

## ENLITEN IT LTD

# DEALING WITH CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Sooner or later every business has to deal with situations in which things go wrong from a customer's point of view.

Although it might seem contradictory, a customer with a complaint represents a genuine opportunity for your business:

- don't be dismissive of your customer's problem - even if you're convinced you're not at fault
- stay as calm and professional
- if you handle the complaint successfully, your customer is likely to prove more loyal than if nothing had gone wrong
- people willing to complain are rare - your complaining customer may be alerting you to a problem experienced by many others who silently took their custom elsewhere

Complaints should be handled courteously, sympathetically and - above all - swiftly. Make sure that all employees know the procedure.

The following stages are involved:

1. Believe your customer.  
It is important to understand that your customer believes that your establishment has wronged them.
2. Listen and clarify. Never defend or justify.  
The key is to relax and **listen** sympathetically to the customer. Ask questions to make sure you fully understand the problem and sympathise with their situation, even if you don't think it is your fault.
3. Record the details together.  
When the customer is done venting; in a calm, non-judgmental tone, repeat their problem. By repeating the problem, you demonstrate that you heard and understood the problem. The customer does not want excuses, just solutions!
4. Always apologise.  
From your customers' perspective, they have a legitimate complaint, and they expect an apology. It could be as simple as "I'm sorry we've inconvenienced you." A sincere apology will usually diffuse a lot of frustration that the customer has.

Show concern for their inconvenience and thank them for telling you about their concerns. If it's a mistake on your part, then make sure you apologise for that, too.

5. Investigate the complaint.  
If other parties are involved (e.g. staff or contractors) get feedback on their version of events. It is important to understand both sides of a problem.

6. Find a solution with the customer.  
Ask the customer "What can I do to make this right for you"? Be the judge of what is fair of course, but allow them the opportunity to feel empowered over the situation. It's no good you offering a solution that doesn't work for the customer.

Make sure you both understand the agreed solution and write it down so no one forgets it.

Determine a time frame for the solution, unless it is an immediate solution, and make sure it is done by that time.

7. Follow up.  
Always follow up a complaint a few days later e.g. a letter of apology, email or a phone call to make sure that the problem has been rectified. The follow up shows you are serious about trying to fix their problem.

At the beginning, at the end, in the middle; it doesn't matter, thank the customer for calling and complaining.

Why? With the simple act of complaining, your customer is telling you "I care about your business and your success". They are giving you the opportunity to fix the problem and invite them back so they can give you repeat business.

8. Keep records of complaints.  
This will enable us to analyse what went wrong and make appropriate changes in order to avoid future re-occurrences.