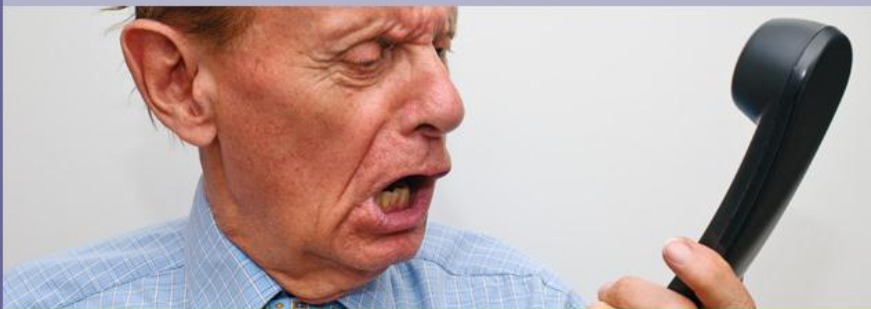


Smarter > Advice > How your worst customer can be the best for business



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Customer Service

How your worst customer can be the best for business

Mel Hearse 19 Mar 2013

MEL HEARSE chats to the founder of a customer complaints website about how to turn frowns upside down for your business.

"Customer complaints can be terrific news for your business," says Jo Ucakalo, CEO at Handle My Complaint (www.HandleMyComplaint.com.au). She qualifies her unusual statement by adding it is only so if you know why you've attracted the complaint, how to deal with it quickly and appropriately, and how to comprehend and seize the opportunity it's presenting your business with.

"The most common complaints we see arise from two core issues - the first being poor communication, and the second a failure to deliver what was promised or expected," says Ucakalo. So how does she recommend you successfully address them?

"Step one is to appease the complaining customer. After this has been achieved, you can look to the second step - discerning which changes could be introduced in the business to ensure a smoother run in future. This is where you can actively improve your business across the board."

See also: [The Gruen Transfer's Rowan Dean on turning complaints into a plus](#)

Once you've taken the time to solve your complainants concerns and followed up with them, it is time to turn the negative experience into an across the board positive. Ucakalo recommends:

- Review and investigate the cause of complaints received. If a customer has taken the time to complain, more than likely, other customers have had the same complaint but failed to act.
- After investigating each complaint, consider the impact to your business if the same situation were to occur regularly. If it's important to your business that the complaint doesn't reoccur, take steps to reduce the likelihood of the complaint returning. Evaluating each complaint received ensures your business is under continual improvement for all customers.
- During staff meetings or training discuss complaints that have been received. Take the time to discuss how they were resolved and if that resolution was satisfactory to the business and customer. If the resolution wasn't satisfactory, discuss how staff should approach a similar situation in the future. The best way for staff to learn is by real examples.

Businesses are unlikely to get it right all the time, and there are processes you can put in place to make the most of negative customer experiences. Here are some suggestions from us:

Empower your staff - Give your staff the power to resolve complaints themselves.

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Acknowledge the customer's emotion, assure the customer the problem will be investigated and move quickly onto effecting results - This is different from accepting responsibility for the complaint. Once a dissatisfied customer has been recognised, or a customer is actively complaining, begin by assuring the customer they will be given the opportunity to explain why they are upset.

As the customer shares their experience, practise active listening - the use of body language is an effective way to demonstrate interest in the customer's experience. Staff should be taught to use an open stance, maintain eye contact, and nod. Do not interrupt the customer (or attempt to correct them) as they explain their version of events.

Ascertain the desired outcome - Very often, the most overlooked aspect of complaint resolution is the desired outcome of the customer!

Achieve the desired outcome - once it's been established what is required to make the customer satisfied, the staff member resolving the complaint should inform the customer what they can do to resolve the issue immediately.

Admit fault - yes, even if it hurts! If it becomes apparent that your business is at fault, it should be a matter of course, that you offer some form of compensation (or goodwill gesture) to the customer, on top of addressing the complaint.

Make refinements - Also, spend some time defining the cause of the complaint and how it might be avoided in future. If your business needs to make some procedural adjustments to ensuring smoother running in future, put them into action as soon as possible.

If you feel you could use a little extra help when it comes to dealing with complaints (and you'd like to learn more about turning them into a bonus, visit www.handlemycomplaint.com.au for more information.

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