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Customer Service / **Customer Experience**

How to effectively respond to customer complaints



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Nov 04, 2019 · 10 min read

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How to respond to



5 tips on responding to customer complaints:

1. listen to the customer's experience in its entirety
2. apologize
3. focus on the solution
4. don't rush the customer
5. find complaints before they find you

Customer complaints are timeless. No matter the size, nature, or success of your business, you'll always have at least a small percentage of people who aren't happy with what you do. The idea that you can't please everyone is as true today as it was a century ago.



But never before in history has it been easier for customers to complain. To criticize a business, customers don't have to take the time to talk with you. They can simply pick up their phone, type a few angry sentences, and hit send—via email, review sites like Yelp and



discussion boards.

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And, unlike the old days, customers don't have to be loyal to any one business: They'll just Google your competitors. According to a customer service survey by American Express, more than a third of customers said they immediately consider switching companies after a single negative experience.

Since a customer service makes the backbone of any successful business, you can't afford to turn off a customer. To prevent this from happening, it's important to first understand what might be causing your customers to say, "I'm not buying anything from you again."

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6 common customer services mistakes to avoid

1. Over-automation

It might be tempting to automate all of your marketing and sales tasks to cut costs and time if you've adopted automation technology, but you shouldn't automate just because you can. Technology can't provide

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different modes of communication.

Dana Brownlee, founder of the communications consulting firm, **Professionalism Matters**, you need to give options so your customers aren't treated to "the frustrating phone trees." Where possible, provide phone numbers, **live chats**, and emails through which your customers can reach you.

If you do choose to rely on automation (and it certainly has its benefits), be sure your automated emails sound natural and personal. Read the free e-book, **"This Time, It's Personal"** to get more tips on using automation the right way.

2. Trying to handle customers too quickly

Most representatives assume they know what the customer wants. When they answer their customer's call, they rush to give them a solution to their problem. This can disgruntle your customer and could lead them to resent your company. To **avoid losing customers**, teach your customer service representatives effective listening skills. Make sure they're taking the time to listen to the customer, understand their specific problem, and offer a solution. Encourage them to get rid of their scripts and work with the customer.

3. System outages

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systems have their fair share of trouble when the outage monster strikes. The tragedy is, if your customers can't reach you, all the midnight oil you burned grooming your business will have been in vain.

To be on the safe side, look for a reputable web service provider that offers fast page loading time and a reliable, round-the-clock uptime. For those who provide support via email and telephone, ensure that your customer can reach you during the hours you promise support. If you are not reachable after hours, build a system that allows them to put in a request or a ticket. Then call back when you are available.

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4. Slow turnaround

We live in the time of on-demand. Thanks to the power of modern technology, we've become completely impatient. We want to have a quick turnaround time. Your customers expect the same. Having a speedy response not only draws them to your business but can win their **long-term loyalty**, too. Respond promptly to your customers' questions and feedback, especially if it's over social media where things move faster than the speed of



5. Undervaluing your customer service team

Your customer reps are the first personal interaction your customers receive. They make up the face of your business. Unfortunately, they also tend to be the lowest paid and regarded employees. Sinking their morale will **sink your business** to rock bottom. Find ways to motivate them to go the extra mile to satisfy your customers. Hire top talent, pay them well, and reward them whenever they achieve great results. You will also attract top talent to your service desk if you build a reputation treating your employees well.

6. No complaints ≠ good customer service

You work hard to get to your customers. You train your staff on great **customer service** examples and how to handle questions that run the gamut. And you're not getting any complaints, so you should be happy, right?

One of the most common customer service mistakes is mistakenly thinking that just because you aren't getting complaints means



customers will complain. That means that for every complaint you receive, there are another 25 dissatisfied customers who don't bother to complain. However, if you're receiving an avalanche of compliments and only a few complaints, you have a reason to smile. You're doing something right.

Now that you understand what could be bringing in those customer service complaints, it's time to establish a plan for your customer complaint response. Here are the basics that will help create **positive experiences for your customers and make them feel appreciated and loyal.**

Preparing for complaints

Talk as a team

When is the best time to figure out how to respond to complaints? Before the complaints ever occur. Talk with your staff about handling scenarios like angry emails, policy disputes, and discount requests to ensure your company's responses are delivered consistently and confidently. No customer is reassured by a response like, "Um, I don't know; I'll have to ask my boss." Include your whole team in the discussion: All employees represent the company, regardless of whether their roles directly involve customer service.



Customers tend to take their complaints online as a last resort as if your company would only respond to them in the event of public shaming. On every platform, make it easy for customers to find email addresses and phone numbers on every platform so that customers know they have outlets for feedback.

Better yet: Be the first to start the complaint conversation by sending post-purchase emails and surveys to customers. If you're using automation software like Keap, you can send these emails automatically after every purchase. The software can also alert you to negative feedback so that responding rises to the top of your to-do list. By taking a proactive approach, you'll discover more feedback that helps you improve your business: Most companies hear from only 4 percent of dissatisfied customers, according to the book "Understanding Customers."

Responding to complaints

Don't leave them hanging

One hour is the new one business day. More than 85 percent of customers think businesses should respond to emails within an hour, according to a survey by Toister Performance Solutions, a firm that focuses on customer



social media, according to a survey from the social media research project, The Social Habit.

Many customer complaints can't be resolved in 60 minutes or less, but they can at least be addressed. If you need a few days to investigate the customer's complaint, tell her so now, not after those few days. Your failure to respond might lead the customer to believe you're not on top of customer service—or worse, that you don't care, which only worsens the situation.

If you won't be able to respond quickly, consider setting up an automatic response. With Keap, the completion of a "contact us" web form can trigger an email that tells the customer you'll get back to her as soon as possible. While that email can't resolve the complaint, it can reassure the customer that her message didn't disappear into an online black hole.

Listen and apologize

No matter the business or the complaint, the first two steps to resolving a customer complaint are the same. Step one: listen to the customer's experience in its entirety. Step two: apologize.

Ideally, these conversations would take place in person or on the phone, but that doesn't



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Jay Baer says businesses should address every complaint, on every channel, every time. “I’m not suggesting that the customer is always right,” Baer said in a webinar, *Hug Your Haters: Customer Service in a Digital and Social World*, “I’m suggesting that the customer is always heard.”

You don’t have to plead guilty to an offense every time a customer complains, but you do need to consider his point of view—to listen without interruptions. Make it clear that you understand why the customer is upset, even if you don’t agree with him. You may not be sorry that he simply didn’t like your product, but you can still be sorry that he had a disappointing experience.

The simple act of listening and apologizing can be therapeutic enough to resolve the problem. Researchers at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom conducted a study with two groups of eBay customers who had given negative feedback. In a request to withdraw the comments, one group was offered an apology that cited a manufacturer delay, while the other was offered a small amount of money. Ultimately, a simple “sorry” proved more valuable than the cash: 45 percent of participants withdrew their comments after receiving the apology, compared with only 23 percent of those offered compensation.



After you've listened to the customer's complaint and apologized, you can offer your side of the story—not an excuse, but an explanation. A customer's misunderstanding or lack of information could have contributed to his complaint, and learn more about your company's intentions might help settle his emotions.

But keep it short: The more you say, the more you might create opportunities to start another argument. Instead, shift the conversation away from the problem and toward the solution.

Don't make promises you don't intend to keep: You're not going to drastically change your company's offerings or operations based on the opinion of one person. But maybe you're going to talk with an employee or adjust a process that caused the problem in order to prevent it from happening again. By explaining the actions you're going to take, you show the customer that you valued his feedback and gave it serious consideration.

If you can afford it, give the customer a financial incentive for a future purchase. If a restaurant settles a complaint by reducing the bill, the customer still might leave with a negative impression of the service. Offering a gift card compels the customer to come back for an additional—and hopefully, more positive—experience with your company. According to



unresolved negative experience with a business.

Making the most of complaints

Customer complaints can be stressful, uncomfortable, time-consuming and just plain annoying. Still, you should be thankful for them. Unlike 96 percent of dissatisfied customers, complainers took the time and energy to tell you how you could improve your business. Sure, by speaking up, they might hope something's in it for them. But there should be. Always thank customers for their feedback, even negative: Without it, you wouldn't truly know how to provide the good service that keeps them coming back.

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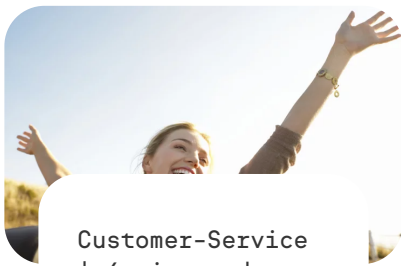
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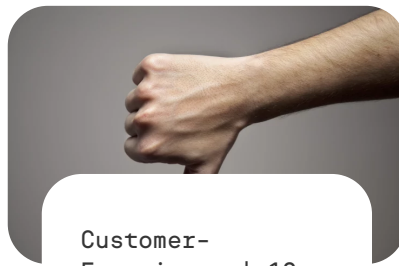
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