



Listen to Your Customers (*resolving complaints*)

Mastering the art of managing customer complaints can seem like a thankless job, but keep in mind that for every customer that shares their worries, concerns or complaints, there are likely more that did not express their dissatisfaction, and instead simply moved on to a competitor. Customer complaints can, and should be treated as opportunities.

Customers that are willing to communicate can help provide information on how your product or service is being used in a specific market segment. Complaints give you the opportunity to see how your company is falling short of customer expectations.

No company is perfect. Acknowledging an area in need of improvement will get you that much closer to perfection. Customers who complain are indicating where you need improvement; seize the opportunity to improve. Adjust the systems that are deficient. Mistakes happen, learn from them and prevent the same errors or problems from recurring.

Communication is critical to resolving customer complaints. First off, listen to their problem, and empathize this will hopefully help diffuse their anger. Also be sure to remind them you are on their side, and you understand their frustration. Communicate a plan to address their problem and provide a timetable for resolution. Unfortunately, not all problems can be immediately rectified; providing a time table will help manage the customer's expectations. Once the problem is resolved, communicate the resolution and thank the customer for bringing the issue to your attention.

Resolving customer complaints/issues builds customer loyalty. Everything was not perfect, and yet you made efforts to correct the issues that customer brought to your attention. It is possible to turn customer complaints into assets. Customers that feel you responded will often become an advocate for your business. Track consumer complaints and watch for any patterns. After a complaint is resolved, conduct a post-mortem, take a close look at the procedures and systems, implement changes to prevent a similar issue from recurring. Perhaps redundancy is required. Of course, there is no need to wait for a complaint to improve processes. Look at systems or procedures where items might slip through the cracks. Is there an area that results in customer confusion?

Business processes should be constantly evolving; take a close look at any critical systems and consider how you can implement changes to prevent any mishaps or problems from occurring. This will give other users confidence that if there is an issue they can expect a reasonable resolution.

Many companies that understand the value of customer feedback solicit comments from customers, often offering incentives for polite, honest feedback. If you wish to be proactive send follow up emails to all customers who have queried your company. This is quality assurance and a great way to solicit customer feedback.

Few people enjoy dealing with customer complaints. The trick is to use the feedback in a constructive way and turn criticism into compliments.

