

Why Do Your Customers Complain and What Can You Do About It?

Having an effective complaint handling process is important but it's more effective to know what your customers could complaint about and put it right before it happens. But what are the areas that can go wrong?

As the Internet becomes an increasing part of our lives there are a growing number of web sites which are run for dissatisfied customers to publicly air their complaints about bad service. See your name posted on these sites or get contacted by them and you know you have a problem!

How can you prevent your business from becoming feature of the week? Of all the skills small business owners need these days, the one least practiced is the ability to step back and look at your business from the customer's perspective.

Having an effective complaint handling process is important but that is the equivalent of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted it's too late, your customer has already suffered.

It's more effective to know what your customers could potentially complaint about and put it right before it happens.

So, what are the common reasons for customer complaints? Mark Bradley of Customer Service Network (www.customernet.com), which facilitates in benchmarking, improving processes and implementing improvements to help reduce customer complaints, says,

Financial loss is the obvious reason but the rest can be split into operational and emotional reasons.

In this article we will look at some of the operational and emotional or human issues within your business which could give your customers cause to complain. Take a look at these and examine each part of your business. How do you stand up?

You didn't do what you promised.

When did you last review your advertising material or web site? Do they contain service promises which sounded great at the time but have since been forgotten? For example, do you promise to deliver within 24 hours but changes in processes have meant that is no longer possible? No one may have complained yet but sooner or later someone will.

Your product didn't do what it's supposed to do.

When did you last undertake a quality check of your product? Random checks can help weed out poor quality workmanship before a customer spots it. When buying your stock or finished item do you test it?

You're never open when I need you.

9 to 5, 5 days a week may have been acceptable when you first started out, but is this still what the customer wants? Check with your customers they may want you to open later and close later.

It's a long time before someone answers the phone.

Hanging on the phone while it rings and rings is very irritating. It conjures up images of staff sitting drinking coffee and chatting; not the impression you want to portray and not the way to put customers in a buying mood! Do your staff understand the importance of the phone being answered promptly?

Whenever I ring in and get transferred to another person I often get cut off.

Have your staff been trained in getting the best out of your phone system? Do all staff have a handy list of extension numbers to avoid annoying sorry wrong department answers? Ask a friend or business colleague to ring in and take note of what happens good and bad.

Mark Bradley says, We usually encounter a number of interesting correlations that fundamentally prove that operational accuracy leads to customer satisfaction.

Take some time to look at your business from the customer's perspective and you should be able to stop customer complaints before they hit your desk.

It's not only the operational side of the business which can let you down; the human side of business can also generate complaints your staff! No matter how good your product is one loose cannon in your team can upset everything. What actions can your staff take that can lead to a customer picking up the phone or putting pen to paper?

Bad Attitude

There's no getting away from it some people have a bad hair day every day! The way they speak to people is enough to turn the mildest mannered of customers against your company. They act as if the customer is an interference to their daily routine. A person with poor job skills can be taught the relevant knowledge or skills but a person with a generally bad attitude, the proverbial chip on the shoulder, is harder to bring into line.

These types of people are the ones who never acknowledge your presence when you are standing in front of them, or still chat away on the phone The solution? Get them away from your customers.

Not Willing to Seek a Solution

These people are the ones who may acknowledge a customer's problem but just can't be bothered to find a solution; it's too much hassle. The stock answer is, I can't help. Its company policy their favorite words are I can't Yes, but, won't shouldn't. They can find nothing positive to help the customer. If this happens, your customers walk away thinking you are a can't do instead of a can do business.

Not Giving Full Product Explanations

Your product may be the best in the world, but if it doesn't do what the customer wants then you have one unhappy purchaser. Lack of understanding of how the product or service meets the customers' requirements could be down to your sales staff being too anxious for a sale persuading the buyer that the product is just right when it clearly doesn't fit what the client needs. This is partly down to sales training but also attitude. Do you want staff that are happy to sell to your customers on this basis?

Not Willing to Admit a Mistake

Isn't it refreshing to hear someone say, do you know, you're right. We really messed this up. If you get this as an opening line when making a complaint, you immediately know you're in business. However, sometimes getting a business to admit it has made a mistake is like pulling teeth. If you're in the wrong, get your staff to own up and say, Yes, we were wrong, it can take away the emotion which sometimes blocks successful resolution of complaints.

Not Keeping You Up To Date

In any effective complaint handling process, everything can be done according to the book, but it can all be thrown away if the client is not kept up to date. A complaint, followed by days of silence, allows doubt and anger to bubble up again. It may be that the person handling the complaint had a bad time when taking the initial query; he's not motivated to pick up the phone and engage in another torrent of abuse! However, not speaking to the client can only make matters worse, and so guaranteeing that the next call will be even more interesting! Get strong characters to front your complaints, people who are not intimidated and are happy to solve problems.

Broken Promises This is probably the most frequent reason for human cause of complaint; Yes, I'll do that for you. Leave it to me. What happens? Nothing! The impression given is that your staff just don't care, or that the customer is not important. Impress upon your staff the importance of following through on their promises. Any broken promise will compound a complaint.

So, in what areas are your staff letting you down? Are you doing everything to ensure your staff are treating everyone as loyal customers? Listen to what your staff are saying, and listen to what your customers are telling you. Get the human side of your complaint process right and you have more chance of keeping your customers for life.

The art of complaint handling is not only resolving it to the customers satisfaction; it's also about taking action on what you find out and being proactive in finding potential problems before they become problems.