

## Introduction

It goes without saying that nobody wants a complaint about their business. We would all like to have 100% satisfaction, 100% of the time. The reality, however, is that customers will choose to complain about their experience. It is possible to turn them into something that will benefit the customer and your business.

These Guidance Notes look further at complaints, considering their value, and providing some useful ideas for handling them and to learn from them. References are also made to the Customer Complaints Policies and Complaints Handling Procedures (Simply-Docs). Whilst these Guidance Notes are not designed to be instructions for those documents, they do explain the principles which should be adopted when using them.

## 1. Why Customers Complain

Customers complain for a variety of reasons. Some are covered by specific statutory provisions. For example, goods must be fit for purpose, free from minor defects, safe to use and conform to implied terms, a customer has the right to a refund. If a salesperson selling those goods in a helpful manner, from a legal perspective the customer has the right to a refund. The customer's rights are enshrined in law. It is the responsibility of the business to handle their grievance properly.

Some examples, then, of reasons why customers wish to complain are:

- Goods are not fit for purpose
- Promises are broken
- Poor customer service
- Rude staff
- Incompetent staff
- Difficulty in contacting you
- Inconsistency when the customer is passed from one person to another)
- Lack of understanding towards the customer
- Not receptive to complaints

There are many more, but such complaints are a common fact of business life and should be dealt with properly. This applies even if the customer is not happy. The customer's mantra, "the customer is always right", is your starting point.

## 2. Why Don't Customers Complain

The previous section would provide a clue: it is the responsibility of the business to handle their grievance properly. Here's a clue: it is the responsibility of the business to handle their grievance properly.

complaints about themselves or their business. We would all like to have 100% satisfaction, 100% of the time. The reality, however, is that customers will choose to complain about their experience. It is possible to turn them into something that will benefit the customer and your business.

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opt not to complain because they don't think the business will pay attention. Many businesses fear a complaint. Others simply follow the usual.

The root cause of this in many cases is that businesses don't invest sufficient time and resources in particular may consider it unprofitable. How, after all, can a small business with two employees? It is not, however, the most important. What is important is that businesses handle complaints effectively. As is the case with handling documents, a business should put suitable policies and procedures in place to manage complaints. A procedure designed for a small business with potentially thousands of complaints is the same.

### 3. Complaints Are Good - Encourage Them

Nobody likes to hear bad things about their business. It either feels harsh and unfair or it requires dealing with. A complaint might be a customer (whether or not they are paying) perhaps incurring a cost that they don't want to pay. A positive attitude about complaints is essential. Complaints are free (or cheap).

#### 3.1 Complaints as Information

An oft-cited sum is that it costs more to acquire a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. We see this in the value of complaints handling.

Even a customer who doesn't complain may come back because it's their friends? Perhaps not. Products that fall on the lower side of average or abrasive may go unnoticed (whether a literal one or a metaphorical one). If a complaint is fine, right? Not necessarily. If you get feedback, you can gather a great deal of information.

*Customer X might have been with you for five years, but have they referred their friends to your staff to be disinterested in your products to be limited with items often out of stock. If you are not listening and expressing their grievances, your business is met with little more than a silent protest.*

*By making it clear that you are listening from them, and by responding to their complaints, Customer X will only by way of an apology be more friendly and engaged with your business.*

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They have to say - even if it isn't  
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 base in the process.

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Access to the complaint should be free of charge to the complainant.

### **Confidentiality**

Personally identifiable information should be available where needed to address the complaint within the organisation, unless the complainant actively protects it from disclosure, unless the complainant expressly consents to its disclosure.

### **Consumer-Focused Approach**

The organisation should adopt a consumer-focused approach, should be open to receiving feedback, and should show a commitment to resolving complaints.

### **Accountability**

The organisation should ensure that responsibility for the actions and decisions taken in the complaint handling is clearly established.

### **Continual Improvement**

The continual improvement of the complaint handling process and the quality of products should be a priority for the organisation.

(Source: BS ISO 10002:2004)

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## **4.1 Have a clear and welcoming attitude**

Ensure that your customers know they are welcome. They should not feel that making a complaint is a burden. At all times the organisation should be open to receiving feedback and should never be defensive.

## **4.2 Have a clear procedure to handle complaints**

Your internal procedures should be clear and consistent. Having a formal complaints procedure helps to ensure that complaints are handled in a consistent manner (meeting customer's expectations) and, where appropriate, in a timely manner.

## **4.3 Ensure that the right staff handle complaints**

Depending on the size of your organisation, you may have an entire department dedicated to handling complaints. Ensuring that staff are suitably trained is vital. Ensure that complaints handling is a core part of the training such as mock complaint handling. Periodic refreshers help to keep the principles and important points of the procedure fresh.

## **4.4 Make it easy to contact your organisation**

This rule extends beyond contact with your organisation that exist only online, can be communicated by email, but other methods of communication as well. Burying a point of contact in a sea of questions on a web page, the Consumer Contracts Regulations require that the point of contact is clearly visible and easy to find.

should be free of charge to the complainant.

The complainant should be able to provide feedback on the effectiveness of addressing the complaint and be actively protected from any retaliation. The complainant expressly consents to its disclosure.

Consumer-focused approach, should be open to receiving feedback, and should show a commitment to resolving complaints.

Accountability for and reporting on the actions and decisions taken with respect to complaints.

Handling process and the quality of products should be a priority for the organisation.

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Whether positive or negative, is a reflection of the prospect of making a complaint. Your complaints handling process should be a pest.

Customer-facing policy at every stage. Having a formal complaints procedure helps to ensure that complaints are handled in a consistent manner (meeting customer's expectations) and, where appropriate, in a timely manner.

Handling complaints yourself or asking for help. Regardless of where you handle complaints, ensuring that staff are suitably trained is vital. These rules, consider on-the-job training. Periodic refreshers help to keep the principles and important points of the procedure fresh.

For businesses, especially those where customers may be happy to provide feedback. Provide as many points of contact as possible. Burying a point of contact in a sea of questions on a web page, the Consumer Contracts Regulations require that the point of contact is clearly visible and easy to find. In point of fact, following the Consumer Contracts Regulations, a premium rate telephone number is not required.

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#### 4.11 The golden rule: Learn from the past

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Providing appropriate redress is important is ensuring that the business is able to keep records of complaints and to keep records of complaints about your business. Even if the cause is the customer's fault (perhaps they bought the wrong tool for the job) or the customer's mistakes in the future. Do you need to rewording? Perhaps staff need to be reviewed to ensure more clarity. Poor quality products in which the customer is disappointed or find a way out of it to the customer. In some cases, even those where you can be taken to avoid the same problem. The complaints handling process therefore does not ensure appropriate compensation.

## 5. Top Level Commitment and Responsibility

Good practices should start at the top of the business. The adoption and implementation of complaints procedures should always begin with the top management delegating such tasks. It should be clear that the responsibility to handle customer complaints and escalated complaints are handled by the top management. At least should be - in the best interests of the business, including staff, customers and the business as a whole.

It is also important to ensure that the complaints handling procedures are not simply set in place and left to their own devices. The complaints handling procedures, not only complaints handling procedures, should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure they are working correctly and - most importantly - to ensure they are working correctly.

Once policies and procedures are in place, the responsibility for the training of staff in the complaints handling procedures is important to ensure that staff are trained from a technical standpoint, but equal emphasis should be placed on the handling. These guidance notes should be read. As we have stressed throughout the guide, the complaints handling process is not negative - not as a cause for business failure, but as a bona fide improvements to your business and your goodwill.

## 6. Picking Your Complaints Handling Procedures

What to look for in complaints handling procedures with customer complaints should be clear. The ability to truly understand the customer's perspective is very important. The phrase "I am very sorry to hear that" from a customer is quite another. For a truly effective complaints handling system, the latter should always be the case. The complaint is not personal and the customer and your business.

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Excellent communication skills for complaint handlers must be able to communicate with a range of customers, some of whom may be expressing anger or frustration towards your business and your staff (however appropriate or inappropriate the complaint might be). This is vital not only in ensuring that the matter is handled properly, but also in ensuring that all relevant information is obtained. Of course, stop with the customer. If changes may be necessary to your business, communication skills help to ensure that you need in order to implement changes. A customer has complained about your business, whether written or verbal, about, *why* it was made, *what*

## 7. Actively Inviting Feedback

Complaints provide a valuable source of feedback from being the only means of communication. Customers may wish to complain, but more neutral comments that may provide hints and tips on how something

As we noted above, the internet can be a double-edged sword. It can give disgruntled customers a platform to voice their discontent. Once again, however, it can be a powerful tool for your benefit. Websites such as *trustpilot* or *Simply-Docs* give customers the ability to rate and review your business. A list of positive ratings and reviews should again be an opportunity should again be an opportunity. If a customer feels that they are valued and acted upon it, they will likely continue to do so. If their complaints fall on deaf ears, they may go elsewhere. The same rule should be applied to positive feedback. Respond each time, and show that you value compliments and want to fix the problem.

## Final Thoughts

In this guide we have endeavored to provide you with a comprehensive guide to handling processes and policies. Customer feedback - whether positive or negative - is both in terms of fostering a positive attitude towards complaints. It is worthwhile improvements to your business. Personally a complaint is like a gift. After all - whether it is a compliment or a big favour.

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It is not only the value of complaints that is important, but also the value of the complaints themselves. Customer feedback - whether positive or negative - is both in terms of fostering a positive attitude towards complaints. It is worthwhile improvements to your business. Personally a complaint is like a gift. After all - whether it is a compliment or a big favour.