
Defusing Upset Customers



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Table of Contents

Accreditation and Testing.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Defusing Upset Customers Part 1: In Person	6
Chapter One: In Person	7
In-Person Interactions.....	9
Defusing Upset Customers Part 2: Online.....	12
Helping an Online Customer	13
Once it's Online it is Hard to Get Off.....	14
Social Media Attacks and How to Defuse Them.....	15
Pleasing the Online Shopper	16
Conclusion.....	20
Testing.....	21

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Introduction

Some say that customer service and dealing with the public is one of the most difficult positions held within any business! Whether the company is a brick-and-mortar retail store, online or phone managed you get the good and the difficult. But what we need a customer service representative to do is to remember that every customer is important to the business and should be treated with the same respect as the next customer even in difficult situations. Ever hear someone say, “you only hear the bad, no one ever says anything nice.”

In the retail and online climate world dealing with an upset customer can be a daunting task. To begin we need to be able to look and hear their perspective and understand them.

In this online course, we are going to go over some suggestions as to how to deal with upset customers, so everyone has a positive experience with your business.

Defusing Upset Customers Part 1: In Person

In this first section, we will cover the retail in-person element of helping an upset customer and how to respond.



Chapter One: In Person

So, let us first start to think about when you must deal with an upset customer or have to deal with a difficult situation and have to defuse it. We need to understand that your customer feels they have a valid issue. Each situation is different so let's think positive so you will be able to take care of the issue efficiently and within no time your customer will be back smiling again and on their way content and knowing that their issue was resolved.

Employees should always be trained on understanding the procedures of the business so that if any complaints do occur, they have the knowledge to assist. Make sure all the employees are aware of warranties, or who the staff authority is daily to reach out to. Teach yourself and your staff about manufacturer knowledge and learn their policies and have staff meetings to discuss and keep notes in a binder or a staff folder so that it can be easily reviewed. Remember your staff is your business's ambassador and so are you!

One of my first interactions with a customer who was not very happy was when I was an employee of a very large retail store here in Canada. I experienced many customer complaints over the years as a customer service representative, but I remember this first time. How did I react the first time, not like I should have! I was a cashier, learning the customer service aspect in a retail brick and mortar retail store. One day I had the opening morning shift, as it happened, I was the only person on the front-end cash. The first few customers that had been waiting at the door before the store had even opened now had shopped for what they came in for and were ready to be attended to and cashed out. I happily thanked them and saying have a nice day as they went on their way. I was cleaning up my area and saw what was about to happen. A lot more shoppers heading my way and as I headed around the countertop, they started forming a line. Then it happened. All I heard loudly was "is there not anyone else who can help me?". Looking up I answered, "sorry sir, no there is not, I am the only person here this morning this early and he quickly engaged me saying "fine" I could tell in his voice and his movement he was going to start a disturbance. This is when it got a little more frustrating for this customer. "This is ridiculous I heard", and knowing

that this was the same person complaining, I looked at him and smiled. He was the third person in the line, and it was starting to be very clear that his time was more important than standing in a line waiting, he was flustering me and because of that I said in front of the other customers, "if you think you can do this job better, please come on up and try." To this day I do not think that he expected me to say anything back to him, he just looked at me and as I looked at him back. I realized that I just needed to concentrate because there now were a few more customers in my line. His turn, I was cordial and told him to have a nice day (which I don't think he liked). As I assisted the remainder of the customers who were waiting in line and heard this, I apologized for the wait time and they were very nice to me and smiled, they knew that I was trying. I am sure that most of them understood and had in their own job's customers like this. It is funny that all these years later I still remember what happened that morning. It also taught me how to react when this happens. I should have been told that these types of comments never should be said. The thing is I knew that I should not have said anything back, I should have just replied with, "I will just be a moment" or just kept gently smiling or not even said anything at all until I was ready to assist him with his purchases and then apologize for the wait. Whether he returned to the store as a customer I do not know, I do not recall seeing him again. I found out later I could have called for help, one of the office staff could have been called to the floor and helped me out but I did not know that. I knew that a manager was in the store so should have I called them and asked them to speak to this customer? I wonder, did I lose this customer from shopping at the store again? Have you ever had a circumstance like this one?

In-Person Interactions

As a business owner or a staff team member, you may think to yourself,

*Has this customer complained before?... yes, and here they are again complaining... I'm not listening anymore they can go somewhere else, it's not worth it...I'm walking away someone else can deal with them this time... yes that is why I remember them or thinking this is a long-time customer, and they are complaining now? that's odd they are always so happy with our service... maybe something **is** upsetting them... I need to pay attention to their complaint. Or maybe think, this new customer complained to you about the last place they went?... but you thought at the time I am so glad they have now come to our store because now I have stolen them from my competition... maybe the competition is happy they no longer have them as a customer.*

Results in any of these scenarios should be that this is your or your businesses customer and you should be listening or get someone on staff that is of authority that will resolve and find a resolution quickly. Here are a few tips if this unhappy customer walks in your store.

Do not get aggressive with them, this is not the time. In fact, learn from what they are saying and offer your support.

Listen to the customer, stay calm and do not talk over them or talk back, remember to smile and speak softly, even sit down with them in a quiet area so other customers or potential new customers do not hear.

Stay with the customer until the issue gets resolved and if you are not in the position of authority to answer make sure to take notes so that you can pass the issue along to someone who can help this customer as soon as possible and make sure to follow through. Avoid interruptions, phone calls or other staff asking you questions, this will only make that customer feel more upset that they are not being given the consideration that they should. Once they have finished explaining tell them that you can help them out and determine the best way to do that. If someone

knows that they are being validated and someone has listened, it will help calm them and instead of them getting their money back and seeing the door they will give you the chance to help. If they start complaining again while they are waiting for you go over and offer them a beverage. Always be courteous and nice, others may be listening. Remember, your body language can also be a trigger for someone who is already upset. Folding of your arms, hands on your hips and waving your finger may give off the wrong signal.

When defusing an upset customer on the telephone it may be a little different. Sometimes people will say more angry comments to you because they feel that speaking over the phone they feel more in charge. Same ideas to defuse apply.

Just listen, respond only when you need to while they are explaining their dispute. You know, you can tell if someone is smiling on the other end of the phone because of the sound of their voice. If you are unable to help right away take down as much information as you can and clarify their first name and telephone number. If they can come in the store and talk to you then set a time when you can see them even after hours if you are the business owner. Make sure you have all the information ready so that when they meet you the situation might be easily resolved. Follow up as soon as you can to make sure this customer has been taken care of if you had passed this along to your boss. This is an important part of keeping the customer happy and helping ensure that they return to your store. As well as tell others how satisfied they are that there was an issue and how quickly it was resolved. Remember word of mouth is an excellent way of advertising.

Think about a situation that has happened when you just could not make the customer happy. Maybe you went with rules that maybe could have been bent? Maybe you decided that this is too big of an issue and really, you are not willing to go any further, so you know what, let them leave upset, there are many more customers out there (you might think to yourself). Would you repeat this scenario again? Or would you have changed the outcome and made that customer happy and satisfied? Did this upset customer return to your store? Well, you cannot make every customer happy!

Remember overall you represent your business this is your “bread and butter” and your staff too! Setting a great example is part of being a great leader. If a situation arises and you are watching it happen make sure that you take your employee aside and tell them how professionally they applied themselves with the upset customer. Always try to give a time out to relax for a moment or two and regroup before going on to the next customer.

Now let us turn this around, as a customer yourself and how we treat a representative of a business that we shop in every day or week. Often, we shop in grocery or department store, many of us have our favorites. When we walk into the store, we expect great service that is why we go back to that same store location. Now, what would happen if one day you went to your favorite department store and bought an appliance and when you got home you unpacked your appliance, put it away until you needed to use it. So, after a few months using it, you realize that it is not working correctly. How would you react? Would you simply throw it out or would you go back to the store and tell them or maybe phone the department manager who you have known for a long time? Let us decide that you take it back to the store after all you are a customer who purchases quite a bit, but when you get there, you see that there are a few other people waiting. So, what do you do? As a customer, do you think like an owner of your business? *You should...*

What do you do when you hear someone who starts to complain about the product or service, and you are a customer too? Have you ever spoken up and supported the person who is behind the complaint? Most of us probably have not only because we do not want to get involved. If you have, did you support the store employee or did you say to the person complaining that you disagree or say something out loud for them to be quiet?

What do you do when you hear someone who starts to complain about the product or service, and you are a customer too? Have you ever spoken up and supported the person who is behind the complaint? Most of us probably have not only because we do not want to get involved. If you have, did you support the store employee or did you say to the person complaining that you disagree or say something out loud for them to be quiet?

These are just some suggestions, a few things to think about and complement what you are already doing when dealing with upset customers. Afterall, you know what is best for your business as a business owner.

Defusing Upset Customers Part 2: Online

In this second section, we will cover the online element of helping an upset customer. Here we will discuss how to properly respond and be as helpful as we can be with all parties walking away fulfilled.



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Helping an Online Customer

The chances are you may have been in a situation like this, you wake up and check your phone and see you have a new notification from someone on Twitter, Facebook, or wherever you engage on social media to help build your brand. There you see a frustrated customer either messaging you, leaving an upset review on Facebook or tagging you on Twitter. If you have run a business long enough you may receive a negative review. It happens in every business where you interact with other people. The first thing you should do is never reply or comment right away, take a break and take a deep breath and think of a logical reply.

Maybe they commented online how your store was a mess the day they had come. You can reply with something simple like “I’m sorry you had this experience we were in the midst of redoing our display cases” with this type of reply traditionally people are not used to getting a genuine response, they are used to being ignored by a large company. When you show them sympathy you are showing them that you are in fact a human as well and are trying your best. Put yourself in that position and imagine someone replying to you with that type of response. How would you feel?

In the current Online climate, it is much harder to get your full view across on Twitter as you are limited by how much you can say in a tweet. It can still feel like some people don’t see you as a human but as a corporation online and that what they say isn’t going to hurt you. Especially for a smaller store if you don’t have as many reviews this can bring down your overall rating online and could become one of the first reviews potential customers see.

That is why it is always important to show others online that you are a person replying to their comment and you genuinely care about what they are saying and that you want to improve, remember reviews are usually public and if you reply to a person leaving a critical review it is not just that person that will see your reply, it is also potential future customers.

Dealing with customers in-store and online can be extremely difficult especially if you're dealing with negativity. As stated earlier you need to make sure you give yourself some time to think of a logical response, usually our first reaction when we see negativity or a negative review about our store is to feel frustration and anger. You don't want a future potential customer to look at what you're posting online and think “Wow, this person seems very angry, and I don't want to be around them so I'm not going to support their store” and that will just lead them to your competition. Put yourself in this future customers shoes, who would you rather be around someone who is

positive and listens to what you have to say or someone who is angry and frustrated and that may not be specifically true about you, it is peoples first impression of you, and it may be misleading.

Once it's Online it is Hard to Get Off

The Internet can be such a fantastic place, it gives us access to everything we could have ever imagined but with that comes the negatives.

When you post something online it can be very difficult to erase, especially if you're posting on a platform you don't always have access to get rid of your reply and even if you do people will screenshot what you posted, from there they will be able to use this screenshotted image of your conversation and post it in threads about you and post it while you are talking with customers on social media.

That is why if there is one thing you take away from this write-up, it is that you must think before you write.

When you are trying to resolve an issue with a customer you must keep in mind they are coming from a frustrated state of mind. They don't want to have to waste more of their time to fix an issue and that they feel like if they paid for an item that it should come the way they expect it to be and while their expectations are not always realistic, they are allowed to have their opinion online and when they do voice their opinion online sometimes it can just be straight hostile so your response should not be to fight fire with fire.

In these types of situations, you want to come out of this looking like a professional who knows how to handle issues because once this customer calms down and gives himself some time they're going to look back on what they did and the chances are they're going to feel bad about it and they may just delete the comment or the review themselves, but as a store you have a reputation to withhold, you don't want people looking at that and thinking that's who you are that is what you have to offer you want to show them that you will fix the issue.

Now traditionally we will see a lot of stores online try and take this discussion with this frustrated customer to private direct messages and that is always something that will always help as it is more personal with the customer and it is no longer a public discussion. You do not want to turn this interaction in the public eye into a long-winded forum post, you want it to look quick and easy.

Continuing with the topic about direct messaging you have to remember when you direct message someone you can still take a screen capture of the messages that you have been sending back and forth, and if you then decide

to take this approach but don't fully follow through with staying level headed and you then become frustrated with the direct messaging that you're having with this person that this frustrated customer can take what you're saying and post it all over online and again as stated earlier you do not want these types of situations coming up in 2, 3 even 10 years down the line because simply giving yourself time would have been the solution to these issues.



Social Media Attacks and How to Defuse Them

If you spend enough time online, you will begin to see how most people take out their frustration.

It usually begins with a purchase either online or in-person and if things go poorly it is followed by a customer who is upset and begins to either spam your email or bash you on social media. We see this all too often with large online stores, you can look at any of the largest corporations online, for example, Wal-Mart or Amazon. You can go on almost any of their posts online and you will see someone who is upset with one of the purchases they have made.

Over the last few years, we have begun to see Social Media customer services helpers who will reply to these comments asking them to direct message the companies page so they can speak in private about the incident. What had begun to happen with large stores is that their posts were getting hit with people spamming their issues. That is why it is always recommended to publicly reply an offer to direct message as soon as possible.

What many have begun to learn from this is that handling a situation with a person as quickly as possible is not only helpful when dealing with a customer, but it helps the entire brand from being bombarded with frustrated customers. This can also harm getting future customers as this could be their first impression and seeing that there are this many issues on there posts can make them go to a competitor.

With the number of sales that go on in a single day for most stores the amounts that are upset is a small but vocal minority, but no matter how small it seems to be, driving away even one customer is not something you want to do.

Online in the world of social media, we also see people take things too far at times. They can threaten physical violence they can send harassing words and the best step in these types of situations is to make sure you report the account they are posting these messages on. Send it to Facebook or Twitter so they can review it, no matter what site you are getting these posts on, social media companies tend to take these actions and these threats very seriously. Make sure after they are recorded you end up blocking them as well, sometimes it is best to not even try to reply to these people. You do not want to give them your already limited time of day, you don't want to give these types of people the ability to think that if they threaten like this that they will get what they want because then they will continue to act this way and if it works on one person or one store, they're going to do it to other stores as well, so make sure you block and report.

Pleasing the Online Shopper

When a customer walks away happy, the chances are you will not hear from them again until they want to make another purchase. If they walk away frustrated its only a matter of time before hearing about it online.

The way the world is currently shaping we are seeing more and more people turn to an online storefront, like eBay. If you sell on eBay or any other online storefront there is traditionally going to be some type of rating system.

On eBay, the system is simplistic at first. It goes: Positive, Neutral, or Negative. Usually, if you are transparent and package everything safely you will receive all positive reviews but what happens when you get that one customer that you just cannot please?

The problem with a rating system online is that sometimes no matter how well you do, the circumstances that you do not control are what may end up hurting you. For example shipping.

Say you package up the item you sold, and you did it like all the others. You hand your package off at the post office and from there you can only hope the package was protected enough. With that comes the odd chance that it broke, say a piece of the frame got scratched or even something as simple as the case was dented. This at times can be enough to set people off. The first reaction most people have is to contact you and to let you know if there was an issue, the problem is, unlike it being in person where you can see the broken product you can assess potentially what happened to it. Online people have the ability to lie and they can do it a lot easier thanks to eBay's not so seller-friendly environment, the first thing you should always do is ask for pictures, inform the customer that they need to send you pictures be as polite as possible because most of the time they will be telling the truth and it may have just been damaged in the mail, but for your records and to protect your business you want to have as much documented as possible. After you assess the damage, you will have the ability, on most storefronts, to either offer a full refund for a return or you and the buyer can settle on a partial refund.

If you don't see any damage to the product, or you feel as if the claims are false your best bet will always be to ask this person for a return because if this product is still in near perfect condition what's the point in giving them a partial refund? You will be able to assess it in hand once it is returned and you can either list it as slightly damaged at that point or if it's perfectly fine you can just sell it brand new again. The issue that arises in a lot of these online environments is that most people are friendly and will be transparent with you but you're going to have the issue of

buyers remorse at times and this has become very popular in online formats and it's very easy for these types of customers to return the product as most storefronts will always protect the buyer, so it is always recommended to take the product back and offer a full refund unless of course, you can see in the picture that there is damage on the product and you would like to settle for a partial refund. Usually, there is also the ability to contact shippers who shipped the order to the customer and there is insurance that will help cover the damages.

If you talk to most sellers online who operate by shipping the product to the customer and you ask them how do you feel when a customer that you have sold a product to replies to you around the time when the item was supposed to arrive in the buyer's hands they will say that they feel anxious and the reason for this is that most people won't contact you again once the product has arrived to them and that they are happy with it.

In fact, a lot of people do not even leave feedback so when a seller receives a message from the buyer the first feeling is that something went wrong and this is the unfortunate online world that we live in for sellers, for stores, and for everybody who wants to sell products. Right now, these companies online that expose your product to all these potential customers and work as middlemen will quite frequently take the side of the buyer and once you have been burned enough times by this it will just increase the anxiety that a lot of sellers feel, so it's very difficult online now to not feel your stomach drop when you receive a message around the time of expected arrival. So with that comes frustration and as we've discussed in this educational piece already, once this happens so frequently you don't have the ability to look and touch the product anymore once it's been shipped off you have to hope that this buyer is a good person and you need to use your best judgment and make sure that your frustration does not take control that your emotions stay out of the way and you stay professional.

One of the other issues that tend to come up quite frequently when dealing with customers online is the easily exploitable feedback system that a lot of online storefronts offer if a customer gets frustrated about a package being broken and it wasn't your fault you can simply say 'it got damaged in the Mail' they will still at times leave negative feedback on you at times it's because you're the easiest target but you need to be able to keep your cool. eBay does give you the option to reply to these people and to tell your side of the story even if it is a simple 'I'm sorry this happened to you, but it was damaged in the Mail I offered a full refund'. Other people who are assessing your storefront online can then click that negative feedback and they will see how you handled that negative interaction, and they will see that you handled it properly. This will give that potential customer a sense of ease as they will know you will handle the situation professionally.

The block button is still going to be one of the most important things even on these storefronts. If you do have poor interactions with people through the messaging system of the storefronts or if they are sending threatening

messages make sure again to report them and make sure you block them from being able to buy anything from you to prevent any retaliation.

One of the other things that you can do online is if you have friends in the optical industry who are selling online is to get the names and the account user names of the people who either scammed them or have given them a negative interaction, so that that way you can also protect yourself and block these people ahead of time to make sure that this same situation does not occur with you and it's always recommended that you tell the other stores as well about your negative interactions with certain customers and make sure to again give them their names and their username so that they will have the ability to protect themselves and their stores as well.

One of the most important things for you to remember in the online world and with customer satisfaction is that being transparent, being open, and being understanding is always the best way of doing business.

If a transaction goes wrong and it wasn't your fault, say for example there was an issue with shipping, don't be afraid to say 'I'm sorry you had this experience' because it still shows that you care about how the customers feel and it does open up for the possibility that they may buy from you again even though there was a bad experience because they know that you will do the right thing and that you will handle the situation accordingly.



In Conclusion

The online world can be a tool that can help your store or stores not only gain popularity but also increase in sales thanks to the many tools it can offer you. but stay alert to the negativity that can become all too common.

Always keep yourself safe online and use the block button when needed as there will be people who will want to use the anonymity of the internet to hurl insults at your business and potentially your employees.

In the retail brick and mortar world, seeing a customer upset deserves a face-to-face conversation to address the situation. Your knowledge and understanding are a key element. You must remember to always keep calm, stay focused and listen so that you understand where the upset customer is coming from, and try your best to keep it as professional as possible.

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