

Title:

When Customers Complain

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Summary:

You probably won't have been in business too long before you get your first complaint. It just can't help but happen: low-end customers pay nothing and expect the Earth, while high-end ones pay a lot but expect an inhuman effort in return. You just can't please all of the people all of the time, even if you run yourself ragged trying -- there will always be someone who's not happy with what you've done. So what can you do about it?

Don't Be Rude or Dismissive.

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You probably won't have been in business too long before you get your first complaint. It just can't help but happen: low-end customers pay nothing and expect the Earth, while high-end ones pay a lot but expect an inhuman effort in return. You just can't please all of the people all of the time, even if you run yourself ragged trying -- there will always be someone who's not happy with what you've done. So what can you do about it?

Don't Be Rude or Dismissive.

The customer's complaint might seem stupid to you, or even insulting -- but that doesn't mean that you can respond in kind. You must treat every customer complaint seriously, and always act as if it is 100% your fault that things weren't to their satisfaction.

Remember that every unhappy customer will talk about their experience to your potential customers (research varies, but some say that they might tell as many as 20). Those potential customers won't get to hear your side of the story. Going the extra mile to keep unreasonable customers happy is, above all else, a defensive technique to prevent them from damaging your business. Don't be scared

of complaints: you should, instead, be actively soliciting them, to give you a chance to put things right before they tell anyone.

Write a Letter of Apology.

People will really appreciate the effort you've gone to if you take the time to write them a formal letter of apology, and say that you're sorry things weren't to their satisfaction and you appreciate them taking the time to tell you so that you can improve. For example:

'Dear Sir,

It has come to my attention that you weren't happy with the service you received from my company in respect of the delivery of items to your home. We have now contacted our delivery service and fixed the issue, although I understand that this came too late to avoid inconveniencing you.

I would like to sincerely apologise to you for the bad experience you have had with my company, and hope that this will not harm our chances of doing business together again in the future.'

Make sure you sign the letter yourself, in pen. People hate seeing letters with printed signatures on.

Offer a Partial Refund.

The closing part of your letter should offer a refund of as much as you can afford to give -- in this scenario, for example, where there was a problem with delivery, you should offer to refund the full cost of delivery, plus a little extra to cover the inconvenience.

In this way, you can turn your dissatisfied customers into some of your most satisfied ones. They will tell everyone they know that there was a small problem that wasn't your fault, and they probably complained too harshly, but you handled it courteously and sent them a refund.

Having people know that you respond well to complaints is some of the best word-of-mouth marketing you can get. What's more, that customer you treated well is surprisingly likely to come back and do business with you again -- although, of course, they'll be very annoyed if things don't go well the second time either.

Do Some Complaining Yourself.

A large amount of the time, when a customer complains about something, it wasn't

caused by you -- it was some kind of problem with your supplier, or someone else you rely on. Of course the customer didn't know this, but you do, and you need to do something about them. Write them a letter of complaint, like the following:

'Dear Sir or Madam,

Due to your service being unavailable this week, I have received the attached customer complaints. I hope you will understand that I am very displeased, and I am currently considering alternative suppliers.'

With this letter, enclose a copy of every customer complaint you got thanks to them. Your supplier will often be eager enough to keep you on as a customer that they will offer some kind of compensation package -- which you can then pass on to your customers, or use to cover the cost of refunds you have already given them.