



## INTRODUCING THE **ANGRY CUSTOMER**

The purpose of this paper is to help educate owners, managers, employees and all company representatives about how to deal with angry callers and disgruntled customers who use social media. This is an exploration into why customers are angry, who they are, cultivating skills to deal with hostile confrontations, closing a sale with an upset customer and understanding why businesses are actually lucky to have unhappy customers.



Every business associate who interacts with customers can agree that dealing with pleasant customers makes the day of sales and phone calls go easily. However, when company representatives encounter an angry customer, most of them tend to shy away from having a dialogue with the current or potential consumer. Unfortunately, failing to engage the customer, can be forever damaging to the business. Studies have shown that 65 percent of consumers cut ties with a brand over a single poor customer service experience. Often, losing angry customers can be avoided completely by understanding some principles about them.

There are four fundamental values to learn about angry consumers in order to work towards resolving issues and completing sales, if possible. There are many reasons customers are upset and there are different types of disgruntled customers. How employees respond to and deal with these types of consumers will have a lasting effect on both the business and the consumer. Also, an unhappy customer may be a blessing in disguise, because new ideas to improve services or products may grow from the complaints.

## FIRST FUNDAMENTAL

**Customers become angry for many reasons. Here are some situations to consider:**

- Sometimes, their anger does not even concern your business. It's just simply your company's service or product failure happened to coincide with an event that made them angry. Unfortunately, your company has become an easy target and outlet for their anger. Sounds odd, but it happens.
- Frequently, customers react when a product or service did not arrive as expected. This situation can be due to poor communication on the details between the seller and buyer or a delivery issue.

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- Another trigger is the lack of ability for a potential or existing customer to reach a company representative. When consumers call companies for information about products or services and constantly get transferred to various departments without getting an answer, the empty transfers combined with long wait times on hold are guaranteed to increase a consumer's ire.
- Of course, a customer will typically become irate if he or she feels misled or lied to. Many times it's only because some of the information the client received during the process of making a purchase was inaccurate. Here, an innocent mistake by an employee can start a wildfire and escalate quickly into complete distrust for an entire brand.

There are obviously other situations that can upset an existing or potential customer, but the ones listed above tend to be the most common. Regardless of the reason the individual is upset, an important first step in addressing the customer's anger is to understand why he or she is feeling displeased with the company, its products or its services.

## **SECOND FUNDAMENTAL**

Interestingly, there are just as many types of angry customers as there are reasons why customers become angry. The various types of upset customers exist because people, in general, emote differently. Here, we will look at a few of the main types.

- **The Screamer** can be a huge distraction, especially in the middle of a business location. They can be perceived as threatening by fellow customers and employees. However, most often, by screaming 'Get me a Manager!', they are hoping to just intimidate their way into whatever they want. Often, they may cause the business to lose other sales as people try to distance themselves from the situation. Most importantly, the employee interacting directly with this customer must work hard to remain calm in the conversation and try



to diffuse the situation. On the phone, it is easier to diffuse the screamer by asking him or her to talk in a calmer voice in order to continue the conversation and by also promising to reach a resolution. In person, an employee's body language is important because it can ignite the screamer even more.

- **Next up, is The Crier.** Yes. To some, it may be a humorous thought that a consumer would stand and cry in middle of a store or on the phone. However, it does happen. This type of upset customer is more common when a purchase involves big-ticket items because there is more invested financially. There is not much to do, but to let them cry themselves out and then work to resolve their issue with your service or product. Often, they become overly apologetic for crying. This scenario on the telephone plays out in a similar fashion, except you don't have to offer them a tissue.

Pay close attention to the next two types, because they pose the greatest threat to the business and its employees.

- **The Personal Attacker** can be very combative and sometimes even cause managers to contact the police. If a caller is threatening you, using violent language or swearing, follow your company's policy guidelines for handling difficult customers. If the guidelines allow you to end the call when they cross the line, by all means, end the call right away. Sadly, if the customer is at a business location, a security guard or the police may need to be called to escort the customer from the premises.

**The Publicist** may not be a physical threat to a business and its employees, but can wield a more damaging blow to the company's financial future. Many angry customers have been encouraged to publish their grief about a company online. Today, with the world of social media available at everyone's fingertips, many consumers will just utilize social networks to complain about the company and if the business isn't paying attention its reputation can be tarnished without the business even knowing it. On the flipside, some

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companies put their best reps online, and broadcasting a bad experience into the social universe motivates the company to appease an upset consumer almost instantly. FedEx admitted in a study that it recruits “exceptional” agents for its social media team.

## THIRD FUNDAMENTAL

If there is an owner, manager or employee that doesn't believe it's necessary to respond to complaints and work with consumers to make them happy, then this 2013 study by Dimensional Research might be more persuasive. It showed that an overwhelming 86 percent of its participants said that their buying decisions are influenced by negative online reviews. Reviewing how many stars a company or product has along with detailed written reviews are some of the first things consumers consider before making a purchase. It's crucial to take the time to respond to complaints and correct issues. How?

- The most effective approach to help an angry customer is to **Listen**. Don't speak.
  - If the interaction is taking place in person, just nod your head in acknowledgement as you listen to the consumer's complaint. Nodding your head and looking a person squarely in the eyes, sends the signals that you care and that you are trying to understand.
  - If this is a phone call, an occasional yes or uh-huh will let the caller know you are there. While the caller is speaking, it may be helpful to **jot down the major points of their problem on your notepad**. Angry consumers tend to go on tangents. Keeping notes will help you to find an answer to the problem more efficiently and will also help you and the customer focus more clearly on the issues.

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- Once the person who is angry completes stating their perspective, it's extremely helpful to **repeat the information**. Customers want to feel that you understand their side. They know that you are going to do things by the company's policies, but they want to feel as if they have possibly gained an ally. By conveying empathy and summarizing a consumer's main points, the caller or in-store customer can feel you are listening. This method also gives the consumer a few moments to calm down.
- Once the issues have been sorted, it's time to **determine if the complaint is valid**. It's best practice not to put the caller on hold when you try to solve the problem. Being placed on hold may cause the customer to reignite their angry fuse. If it's necessary to place the customer on hold, inform the customer the reason for the hold, so you can gather information or a manager's input. Switching the line back to the customer occasionally will let them know you are still working for them.
- When working out a **resolution to the problem**, present the customer with options so they will feel more in control. As the options are explained, tell the customer how soon each option can be implemented. If the customer continues to feel that they don't have any control in the situation, it can enrage them even further.

Today's world of social media also allows for businesses to craft a well-organized response to complaints. In some cases, a direct response with a concise plan of action. A great example, would be in 2011 when comedian Gilbert Gottfried, the former voice of the Aflac duck, made derogatory Tweets after the Japanese tsunami. Of course, Aflac received lots of angry calls and messages. After a short period of time, the company announced Gottfried was no longer associated with Aflac. Then, to continue with their great duck series of commercials, the company published a contest on their social media for a replacement voice and solicited demo voice reels. Today, most people have forgotten Gottfried was ever associated with Aflac.



This is an example of how a tactful and timely response can renew trust in a brand. Just as an angry customer's friends and family are listening to the customer, there are other potential customers waiting and listening for a response. Thanks to social media, a company can demonstrate to other potential and existing customers that it really cares and will go to great lengths to fix problems.

## FOURTH FUNDAMENTAL

Some business analysts feel that companies with angry customers and callers are lucky. Most employees and operators may have a challenge wrapping their heads around this one. However, analysts are very convincing in their argument. They believe that the biggest favor an angry consumer does is to look directly in a company's face and provide it with unadulterated, honest feedback. As the customer is going through a rather cathartic moment listing out how terrible his or her experience was with the company's product or service, the feedback can often contain some very valuable insight.

The way that a company deals with angry customers can reveal that company's character in many ways. For instance, studies show that almost 60 percent of millennials share bad customer experiences online for all to see. That number is probably not too far behind for other demographic clusters either. Simply put, when a customer becomes angry with a company, it has the potential to be displayed throughout social media. A 2013 study by NewVoiceMedia gives a great view of the consequences when a company handles angry consumers poorly. An estimated \$41 billion is lost in the US by companies each year for lousy customer experiences.

So, needless to say, should a company excel in making situations right, it can help win customers for life. And there's proof, because 70 percent of customers will do business with a company again if their issue is resolved.

Additionally, new product ideas are sometimes generated from angry customers who suggest how they wished a

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product would be. That could range from simple fixes to an entirely new product.

## CONCLUSION

As the tools and techniques in business transactions continue to evolve, one thing remains true; great customer service and customer experience will continue to help companies to grow. Customer experience comes in just three sizes - small and fiery, Medium and So-So, and Large and Painful. Angry customers can be your litmus tests that label your business. What is your company's size?

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