How can you take customer complaints and turn them into opportunities? Do a little market research into how your customers feel about the way your company handles complaints. Interview at least three customers who have registered complaints about your products or services.

How upset were they about the original mistake? How upset or pleased were they about the way the mistake was handled once it was called to your attention?

Get answers that address specific incidents to support their statements.

When a customer has a complaint to make, how easy is it for the customer to get in touch with you or someone else who can respond appropriately? It should be as easy for customers to register complaints as it is for them to buy from you.

Look at the last several customer complaints you’ve received. How many of those did you “explain away” as resulting from special circumstances? How many were really “special” or unavoidable, and how many could you have avoided with a little careful attention?

Remember, you should be glad your customers are complaining to you. Otherwise, they’d be complaining to your competition.

Try this five-step process to handle customer complaints:

1. Focus on the problem, not the anger. Make it clear that you care about the problem and want to help solve it by saying, “I’m sorry you had a problem. I’m glad you told me about it.”

2. Listen—but don’t react too quickly. Acknowledge the customer’s feelings and statements, but don’t immediately commit to any specific solutions.

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3. If possible, have your customer show you the problem rather than simply explain it.

4. If the solution to the problem isn’t obvious, ask your customer, “What do you think would be fair?” before you suggest any solution.

5. Never promise what you can’t fulfill yourself. If you don’t have the authority to solve the problem, tell your customer that you’ll get the information promptly. Then call the estimator, designer or banker and get the facts. Follow-up in person, if possible.

Excellent customer service happens in companies that plan for customer service to be excellent. It can pay off in repeat business and more referrals. CD

About the Author
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