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How To Handle The Occasional Oop-See!

By Tim Knox

Q: My company is really in hot water with one of our best customers. I can't reveal exactly what

happened, but suffice it to say that we really dropped the ball and the customer is furious. I'm not even sure we can save the account. What's the best way to get back in a customer's good graces after making such a mistake? -- Charles W.

A: Without knowing the full story, Charles, I can't give you a specific course of action, but let's start at the sharp end of the uh-oh stick and work our way back to see if we can come with up some advice that might help.

First off, it's important that you understand that the magnitude of your mistake will determine the course of action you take to make amends. If your company's error was such that it caused your customer a significant amount of lost time or revenue, embarrassed them publicly, caused damage to their reputation, or otherwise negatively affected their bottom line, you may face legal repercussions that saying "I'm sorry" will not deter. If that's the case you should consult an attorney immediately and prepare for the worst. Whether or not the worst comes is irrelevant. You must be prepared for it.

Now on to dealing with more minor offenses. As anyone who has read this column for any length of time knows, I'm cursed with daughters. I used to say I was blessed with daughters, then they learned to walk and talk. Blessed quickly became cursed. Now my oldest daughter is an inch taller than me and getting all lumpy in places I'd rather not think about. She's a sad case, really. The poor kid needs an operation. She has a cellphone growing out of her ear. But I digress...

When she was a toddler she coined the phrase, "Oop-see!" Whenever she did something innocently destructive, like knock over a glass of orange juice on my new computer keyboard or shove a Pop Tart in the VCR tape slot, she would look at me with her huge brown eyes and say, "Oop-see!" My wife says there is a reason God made kids cute. Oop-see moments are evidence that she is right.

Oop-see meant, "Uh oh, I didn't mean to do that. I was wrong. I'll never do that again. Forgive me? Love me? Buy me toys... Oop-see worked like a charm every time. Now, I certainly don't expect you to bat your eyes at your customer and say, "Oop-see!" but consider the effect her words had on me.

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Instead of screaming at the top of my lungs like I wanted to do (hey, have you ever tried to dig a Pop Tart out of a VCR) I immediately softened and found myself actually taking her side. "Aw, it's OK, really, we all make mistakes..."

What my daughter had figured out is that it's hard to stay mad at someone who admits a mistake, sincerely apologizes for it, and vows never to let it happen again. Little did I know this was only one of many tactics she would employ over the years in her never–ending quest to wrap her daddy several times around her little finger, but that's a whole different column.

Dale Carnegie said it best: "Any fool can try to defend his or her mistakes – and most fools do – but it raises one above the herd and gives one a feeling of nobility and exultation to admit one's mistakes."

Carnegie and my daughter were basically saying the same thing: When you (or your company) make a mistake, no matter how large or small, the best thing you can do is quickly admit the error of your ways

and face the consequences, come what may.

Here are a few things you can do to help set things right with your customer.

Assemble the facts. The very first thing you should do is find out what went wrong and why. Meet with your key people and gather the facts. Ask specific questions like: What was the mistake? What caused it? Who was involved? What could have been done to prevent the mistake from happening and what can be done to prevent it from happening again in the future.

Put yourself in your customer's shoes. I've been on both ends of the uh–oh stick and neither is very comfortable. My company has dropped the ball on occasion and we have also been negatively impacted when one of our vendors did the same. Put yourself in your customer's shoes and consider what could be said or done to remedy the situation from their point of view.

Take responsibility for the actions of your company. In my role as a company president there have been times when I've had to call up a customer and confess that a mistake was made, and as president it was also my responsibility to take the heat for it. Remember, you're the head cheese, Charles, you get to sit behind the big desk and take home the nice paycheck. You're also the one that gets to mop up when your employees makes a mess. It just goes with the job.

Do not place the blame on specific employees. No matter how tempting it is to put the blame on specific people in your organization (even if that's where the blame lies), do not do it. It is unprofessional, counterproductive and can backfire on you, especially if the person you're blaming reports directly to you. Saying something like "My sales manager is always making mistakes like this!" is not going to make your customer feel any better. To the contrary, such statements will make the customer question your leadership ability and the quality of all your employees, not just the one that made the mistake. If you don't have faith in your company and employees, why should your customer?

Don't deny that a mistake was made, especially when there is clear evidence to the contrary. You're not Richard Nixon, for petesake, so don't try to pretend that the mistake didn't happen or stage some

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elaborate cover–up to try and dodge the blame.

Admit your mistake. This may sounds trite, but you must admit your mistake before you can move ahead and start to make amends. Don't be so afraid to take this step. I doubt your company is the first one to screw up with this customer and I can guarantee you certainly won't be the last.

Apologize for the mistake. The one thing that could make the situation better is often the thing that companies find hardest to do. I don't mean to sound like Dr. Phil, but simply saying you're sorry is often the best way to get a business relationship back on track. Ensure the customer that it will never happen again. After you have taken responsibility for the mistake and apologized in a sincere and professional manner, you must then start the process of rebuilding the trust that was lost. Promising that such a mistake will not happen again is a good way to start.

Compensate the customer for his loss. Even if your mistake didn't cost the customer a dime, he will appreciate an offer of compensation. This can be something as simple as a lunch on you or a discount on his next order. The size of the compensation offered should be in direct proportion to the size of your mistake. A word of warning: don't let the customer bully you into overcompensating him for your mistake. That can be more detrimental to the relationship than the mistake itself.

As my daughter understood all those years ago, Charles, a sincere Oop–see can help make things all better.

Here's to your success!

Tim Knox Entrepreneur, Author, Speaker

<http://www.prosperityandprofit.com>

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PHP, my favorite Server–side Programming Technology!

By Muhammad Umair

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If you are a beginner web designer, most probably you have had faced the difficulty to having some dynamic contents on your site, Just think about a small Guest book, some form to be submitted directly from your site, some dynamic results based on user's previous action..... All impossible with simple html!

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Although Java scripts can do some of your dynamic works, like automatic form submission by email etc, but this is just client side (all work done on the computer have your page loaded, means you can't save something to server), another option remains for you is to use the 3rd party ready–made services that enables you to install the dynamic contents on your site, with there half page annoying ads! Or you have to pay them a leg or an arm to remove their text and banners!

So if you are serious about your web, its time to think about a tool that can store data on your web server, retrieve and process data directly on server and display just the final results (in simple html) on your visitor's PC. It's certainly you are thinking about the Server–Side programming language.

Now the major question arise which technology to use?

Every one wants to get maximum returns with minimum efforts. And if their is the same case with you, PHP is the most recommended solution. Let see,

PHP: Php Hypertext Processor (a recursive acronym) currently most widely–used open source server–side programming language.

PHP with the shortest learning curve, if you are already familiar with C / Java, you can start developing in PHP in just next 30 minutes!

Its highly compatible runs on any 32 bit or better platform (UNIX / Linux / Windows) without changing a bit in your codes, *1 currently 16,946,328 Domains on 1,348,793 IPs (Servers) are using PHP! *2

Another statistics is that it is supported by more then 98% web servers!

Php has remarkable Database support, PHP with MYSQL is really an awesome combination. PHPLIB is a set of libraries with most commonly required routines.

If you are inspired of Object Oriented Paradigm, PHP has it for you, OOP support in PHP is sufficient enough for most web programming related tasks, plus their is nothing to worry for the programmers don't like to use OOP.

The most major future of PHP that encourages web hosts to provide support for PHP on their servers is that its really very lite. For many simple tasks PHP running on P–133 with just 32 Mb RAM ran circles around ASP code on an NT machine having P500 with 600 Mb RAM!

For more information, www.php.net can be the best start.

*1 Stats for August 2004 from www.PHP.net

*2 Missing the actual resource!

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