he or she is on holiday. However, avoid details such as, “Raymond is at the beach and I am sure he is having a great time.” While such details may seem innocuous and even humorous, they give the wrong impression to those seeking service.

### **“Ending the Call”**

This is the final step in good telephone etiquette. A good customer service representative ends the call on a positive note, repeating any actions agreed to be taken and what is going to be done to help or serve the customer.

## ***Respond to your business email quickly!***

Answering your business email promptly should be a priority for all business. Not only is e-mail an important communication line with your customers, it is often used by them to gauge that your trustworthy.

If a customer sends you an e-mail with a simple question, and you take forever to answer it, what does that say about the rest of your operation? It's one of the tell-tale signs customers use to separate men from boys. And we all want to play with the big guys, don't we?

Talking about the big businesses, surveys show that the Top-500 **fail miserably** at answering their business email. Jupiter Communications reported that 42% took more than 5 days to answer a simple question. In the world of Internet, that might as well have been forever. If a customer has to wait that long for an answer, most likely she will have taken their business elsewhere. 35% of companies don't even bother to answer at all. I guess, they just don't like customers ;-) Forrester Research is reporting figures that are similar.

## **So what is prompt answering your business email?**

Business email should be answered within 24 hours max. **No exceptions.** At that rate, your doing a lot better than a lot of other businesses.

If you **really** want your customer service to shine, you should consider answering your business email twice a day with a 12 hour interval.

It is even better to check out your direct competition by sending them an e-mail as if you are a potential customer. Send them more than one on several days. Especially check out Mondays, Fridays and weekends. Track the time it's taking them to answer, and implement a procedure to beat them at the business email game.

OK, I understand that for small businesses, resources are limited. But your stream of business email is most likely to be a lot less than for big guns. And if you check and answer e-mail regularly, numbers of e-mails to answer are usually very easy to handle.

## ***First Impressions – You Only Get One***

### **Making a Good First Impression**

Every salesperson in every business knows the importance of making a positive first impression. Sales people know their success and livelihood will depend on how their potential customer perceives them in the first 30 seconds of interaction. Good salespeople develop an almost instantaneous rapport with potential customers. Customers like them, follow their advice and then buy their product.

The reality is that we prefer doing business with those we like and trust. Impressions are the key to developing trust and confidence in the customer.



As the old saying goes, “You will never get a second chance to make a first impression.” This is why the first impression is extremely important and can set the tone for all future transactions.

Here are some ways of creating positive impressions, some of which have already been discussed:

- Thoughtfulness in meeting the customer’s needs
- Personal responsibility for a customer
- Quick problem solving for customer
- Offering immediate assistance
- Friendliness
- Using customer’s name in a conversation
- Pleasant voice tone
- Polite and courteous manners
- Neatness
- A genuine smile

Here are some factors that create a negative impression:

- Making the customer wait
- Not answering the phone promptly
- Not saying “please” and/or “thank you”
- Speaking loudly or condescendingly to customers or colleagues
- Making faces, frowning, acting distant, not smiling
- Looking disheveled or like you do not care about your appearance
- A poor handshake
- Focusing on another task while addressing or servicing a customer.

Remember, impressions stay with those you meet, especially customers, and once registered; negative impressions are difficult to overcome.

### ***Ten Major Do’s and Don’ts of Customer Service***

Every day customer service representatives face situations when what they say makes or breaks a service interaction. Below are ten phrases that should never be used because they frustrate and anger customers.

- “No.”
- “I don’t know.”
- “That’s not my job./That’s not my department.”
- “You are right – that is bad”
- “Calm down.”
- “I’m busy right now.”

- “Call me back.”
- “That’s not my fault.”
- “You need to talk to my supervisor.”
- “You want it by when?”

**No:** Everyone hates the word “no”. It is de -motivating, discouraging, and disinteresting. You will hear this word throughout your life as a customer and as a service provider. “No” is tantamount to “bad service.” “No” is easy, cheap, unproductive and negative – it means failure. Unfortunately, “no” is the word we most often hear when a new idea, request or concept is introduced. Admittedly, there are times when you will have to say “no,” but focus on what you can do for the customer (accentuate the positive) and not the negatives of the situation. Better to say “What I can do is…” and demonstrate that you care and want to provide quality service despite your current limitations.

**I don’t know:** Good service means never saying, “I don’t know.” When a customer hears “I don’t know,” they hear, “I don’t feel like finding the information you need.” Better to say, “I’ll find out” or “Let me look into this and get back to you ASAP.”

**That’s not my job./That’s not my department:** When a customer asks you to do something that you do not know how to do or do not have the authority to do, become a catalyst by leading the customer to the person or department who can help him/her solve the problem. Better to say, “Let me transfer to the person who can immediately help you with this problem.”

**You’re right – that is bad:** Many inexperienced customer service representatives think by sympathizing with the customer’s plight, he/she will win over the customer rather than actually doing something to solve the customer’s problem. If a customer expresses annoyance or frustration, do not make it worse by commiserating with him/her. Empathize with the customer but seek to solve the problem.

Likewise, it does not do your company or organization any good to criticize co-workers or other departments within the company or to the customers. All interested parties end up looking unprofessional and inept. Rather try your best to accommodate the customer. Do not promise anything you cannot deliver but do try to serve the customer well. Better to say, “I understand your frustration, let’s see how we can solve this problem.”

**Calm down:** When customers are upset or angry let them vent (within reason) and they will eventually calm down. Telling them to “calm down” is belittling, and often serves only to infuriate them further. Better to say, “I’m sorry.” This is one of the ideal phrases for customer service – it helps to placate the angriest of customers and allows you to begin the process of solving a customer complaint or request and “meet him/her half way.”

Apologizing does not mean you agree with the customer but it is a means to empathize and move beyond the emotion of the moment and negative impact.

**I’m busy right now:** It is not easy to juggle customers. You are often helping one customer when another calls or visits your service area. Asking a customer to be patient or politely asking them to wait is very different than putting them off and saying you are too busy to help. Leaving them standing there or on hold are two of the mortal sins of customer service.

“Being too busy” is tantamount to saying that you do not care and they are not important. Let the customer know they are important and you are aware of their presence. Better to say, “I’ll be with you in one moment” or “Please hold and I’ll be right with you.”

**Call me back:** This expression conveys little interest on the part of the customer relation’s employee for the needs and wants of the customer. You should always call the customer back because you want their business and are responsive to their requests. Being proactive is part of good customer service.

**That’s not my fault:** If an angry customer accuses you of creating a problem, rightly or wrongly, the natural reaction is to defend oneself. However, this is not the best course of action. The customer has a problem that needs to be solved. By resisting the need to defend yourself, and focusing on the needs of the customer, you can resolve the problem faster and with less stress and confrontation. Better to say, “Let’s see what we can do about this problem.”

**You Need to Talk to My Supervisor:** This cliché of bad customer service has angered and frustrated customers decades. Customers often ask for things outside the scope of your work or authority – maybe even outside the services/products provided by your company. While passing off these requests to your manager is a tempting option, it is better if you attempt to solve the problem yourself or directly go to the supervisor yourself and get a solution. You become a service hero for the customer and the supervisor. Better to say, “Let me find that out for you.”

**You Want it by When?:** Customers often make unrealistic demands, especially when it comes to time. Your first reaction may be annoyance and you may want to make a snide or sarcastic comment. However, the best approach is to hold off on displaying a negative attitude and making a poor impression. Better to say, “I will call you right back after I find out if that is feasible.”

## Helpful Reminders for Polite and Friendly Responses

Wrong Approach	Polite and Friendly Alternative
“I don’t know.”	“I’ll find out.”
“No.”	“What I can do is...”
“That’s not my job.”	“Let me find the right person who can help you with ...”
“You’re right – this is bad.”	“I understand your frustrations.”
“That’s not my fault.”	“Let’s see what we can do about this.”
“You want it by when?”	“I’ll try my best.”
“Calm down.”	“I’m sorry.”
“I’m busy right now.”	“I’ll be with you in just a moment.”
“Call me back.”	“I will call you back, what is your telephone ber.”

# Practice what you preach – Dealing with the customer

## ***Communicating with the Unsatisfied Customer***

How many times have you as a customer run into the problem of excuses. There is a problem and the sales person, technician or customer service representative is making lame excuses, namely:

- It is the fault of the computer.
- It is the fault of the other sales clerk.
- It is the fault of the chief of the department.
- It is the fault of the system.
- It is the fault of the Government.
- It is just the way it is.

Sometimes it feels as if nothing is anybody's fault or is in anybody's department. This is poor customer service. Good customer service means accountability, responsibility and taking action to satisfy the customer.

Having discussed the importance of knowing how the customer feels and WHAT NOT TO SAY, let's address the notion of how to communicate with an unsatisfied customer.

If your customer is unsatisfied (for just or unjust reasons), you will have to use some of the many techniques of the customer service professional to win their support and continued loyalty. When coming into contact with a customer, communicating with him/her, or analyzing problems, do not forget to use the following methods or qualities of the customer service professional:

**Listen:** It is of primary importance when dealing with an unsatisfied or complaining customer to listen attentively to his/her complaint, gripe, frustration or grievance. Be patient, attentive, and friendly.

**Express you are sorry:**

“We are sorry for this mistake/problem.”

“We are terribly sorry for this inconvenience.”

“How can we work to solve this problem together?”

“I can imagine how frustrated you are.”

**Do not argue and do not interrupt:** This will only worsen the situation, especially if the customer is angry. Let him speak before you try to discuss with him what has happened.

**Do not lose your self-control:** If you stay relaxed, customers will calm down.

**Point out facts:** Listen carefully – and write everything down. Do not make any comments until the customer is finished talking.

**Admit the problem:** If you can suggest a solution, do it. If not tell the customer what actions you will take and what actions will follow. Never make the mistake of promising something you are not able to do.

**Involve the customer in problem solving:** Suggest the customer alternative solutions, if they exist. Customers appreciate the opportunity to choose the ways of problem solving.

**Follow-up:** Make sure that the promised measures are taken. If you do not fulfill what was promised and ignore the customer's complaint, the problem will grow. Next time it will be more difficult to solve.

**Give the customer a “way back”:** Sometimes customers are wrong. You should let them leave with dignity, without feeling embarrassed.

**Do not question the customer's correctness:** From the very beginning you should believe that the customer may be right. Always be open minded toward the customer's opinion, make them feel they deserve to be listened to.

## ***Solving the Customer's Problems***

When you listen to the customer's complaint you take responsibility to solve the problem.

- Listen without interruption and with full attention.
- Behave without aggression, and without arguing.
- Do not extend excuses for the problem, and thank the customer for drawing their attention to it and helping solve it.
- Express sympathy and full understanding.

**Customer service problem solving involves:**

- Ask necessary questions to get more complete information and completed picture of a situation
- Find out exactly what the customer needs you to do for them
- Explain first what you can do, and then gently add what you cannot do
- Discuss in detail all opinions, and then decide what needs to be done
- Undertake immediately what was discussed
- Check the result to make sure the customer is completely satisfied

## ***Follow -Up with the Customer***

### **It pays to please**

We like companies that treat us well, and some people will even pay more to obtain this.

Here are some recent statistics that prove the point:

- People spend up to 10 percent more for the same product with better service
- When people receive good service, on average, they tell 11 people
- When people receive poor service, on average, they tell up to 20 people
- There is an 80 percent chance that customers will repurchase from a company if their complaint is handled quickly and pleasantly
- If the service is really poor, 90 percent of customers won't come back

It is extremely important to make sure that all customer service measures that were discussed or promised are in fact taken. It is not enough for the customer to experience a satisfactory telephone or face-to-face interaction. If nothing comes of the contact they will be even more frustrated and unhappy. Make sure you do whatever you have promised in a timely manner.

## Initiative

Initiative is the difference between adequate customer service and customer service that wins you a customer for life.

Everyday examples of exceptional customer service:

- Taxi driver who opens the door for you or waits at night for you to safely get into your destination.
- Computer technician who does computer work and then calls back a week later to make sure your IT is functioning well.
- Car salesperson that calls a month after you buy a car to make sure it is running well.
- The petrol station attendant who washes your window or checks your oil.
- The electric company who calls and checks to make sure your service is working well and apologizes for any “brown outs” or “black outs.”

None of these customer service people HAD to make this extra effort or go to this trouble. These “goodwill initiatives” are beyond the call of duty and make the customer beyond satisfied. They make the customer remember the transaction or occasion.

## ***Customer service traits to copy***

- Be on time, open on time, deliver on time
- Follow through and deliver your promises
- Go the extra kilometer for customers
- Offer you customer options
- Express empathy to upset customers
- Treat customers as the MOST important part of your job
- Treat co-workers as if they are customers
- Give customers your name and contact details

## ***Benefits of good customer service***

Beneficiary	Benefit
Providers	Higher income (more sales, repeat business, referred business)
	Recognition
	Personal satisfaction & fulfillment
	Less stress
	Higher self-awareness and self-control
	Greater authenticity
	Happier life at work
	Happier life outside work
	More repeat business
	More referred business
Organizations	Fewer returns
	Better reputation
	Higher morale, happier employees
	Lower employee turnover
	Fewer complaints
	Higher productivity
	Better work environment
	Higher inventory turnover
	Higher profits

## What do IFTA customers think at the moment?

Here are some excerpts from the insectnet.com website where many IFTA customers talk about the customer service that they have received from you. Some are good but many show that you could be doing better.

**Nipam**

Member since Jan-7-03  
20 posts

Apr-04-03, 10:51 PM (PST)

### "IFTA (New Guinea) - Good dealer report"

Hello,

I know a while back there was some discussion about the Insect Farming and Trading Agency in Papua New Guinea. I just completed a purchase from them and overall I was very happy with the purchase. A few specimens showed a bit more wear than I would have liked, and the shipping from New Guinea can be a bit slow.

On the whole, however, the specimens were excellent (especially the Ornithoptera), they all came with good collection data, and the prices were very good. David Whitaker at IFTA was especially helpful and rapid with his email communication.

I certainly plan on ordering from them again in the future and recommend them highly and without reservation.

Cheers,

Nipam

**Nipam**

Member since Jan-7-03  
20 posts

Apr-06-03, 08:38 AM (PST)

### 1. "RE: IFTA (New Guinea) - Good dealer report"

In response to [message #0](#)

Just a brief addition to my initial comments:

I've finished mounting more specimens and am really impressed with the quality of what was sent by IFTA. One or two specimens did show some wear, but most all the rest are in pristine condition. The birdwings are all perfect and have some of the most spectacular color that I have ever seen in these species (especially the *O. caelestis* and the *O. priamus urvillanus*)!

Also, regarding placing an order. Don't be put off by the fact that you will need to make a money transfer through your bank (IFTA doesn't currently use PayPal or take credit cards). IFTA provides very detailed information on how to set up the bank transfer. I just handed their email to the teller at my bank and they were able to get all the information they needed from it to set up the transfer in a few minutes. IFTA ships by DHL and this makes it easy for you to track the progress of the shipment. Mine stayed at LAX for a couple days, but there were no problems with clearance with Customs and Fish and Wildlife as IFTA had taken care of all the needed CITES permits.

Once again thanks go to David Whittaker and IFTA for some great specimens.

**entom**

Member since May-25-05  
11 posts

May-25-05, 07:27 AM (PST)

**"IFTA PNG"**

Hello everybody,  
do you know anything about IFTA from Bulolo PNG?  
last year i made an order and agreed with David Whitaker to process with it in December 2004,  
so that all the species i wanted were available.  
i received last email in November 2004, and since then they do not reply to any emails.  
if anyone has any news, please just let me know.  
best regards  
karol(poland) [entom@op.pl](mailto:entom@op.pl)

**Chris\_2005**

Member since Jan-23-05  
322 posts

May-25-05, 11:36 AM (PST)

**1. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #0](#)

As far as I've heard, IFTA is having financial problems and ordering is difficult at the time.

I've tried to order from them, but the email communication is very poor.

Good luck!

---

Chris Garcia  
Cool, California 95614  
[chris\\_garcia\(at\)chris-insects.com](mailto:chris_garcia(at)chris-insects.com)

**telliottmbamsc**

Member since Feb-4-05  
22 posts

May-26-05, 01:11 PM (PST)

**2. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #0](#)

I am currently in communication with the IFTA.

Have you given them money and then not received your specimens?

Regards,

Tom Elliott  
Madison, Wisconsin  
usa

**Chris\_2005**

Member since Jan-23-05  
322 posts

May-26-05, 01:28 PM (PST)

**3. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #2](#)



Hey Tom!

Are you ordering from them right now? If so, is it going smoothly?

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Chris Garcia  
Cool, California 95614  
chris\_garcia(at)chris-insects.com

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**telliottmbamsc**

Member since Feb-4-05  
22 posts

Jun-24-05, 05:55 PM (PST)

**7. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #3](#)

I have placed an order with the IFTA and I haven't experienced anything that would give me cause for concern. Their website does mention that they do experience outages in their telecommunication service (tel. (675)474 5285).

At this time, I have received a Proforma Invoice and nearly completed the customary waiting period for a CITES permit. It is my understanding that once the CITES permit is issued I will wire payment to "Unitech Development & Consultancy Ltd.," in association with the University of Technology, Lae, Morobe Province.

My contact at the IFTA is Nasie Gadau at [ifta@global.net.pg](mailto:ifta@global.net.pg). Both Catherine Aisi and Nasie have been pleasant and our understanding is well documented.

Unfortunately, they do not subscribe to PayPal or IKOBO at this time.

Best Regards,

Tom Elliott  
[telliottmbamsc@yahoo.com](mailto:telliottmbamsc@yahoo.com)

**ML**

Charter Member  
117 posts

May-27-05, 01:28 PM (PST)

**4. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #2](#)

David Whitaker is no longer working there, I received my material 1.5 months after ordering and 90% was A2.

8 months later I received replacement and I'm ok with them now but will never order again.

Communication and customer service is the worst possible. They are disorganized.

Anyone interested in large (~15cm) *E. horrida* can contact me, I have 30 pairs to get rid of (trade or sell).

Michel Lauzon/Montreal, Canada  
[Michel.Lauzon@Gmail.com](mailto:Michel.Lauzon@Gmail.com)

Help yourself; Get rid of Bush.

**CONSTAN**

Member since Mar-1-05  
7 posts

May-27-05, 08:09 PM (PST)

**5. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #4](#)

The IFTA they have a bad phone and computer systems. I think for you it is better to maybe phone them on the numbers. I have progress towards this way. Thank you.

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**bgarthe**

Member since May-8-03  
363 posts

May-28-05, 08:33 AM (PST)

**6. "RE: IFTA PNG"**

In response to [message #0](#)

**"insect farm Papua New Guinea"**

Is the "Insect Farming and Trading Agency of Papua New Guinea" a reliable supplier?  
I would appreciate to hear from anyone who has ordered from them.  
Thank You

**prelson**  
Charter Member  
14 posts

**1. "RE: insect farm Papua New Guinea"**  
**In response to message #0**

The single transaction I had with them was somewhat slow, but everything that they promised to send they did and the condition was as indicated.

They did forget to attach the CITES permit original to the outside of the package, which made for a bit of a hassle on the "import side", so you might want to remind them of that.

I'm not sure that my bank had ever done a wire transfer to Papua New Guinea before, but it worked fine.

Peter

**jasj**

Member since Jul-17-06  
2 posts

Aug-08-06, 08:38 AM (PST)

## "Is IFTA reliable?"

Hi

I made an order to IFTA in March. A few days later I recieved the invoice with the message not to pay until the CITES permits was OK. After about two months I asked for a status on my order. I sent the message several times before response. The status was that the administration who gives the permits was delaying the proses. Over the last months I have made many requests without any response. Should I forget the whole thing and find the specimens elsewhere?

Jan

**vytas**

Member since Oct-31-05  
18 posts

Aug-09-06, 02:04 PM (PST)

## 1. "RE: Is IFTA reliable?"

In response to [message #0](#)

Hi Jan,

I tried to make trade with IFTA about a year ago. It took about 8 months of "communication" till finally I stopped this nonsense. My recommendation - don't waste your time!

wish you luck

Vytautas Visinskas

**ML**

Charter Member  
151 posts

Aug-09-06, 06:46 PM (PST)

## 2. "RE: Is IFTA reliable?"

In response to [message #1](#)

Waste of time.

Michel Lauzon/Montreal, Canada  
[Michel.Lauzon@Gmail.com](mailto:Michel.Lauzon@Gmail.com)

I drank milk with Elvis last night.  
Man did not land on the moon.  
Bush is not a lying SOB.

**cetoniinae**

Member since Feb-4-05  
75 posts

Aug-09-06, 06:46 PM (PST)

## 3. "RE: Is IFTA reliable?"

In response to [message #1](#)

Sadly IFTA does not seem to respond any longer. The organization had a good start with a good ecological ethic, but I think it is poorly manned and underfunded nowadays. I have picked up some amazing specimens from them in the past but only when an American or European was at the helm and responses were more forthcoming - and even then, I had better luck when I phoned them.... I have no idea who is working with them now, but after three years of trying to get a response from them, I too have given up...

**bgarthe**

Member since May-8-03  
495 posts

Aug-09-06, 06:46 PM (PST)

**4. "RE: Is IFTA reliable?"**

In response to [message #0](#)

Jan,

I "second" the motion. Give it up 😞 Many of us have tried (check the archival posts on this topic) to no avail. A few have managed to get through, but not many. Interestingly, I was once one of a group order to IFTA and we got burned.

There are many good dealers and collectors who can get most of what you'd be after from IFTA for you.

FYI, IFTA's idea of A1 is really A3, A- is really B2, and their A2 would fall in the C4 range.

That organization (for whatever reasons) needs an overhaul. In fact, it has been so poorly managed, that a mere overhaul might not do it 😞 They are not crooks, but people who have NO idea on how to run a business, don't have the government support to do so, and they don't even appear to 'know' that a male *Ornithoptera meridionalis meridionalis* has TWO tails. Yep, I ordered one and got a male with one tail----a few years ago. Did they attempt to care to fix our big group order? Nope.

Bill Garthe

**ML**

Charter Member  
151 posts

Aug-10-06, 08:29 AM (PST)

**5. "RE: Is IFTA reliable?"**

In response to [message #4](#)

**vytas**

Member since Oct-31-05  
12 posts

Jan-10-06, 10:23 PM (PST)

**"Something more about IFTA"**

My adventure with IFTA from Papua New Guinea started in february 2005 when I made payment by W.U. Now it is more than 10 month passed and today I took these money back. They did not find time to take this payment. I do not understand this kind of business and do not recommend to make any deals with IFTA to nobody.

Best regards to all  
Vytautas Visinskas  
Lithuania

**papilio28570**

Member since Nov-1-05  
195 posts

Jan-25-06, 00:36 AM (PST)

**1. "RE: Something more about IFTA"**

In response to [message #0](#)

I had searched their web site and wondered how they could be in business selling so cheaply at the prices they had listed. I suspected scam right away.

Bob Cavanaugh

**Agrias**

Member since Jan-20-06  
3 posts

Jan-26-06, 01:11 PM (PST)

**2. "RE: Something more about IFTA"**

In response to [message #1](#)

Just to let you know I had a transaction with IFTA approximately 2 years ago that took a while (about 5 months) but it worked out fine. The specimens were packaged well and A1.

Sincerely,

Maurice Bottos

**bgarthe**

Member since May-8-03  
415 posts

Jan-27-06, 01:11 PM (PST)

**3. "RE: Something more about IFTA"**

In response to [message #1](#)

Yep-----be careful!!!!

1. A couple of years ago I received (as part of a group order) stuff that was simply BAD. Specimens were not nearly as promised. Did they replace or re-send?? No. I lost out on some \$ and will not try it again 😞

2. I actually tried to set up an order with several staff people there and for nearly a year,

nothing came to be. Luckily I did not send \$.

3. I personally don't think it (IFTA) is a scam, but I do think that IFTA is about the most poorly run business in the lepidoptera arena 😞 Some of the garbage, no doubt, is due to the governmental "stuff" that has happened, but still I expect businesses to do business and not to jerk around potential customers and certainly fix issues with people who poured thousands of dollars into a transaction that "went south".

4. Actually, one train of thought on this a while back was that only the biggest of big buyers get any kind of service. This may be true. My group order was in the thousands, but we got screwed big time. Who knows? That is who knows (besides the people at IFTA)?

5. SIMPLY-----don't order from there!! There are plenty of great dealers with great prices and quality stuff out there.

Respectfully,

Bill Garthe

**brainy88**

Member since Mar-28-04  
9 posts

Mar-28-04, 09:34 PM (PST)

**"Question about Safe Collecting, and Collectors."**

Hello, I wanted to purchase some insects from Insect-Sale.com but are they safe? But my main question is how good is IFTA? Insect FARMING trade AGENCY? are they really good, and on average how much does the shipping and handling cost? If anyone has done any business with them I would love to hear because I want to send them money, but I want to be sure that they are honest? ALSO VERNON EVAN?!?!? THIS JUST POPPED INTO MY HEAD. Is he reputable? or honest? Any responses would be great!!!

Happy Collecting!

**Bizarro**

Charter Member  
81 posts

Mar-31-04, 06:08 PM (PST)

**1. "RE: Question about Safe Collecting, and Collectors."**

In response to [message #0](#)

Hello!

I've done some business with IFTA a few years ago... everything went well. I still have some Delias and papered Ornithoptera from that package... with CITES certification.

They MUST have to be professionals and honest BECAUSE THEY'RE the oficial Papua New Guinea insect trading agency, the only one allowed to sell native insects abroad. In other words, they just simply can't afford scams... OK!

Actually they make more money from tourist visitation, than from the selling of butterflies because they care that the aborigen papuans that collect/breed the butterflies will keep 75% of the insect selling income (totally oposite to what happens in South America whose insects are bought very cheap and retailed with profits averaging +300%!!).

The major issue with IFTA dealings I think is to get atention from them if you're not a BIG CUSTOMER, or you do irregular, small orders. I think regular cutomers get in front... but this is something I've heard, not actually experienced. I've put a small order and I receive all items after sending the payment first.

Believe me, they are the pioneers of Butterfly Farming Biocommerce in the Tropical World ... just take a look at their website .

Hope it helped

Bizarro



## Improving the customer service that IFTA provides

It is possible for you to regain the ground that you have lost with dissatisfied customers. This is not only through apologizing and reconciling with the people that have made comments on the insectnet website but through improving your day to day practices.

Remember that the survival of IFTA relies on having satisfied customers. Without them there will be no money coming in and not enough money to keep it a going concern.

### ***Insect and butterfly grading***

The correct grading of butterflies and other insects is very important and will make or break your reputation with your customers.

If customers receive an order of A1 specimens from you that they think are actually A2 they will not trust the service which you provide.

You must be very careful when grading insects and if you are not sure if a specimen is A1 then just make it an A2. That way when a customer receives an order from you they will be very happy.

### ***Packing specimens***

You may feel that you already know how to pack specimens but it never hurts to revisit your packing techniques to ensure that your customers will always be happy with you.

#### **Packing butterflies**

1. Kill live butterflies
2. Cut and fold A4 paper triangle
3. Label specimen (name and location of specimen)  
e.g. *O. goliath* from Gumi, Watut, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea  
(do not use abbreviations for provinces)
4. Put a piece of folded toilet tissue around the specimen and place carefully into the paper triangle
5. Dry the specimen
6. Store the specimen in the appropriate storage cupboard
7. On receipt of an order for the specimen double check to see if the specimen is A1
8. If A1 replace the tissue paper with a fresh sheet
9. If it is a rare specimen double wrap it

#### **Packing beetles**

1. Kill the live beetle
2. Make card strips and cut plastic sheet to size
3. Place tissue paper on the card strip
4. Place beetle onto the tissue strip and secure plastic sheet with staples  
e.g. *eupholus* spp. - pack singly (unless otherwise directed by customer)  
*R. straussi* - pack in pairs  
*E. horridus* – pack singly
5. Label the specimen  
e.g. *E. clarki* from Lumi, Torricelli Mountains, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea  
(do not use abbreviations for provinces)
6. Dry the specimen

7. After 7 days check that the specimen is fully dried
8. After drying store in the appropriate storage cupboard
9. On receipt of an order for the specimen double check to see if the specimen is A1

### **Packing an order for a customer**

1. Check the specimens for their quality and then fumigate them
2. Use a strong box for the packing of an order
3. Place a layer of cotton wool into the box
4. If the order is for butterflies place one single layer of butterflies onto the first layer of cotton wool then add another layer of cotton wool and another single layer of butterflies repeat this until the box is full
5. If the order is for beetles place a single layer of beetles onto the cotton wool face up and then another layer of beetles face down so that the two layers fit snugly. Then add another layer of cotton wool and another double layer of beetles until the box is full
6. Never over pack the box by pushing specimens down to fit more in as this will only ruin them and upset your customers
7. If you are packing a mixed order of beetles and butterflies into one box place the beetle layers into the box first followed by the butterfly layers
8. Sprinkle a very small quantity of crushed moth balls or naphthalene flakes onto each layer of cotton wool that you place in the box
9. Gently shake the packed box to make sure that none of the specimens are loose
10. Seal the box with sticky tape
11. Place this box into a larger box and surround it on all sides with shredded paper
12. Stick an envelope containing both export and import permits to the outside of the larger box
13. Dispatch the order with EMS

# CITES

## ***What is CITES?***

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Annually, international wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars and to include hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber, tourist curios and medicines. Levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species are high and the trade in them, together with other factors, such as habitat loss, is capable of heavily depleting their populations and even bringing some species close to extinction. Many wildlife species in trade are not endangered, but the existence of an agreement to ensure the sustainability of the trade is important in order to safeguard these resources for the future.

Because the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it requires international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation. CITES was conceived in the spirit of such cooperation. Today, it accords varying degrees of protection to more than 30,000 species of animals and plants, whether they are traded as live specimens, fur coats or dried herbs.

CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN (The World Conservation Union). The text of the Convention was finally agreed at a meeting of representatives of 80 countries in Washington DC., United States of America, on 3 March 1973, and on 1 July 1975 CITES entered in force.

CITES is an international agreement to which States (countries) adhere voluntarily. States that have agreed to be bound by the Convention ('joined' CITES) are known as Parties. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties – in other words they have to implement the Convention – it does not take the place of national laws. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

For many years CITES has been among the conservation agreements with the largest membership, with now 169 Parties.

## ***How many species are listed in the CITES Appendices?***

Around 25,000 plant species and 5,000 animal species are covered by the provisions of the Convention, in the following proportions:

- 1) Appendix I: about 600 animal species and 300 plant species;
- 2) Appendix II: about 1,400 animal species and 25,000 plant species; and
- 3) Appendix III: about 270 animal species and 30 plant species.

## ***How can I know whether I need a permit to import or export wildlife specimens?***

Import, export and re-export of any live animal or plant of a species listed in the CITES Appendices (or of any part or derivative of such animal or plant) requires a permit or certificate.

## ***How CITES works in Papua New Guinea***

The Department of Environment and Conservation is the CITES management authority for Papua New Guinea. This is the government department that anyone who wants to export CITES listed species from Papua New Guinea has to go to in order to get permits.

CITES traded species exported from Papua New Guinea include crocodile skins, eaglewood, live reef fish and of course birdwing butterflies.

1. IFTA fills out CITES application form and it is sent to DEC.
2. DEC review the application and when approved it is stamped and signed by Wildlife Inspection Officer, the Deputy Secretary for Conservation (Dr. Guy Gowae), the Conservator of Fauna and Flora (Dr. Wari Iamo).
3. Approved CITES permit is sent back to IFTA.
4. Copy of permit made by IFTA and sent to country of import in order to receive import approval from customs.
5. A copy of the import permit sent back to IFTA from importing country.
6. Both the CITES export permit and copy of import permit are put into an envelope on the outside of the order before being sent to the customer via EMS.