

How to get ahead with customer service

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Customer service can leave you tied up in knots. Don't be afraid to complain, experts say, and complain publicly. (Fotolia.com)

The customer is not always treated right.

And when customers complain about it, customer service is often more of a disservice. Though companies should take complaints as free consultations, it can feel as if they shoo them as tedious nuisances – unless customer grievances are handled properly.

B.L. Ochman not only does it properly, but she has also done it professionally. Featured in the New York Times, America and appearing on Oprah three times, Ochman pioneered the profession of objection. Later, she went on to Fortune 500 companies - but never stopped complaining to them.

“The trick to complaining is the same today as back when I started,” Ochman says. “The only difference is now the tools: YouTube, Twitter and Facebook – all sorts of social media – and blogs too.”

Unhappy customers need to take their complaints right to the top and have all the pertinent details, but for extra credit, they should do it publicly. “If you have an audience and a legitimate complaint, you can bet you’re gonna hear from more companies,” Ochman says.

Anyone who has ever called a communications provider knows complaints are often compensated with blood pressure pills and drained phone batteries. Despite a lack of competition, these businesses do not have the power to make you

“There still are ways for one person to make noise and embarrass (companies) publicly, and I highly recommend it,” says Ochman, noting Comcast’s PR fiasco in the United States.

A technician from the communications giant fell asleep on a client’s couch, while on hold with his own company videotaped the slumbering tech – the YouTube video has more than three million hits - and Comcast awoke to a new reality of how to provide better customer service.

Client-pleasing brands understand if their service is lousy, nothing else matters.

Zappos, an online retailer renowned for its superior treatment of customers, stopped shipping to Canada, admit “deliver WOW through service.”

Julie Jordan was upset when her L’Oréal hair colour of more than five years was discontinued. After commentin disappointment on L’Oréal’s Facebook page, the beauty supplier not only scoured the country for remaining box but also had its laboratory find her a replacement better than the original.

As Ochman sees it, “People should be complaining loud and clear. And they should never stop until they get wha you’re not going to get it through traditional means.”

Tips from B.L. Ochman to be like a professional kvetch:

1. Keep receipts, warranties and dates and times of actions you’ve taken. Note names and employee IDs of every whom you spoke.
2. Be firm, but respectful. A to-the-point letter is helpful and adds to the paper trail.
3. It’s easy to get emotional, but you need to have a sense of humour.
4. Blogs, Twitter, Facebook. Take it online and keep it there, even if the company asks to take it offline. Social m louder voice and bigger audience. Use them.
5. Don’t be afraid to ask for compensation. Companies are not mind readers. You’d be surprised how often you g an apology.

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