

Guide: Managing queries & complaints

Introduction

Queries and complaints are a reality in any business.

A well handled query is a great step toward increasing business, just as a well handled complaint can prevent you from losing business.

It costs five times as much to gain a new client as it does to retain an existing one.

Professionalism and follow-up are the two keys to successfully managing queries and complaints.

Managing Queries

Train front of house/reception team

A large proportion of client queries will come through a front of house role.

Whether this is the person who answers the phone or staffs the front desk, it is important that this person is courteous and helpful.

It's a good idea to train front of house staff to answer frequently asked questions. Consider writing a basic document of 10 frequently asked questions — this will be invaluable.

Don't forget to keep your team in the loop of any marketing or media which may generate phone calls and enquiries.

Any person who makes an enquiry should be added to the customer database if not already there.

Advanced queries

Ensure that team members know the correct way to pass a query on to another team member if need be.

Email is the best way to pass on queries as they can be easily read and tracked. Include:

- Name of person enquiring
- Phone number
- Email or address if relevant
- As much detail about the query as possible
- Level of urgency

Follow up

It is imperative that all queries are answered in a timely fashion, whether the answer is what the customer wants to hear or not.

After a query is answered, it may also lead to a sale or the engagement of a service. It is important that this is passed on to the relevant team member to follow up.

Take a universal view

Take a universal view of enquiries. What else may interest the customer? What team members need to know that an enquiry has been made?

Think about what flow-on effect the enquiry may have and who may be interested that the enquiry was made.

Managing Complaints

Attitude

Don't think of a complaint as necessarily a bad thing. The customer is not the enemy and it often takes courage for someone to voice their displeasure.

Although there are always serial complainers, 90% of those who complain just need your help and are disappointed or frustrated with something.

Clients generally want less than you think and will probably be complaining in the hope of remaining a client with you. You need to be sincere and to want to help them, because if you don't this will come across in your voice.

You need to solve the problem using the following steps to try and ensure that the client becomes or remains loyal:

- Establish a rapport
- Discover the problem
- Offer a complete solution
- Cement the relationship

Look at a complaint as an opportunity to improve part of your business.

Professionalism

It is imperative that complaints are handled professionally and with a set process to ensure that nothing is misplaced.

If there is someone in the business more appropriate to deal with the complaint, pass the customer on immediately so that the customer does not tell their story in full only to be told 'this is not my area'.

The person managing the complaint is responsible for bringing a resolution and seeing the process through.

Start by listening to the customer attentively and note down the details of the complaint and whether the client has suggested any particular course of action.

Oral complaints

When a complaint is received by telephone or face to face, listen to the client. Take notes on a complaint form while they get the problem off their chest.

Follow this script to ensure each complaint is dealt with in a consistent way:

'Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I'm sorry that this has happened (or that you feel this way), and I will do everything that I can to resolve the problem.'

Request more details, by using phrases such as *'Could you give me a few more details on that'* or *'Could you expand on that point please?'*

Ask how the customer would like the situation resolved.

Tell the client what you are going to do to resolve the problem, and ensure that you do whatever you say you will. Then thank the client for bringing the problem to your attention.

Written complaints

When a letter or email of complaint is received, or poor comments are received on a feedback form, contact the client by telephone to discuss.

If this is not possible, ensure a reply is sent same day.

Promises

Do not promise anything you can't deliver — this may make the situation far worse.

Simply advise the client you will investigate the complaint and make contact with them once all information has been gathered. Give a time when you will contact them.

Resolution options

When considering options for resolving the complaint consider the following:

- Provide an additional service or product to the client that has a high perceived value to them but low actual cost to the business
- A future discount to a predetermined value
- A credit or gift voucher. This is a last resort option and must be approved by the appropriate manager

Resolution

Complete the complaints form noting the solution to the complaint and ensure the complaint is resolved. Completed forms are handed to the Office/Administration Manager to enter into the customer database and file.

Contact the client within 24 hours of the original complaint with a resolution. Seek assurance from the client that the matter is resolved to their satisfaction and confirm the resolution in writing.

If the client is still not happy, request a meeting at a time that is convenient to them to resolve the issue.

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