

Free eBook

DOWNLOAD NOW

Essential technology strategies for growing business



Optus BUSINESS

smartcompany

Entrepreneur Watch
Five factors the banks will be watching in 2012 – and you should too
 The labour market, retail sales and credit growth are crucial to monitor.



smartcompany

Thursday, 05 January 2012

home

news

ask the experts

blogs

hot topics

industry

community

search...

Go

See all 'Professional Services' articles

Jo Ucakalo

Wednesday, 23 November 2011 09:30
 Madeleine Heffernan

Page 1 of 2



Jo Ucakalo noticed that she was good at handling complaints, and after taking on disputes for friends and family, Handle My Complaint was born.



Describing it as Australia's first commercial dispute resolution business, Ucakalo says her company has a success rate of more than 70% for 1,500 complaints, which have ranged from problems with the telecommunications industry to the beauty industry, removalists and motor vehicles.

With a background in civil engineering, customer service, the airlines and logistics, Ucakalo says her six-strong team not only take on disputes that a disgruntled consumer doesn't have the patience or time to address, but helps businesses understand how their processes are perceived from the outside.

With the business just 18 months old, Ucakalo is hoping to increase Handle My Complaint's revenue to \$3 million next year.

Explain your business to us.

Handle My Complaint is essentially a complaint management service where we go through and negotiate between a consumer and a business an amicable arrangement to resolve a complaint.

Generally there's got to be a complaint for us to resolve. We then go through and understand what the customer wants to achieve and then negotiate with the business and see what outcome we can get for a customer, so that's basically our core business.

We also assist businesses with their complaint resolution processes as well.

You advise them on how to deal with complaints?

Yes, even with part of our general complaints business we always offer suggestions for improvements as well for that organisation.

I guess it's a little bit hard when you're within that organisation to see suggested improvements from the customer's perspective, so we always try to offer that because we are here to improve the customer experience.

And we're also here to offer our services to businesses, to sit down and work through their complaints process and assist them in communicating with the customers or what internal processes their business goes through to receive complaints and resolve complaints.

Can you give us an example?

If we see that this is a broad-scale issue, say that the terms and conditions aren't really clear for consumers, we offer advice to say, "By the way, this is something you may need to look at for your general consumer base, not just for this specific complaint," even though that's what we've been engaged to do.

Your advice is based on your experiences in dealing with them to resolve that consumer's complaint?

I guess it's a combination between having a background in what consumers dislike and also the background of business process improvement or re-engineering.

So it's a bit of a combination, it is a business process improvement but it's really from that customer perspective, and I guess that's where customers really provide that sort of first-hand understanding of what they are perceiving as issues, what sort of issues they are encountering back from the organisation.

That information is really valuable and we put it into a perspective that the business can understand.

A lot of time consumers can get caught up in the emotion of their complaint. You know, they're angry, they're frustrated, they're disappointed.

We can assist the customer first off by taking that emotion and sticking to the facts of what's happened and then communicating that back to the business.

But at the same time we can speak the business language and say, "Okay, it's a communication breakdown here, the customer didn't hear back from you within the expected timeframe therefore that's something you need to address."

More on Professional Services

- > Marcus Sellen
- > The patent protector
- > RedBalloon rising
- > A clean sweep
- > The king of follow-through

Read more on:

- > Jo Ucakalo
- > Handle My Complaint

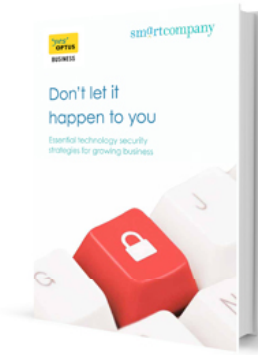
smartcompany

Optus BUSINESS

Free eBook

Don't let it happen to you

Essential technology strategies for growing business



DOWNLOAD NOW

Free Daily Newsletter



Your email address...

Go

I wish to receive special offers via email from related companies

Follow us:



By submitting your email you are agreeing to our Terms & Conditions.

Sponsored Links

SmartCompany.com.au on Facebook

Like

3,851 people like SmartCompany.com.au.

Sjaala Niki Christine Daryl Terri

Facebook social plugin

smartcompany

Free eBook

10 quick sales and marketing wins for SMEs

I guess we have that touch-point of the customer and that touch-point of the business. I guess we're a sort of a translator between the two.

How old is the business?

The business is approximately 18 months old. It was established by myself when I was resolving my own complaints and getting very good results, just simply going through some sort of methodology – finding the right point to contact, outlining the complaint, asking for a resolution.

So it was something I was doing really well for myself, and then I had friends and family asking for me to advise them, "I've got this issue, could you please tell me what I should do".

I would offer them advice and they would say "it hasn't worked" or "I can't be bothered" or "can you just do it for me?"

So then I started doing complaints for my friends and family and then it just started growing, so then they started recommending me to their friends and family and then it just snowballed.

I recognised there was a deficiency in the marketplace that no one is effecting results within the complaints area.

Obviously Government bodies will assist consumers in trying to resolve their complaint but what we do is manage the complaint. So you hand over your complaint to us and we provide that end result by outlining the complaint, doing the follow up, keeping our customers up-to-date with the progress.

We're taking that burden off them from having to remember, "Oh I've got that complaint that's yet to be resolved and it's been six weeks and I should follow that up".

That's still the case that you're the only people doing that or have competitors sprung up now?

I'm not aware of anyone else offering the same service.

You said that you're good at handling complaints and that people might not have the time or patience to follow up their complaints. What else is it that drives your business?

Well, the case managers have got specific information from within the industry as well. For example, we've got one case manager that's worked for the Office of Fair Trading so she's got a broad range of experience. We've also got one case manager who's worked in the extended warranties sector.

So they've got really specific knowledge and been through this process from usually a different perspective from the organisation's perspective but they know what outcome to expect as well.

That ground knowledge has been a key for the recruitment process, to find that really diverse skill set. And I guess I'm typical of that, I've worked in a lot of different industries.

What industries were they?

Well, I started out as a civil engineer and I guess that's where my business process and good analytical background comes from. But then I've worked in customer service, in the airlines, in shipping, in logistics, in warehousing. I think that's probably it. What makes a good case manager is someone who can think outside of the square, who's good at resolving problems.

So you don't need to be a lawyer to take care of these jobs?

The level of complaints that we take on are before a lawyer, so sometimes we advise people that they should go and seek that kind of assistance because it is a specific dispute. We're that step before that where we're trying ascertain who's responsible for what, what outcome we can achieve.

Can you give us some examples of the cases you take on?

Say you've got a product that has broken just outside of its manufacturer's warranty. Or customer service, that's a big one for us – we can assist you with getting a response or a result from your customer service complaints.

It doesn't just have to be, "My terms and conditions have let me down and now I have to pay another \$500" or something.

It can be, "I had a poor experience with my organisation, now can you do something to make me feel like a valued customer and address this complaint?"

The other thing to remember is that they say only 5% of consumers complain.

And at a practical level, how do you deal with complaints?

We work with the consumer, understand what the complaint is and then we put it together as a package. We don't drip-feed information generally speaking. We put it together as a package and then send that through as a complaint.

This gives the business a background, and the complaint is then less likely to get lost or confused because it's all packaged up and answers the questions we know the business is going to ask, such as what's gone wrong, the proof of purchase, who they spoke to. We try to collate all that sort of information up front.

What is your success rate so far and how many cases have you dealt with?

To date we've done about 1,500 complaints. Our success rate is currently around 72% which is fairly reasonable.

Obviously we expect that to be higher in the future as our reputation grows and people will understand that we're not just taking on frivolous complaints, and we get smarter at doing business.

We do screen through the complaints to say, "Yes we can assist you" or "Unfortunately we can't assist you for these reasons".

And when we can't help someone, we do try and offer suggestions on what they can do next, or who can they contact, and also send through templates to assist them to manage their own complaints.

10 quick sales
and marketing
wins for SMEs



DOWNLOAD NOW

Business Resources

Free eBook

30 tips from the
2011 Web Awards



sm@rtcompany

Optus
BUSINESS

DOWNLOAD NOW

[Click here for resources](#)

Most Read

- > The Boxing Day sale that wasn't: Myer brings forward big discounts to Christmas Eve
- > 12 Pulse Pharmacy stores and management arm in receivership
- > Gerry Harvey sets up Irish website to beat GST threshold, experts tip direct import trend to continue
- > IR lawyers surprised as Fair Work Australia reinstates worker sacked for "distasteful" Facebook comments
- > Five things to do over the break

BYO Whitepaper



Find out more

sm@rtcompany

Free Daily Newsletter



Your email address...

Go

I wish to receive special offers via email from related companies

Follow us:



By submitting your email you are agreeing to

Do you charge by the hour or a success fee?

We charge a success fee. In 99.98% of cases people are looking for a financial result and what we term as a financial outcome is a repair, replacement, compensation or a good will payment.

A small percentage of our customers say, "We don't care about the financial outcome, we just want a response," so they'll be charged our minimum fee which is \$110.

But how we charge is 20% plus GST of the financial outcome. Essentially if we don't get you the outcome that you desire there's no outlay for our service.

That would require your screening process to be quite strict.

Yes exactly.

But what has really been heartening for me – because I do most of the screening simply because I've got a better feel for it and I've been doing it the longest – there is a significantly high percentage of customers that approach us who have got a really genuine complaint.

They're not looking for something for nothing, they're not looking for a freebie, they're not looking for something that they don't honestly think is owed to them for a particular reason.

Do you mould your response according to the sector?

According to the complaint, actually.

The majority of our customers have tried and failed to resolve their complaint.

Having said that, we do have some people that just outsource every complaint to us because they don't want the conflict confrontation, they just feel like, "Okay, you guys can just do that for me" regardless of what it is.

What is the most common area of complaint and which sectors dominate?

The complaints that we receive have well exceeded my expectation in variety – when I first started the business there was no way I could have dreamed up the type of complaints that we have received.

But the key ones that we seem to see a lot of is obviously the telecommunications industry, the energy sector, banking sector and a lot of electrical equipment and motor vehicles as well.

But there are also beauty-industry complaints, we've got cruise complaints, we've got removalist complaints and complaints about freight charges.

It just astounds me just how many different types of complaints.

And the complaints are centred on customer service?

Absolutely, and I think that is really probably where we can see our biggest growth because people are accustomed to saying, "Hey I've got a complaint because I've got no mobile phone coverage, I've got a complaint because my washing machine has broken down and it's only two-years-old".

People are used to having those complaints and having those complaints addressed. But we can now deal with customer service issues and get good results as well.

For example, we've got a case where a pregnant woman was on a flight and presented with a few medical issues, but the cabin crew member on-board didn't deal with it appropriately and she ended up in tears.

When I spoke to her about it – I have a background in the airline industry – she said, "Look, I wouldn't normally do this but it really upset me and I'm still upset about it."

So then we raised the complaint with the airline and it was very quickly resolved and customer was really satisfied with the outcome.

The airline has given her quite a significant credit to fly with them again because they recognise they're actually in the customer service industry.

A lot of times people go, "I've had bad service but how can I prove that it was that bad?"

And according to the Australian Consumer Survey Report in 2011, a quarter of consumer problems raised with businesses remain unresolved, so if we can work towards getting that number reduced I think we've done a good job.

How many staff members do you have?

We currently have six. We've had pretty good growth and so we feel we're going to do a lot better for the next year but it's a good starting point anyway.

I wouldn't have dreamed that I'd really be in this position with complaints three years ago, two years ago. I wouldn't have expected that, it was such an untapped market.

And your revenue?

Last calendar year we did just under \$500,000 in revenue but we're expecting revenue to around the \$3 million mark next calendar year because the past four months have been really strong for us.

That's great. Thanks for talking, Jo.

our Terms & Conditions.

Sponsored Links

 **SmartCompany.com.au** on Facebook
[Like](#)

3,851 people like **SmartCompany.com.au**.


Julian Christine Mark Cindy Scott



Facebook social plugin

sm@rtcompany 

Free eBook

Don't let it happen to you

Essential technology strategies for growing business

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)



Business Resources

Free eBook  **sm@rtcompany** 

30 tips from the 2011 Web Awards

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

[Click here for resources](#)

Most Read

- > The Boxing Day sale that wasn't: Myer brings forward big discounts to Christmas Eve
- > 12 Pulse Pharmacy stores and management arm in receivership
- > Gerry Harvey sets up Irish website to beat GST threshold, experts tip direct import trend to continue
- > IR lawyers surprised as Fair Work Australia reinstates worker sacked for "distasteful" Facebook comments
- > Five things to do over the break