

How do you deal with troublesome customers?

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Even in the time of pandemic, for any business, there are some customers who are unwanted. They are troublesome to manage and almost always have a weird sense of value. We all have experienced it. We all wanted someone else to



Q2. The name of this brand was chosen to compliment the first store's décor that opened in 1977 in Palo Alto, California. They wanted it to seem "private" and "fanciful," and impart a sense of class and dignity. The first part of the name emphasizes a historic association and second adds on the sense of intimacy and privacy. With 2012 sales of \$6.12 billion, which brand are we talking about? (Representative image: Reuters)

have them. They are not easy to please and are never satisfied. They are impatient, short tempered, and highly demanding. Many of the foreign airlines classify Indians from India into this group. For most of these airlines crew, Indian cities are their last choice. (Perhaps not now because airline industry will be happy to have any customer!)

How can you manage a tough customer and keep her satisfied while keeping your employees also happy? Indian routes have been most profitable and therefore airlines management need to ensure that the Indian passengers are taken care of. In fact, Emirates CEO famously addresses the crew to better suit up and make the Indian passengers happy, whether they liked it or not.



How can we spot a troublesome customer? What are the early warning signs? How do we deal with such customers? There are some common signals we have seen across various service businesses and here are some remedies you can practise to avoid bad situations.

#1. Payment Delays. A headache customer will not want to pay you for the services you have provided. They will find several excuses as to why they are delaying payment.

Sometimes it might be a genuine cash flow issue. This needs to be verified. Except for such genuine cases, for all the other customers where we see a delayed payment sign we stop delivering further services. We need to be strict with our collection plans and hold the payment deadlines dear to both. A good practice is to take an advance payment to get our initial work costs covered and to commit the client to the contracted work. Firms that offer software support service, seminars and consulting where there is no physical transfer of products, it will be very useful to get full or at least 50% as advance payments from such customers. All you need to do is establish an advance payment policy and then hold the client to it.

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#2. Signs of conflict. Some clients we deal with are difficult from day 1. We spot them easily when in the initial meetings they show a streak of impatience or a short fuse in the meeting. They also tend to interrupt us. Another sign of conflict is when the client starts getting really demanding. This puts a lot of pressure on our people as the client was setting unrealistic expectations. Remember that we are in control here and the client needs to conform to our time constraints along with our limitations. We need to be upfront with such clients from the start.

#3. Signed Agreements. We must always have signed contracts in services business. Since problem clients can get demanding, it helps to get contracts in writing. You want to hold the clients to the agreement and make sure they are not asking for things that are not on the agreement. It is much more manageable when a client demands something not agreed earlier when you have a docket to refer to.

#4. Spreading Risk. It is best to have several clients than one big one. Yes, a big client helps us get big revenues but then they can also kill us by dropping us suddenly. What if the one big client becomes the trouble customer? It is best to spread our risks. Get out there and hunt for additional clients, and find the right types of revenue you need for your business.

#5. Emotional Hassles. We have noticed that a troublesome client will get under our skin and can cause high blood pressure in a jiffy. When we deal with difficult people, we need to keep our emotions in control. We must remain calm and take deep breathing exercise if they act bossy. It will be nice to remind them that we are in control and get them to calm down. When they say something offensive or rude, we need to remain calm and ask them to speak professionally.

While the above situations are for B3B, here are a few strategic ways to address B2C customer issues.

Make your customers communicate how they feel. Giving your customers time and space to “vent” is often all they need to help move forward to resolution. Once they express their feelings, say sorry for causing them unhappiness – even if you do not feel they have been let down in anyway. It is simply showing that you support them in their role as a customer. Having empathy certainly helps.

Pay attention to the customer and understand their viewpoint of the problem. Even if their viewpoint is not your viewpoint, try and deliver a response that shows you respect their opinion. For example, if they are challenging your return policy, explain why it is in place and why it must be enforced. In some situations, such as a response to a customer service

scenario, you may even agree entirely with their perspective – in which case you should acknowledge your understanding of their view and offer a resolution to ease their frustration. By offering an explanation and offering a willingness to help, customers are likely to support your viewpoint.

Resolve the issue quickly. If you can provide an immediate response to the issue at hand, do it. This may mean breaking your own rules every now and then. While this won't – and shouldn't be – the answer for all difficult customer situations, having the flexibility to quickly respond to difficult customers should be considered. For example – when a customer is creating a scene in front of other customers, you should aim to resolve it as fast and quietly as possible. The main goal is to leave your disgruntled customer feeling satisfied that they have experienced valued customer service.

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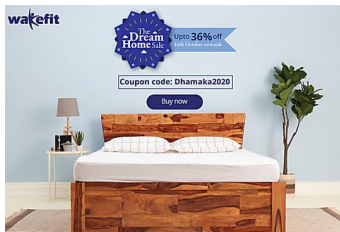
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