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How to Handle Customer E-mails Like a Pro

By Heather Reimer

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Sometimes as part of my work I'm asked to mediate between customers and website owners in dispute. As such, I get to read e-mail correspondence between both parties and I'm often appalled at what I read.

One client wrote to company X to find out why it was taking them so long to apply a credit they owed to her credit card. The customer service agent for company X sent this reply:

Dear Madam:

We received your inquiry. Your refund will be credited to your account within 7 to 10 business days. If you had read our policy statement, you would know this. I hope this fully answers your question.

Regards,
Company X

Whoa! Snarky.

These days, a large volume of customer service communication is done by e-mail because it's so cheap and (potentially) fast. But one of the drawbacks is that it's so easy to leave the wrong impression, to say things in cyber space that you would never say over the phone or face to face.

Here are a few tips you can use to improve your online customer relations.

How to Handle Customer E-mails Like a Pro

- Be professional and polite, even in the face of abusive language, outright lies or stupidity. This is not as easy as it sounds. But you can't win the argument AND keep the customer.
- Express concern and regret over the difficulty the customer is having, even if your company is not to blame.
- Be 100% sure you understand the complaint/question before you answer it. If it isn't clear, then ask for more details. Above all, don't guess! Major turn off.
- Move fast. Speed is half the battle won.
- Write tight. Just get to the point and leave the literature to Shakespeare.
- The jury is out on form letters. Some companies ban them outright. But they do come in handy when you're dealing with large volumes of the same queries, over and over. My take: if you use a form letter, modify it to suit the situation and add a personal touch.
- Use plain English, not jargon. Your customers don't care about ISPs, HTML and File Transfer Protocol. They just want to know what happened to their order of variegated widgets.
- Give a little bit extra. Amazon.com is a great example of this. Not only do they correct the problem but they top it up with free shipping and a credit to say "we're sorry".
- Don't be afraid to say "I" in your letter and sign it with your own name. People want to know they're corresponding with a human being not an autoresponder.
- Once you've sent your message on its mission of mercy, there's one last but paramount detail. Follow up. Make a 'pending' folder or whatever you want to call it. Visit that folder daily until you are 100% sure the issue has been resolved and the customer is in your pocket for the rest of his or her natural life!

When you've done all of the above, create one more folder on your inbox – the folder where you'll save the hundreds of e-mails you're going to receive from all your grateful customers. That folder might come in handy at your next salary review!

Heather Reimer has been a professional writer for 16 years. She now specializes in custom website

content, e-zines, press releases and articles like this one. For fast, effective and memorable e-content, <mailto:heatherreimer@codetel.net.do>

INTERACTIVITY IS KEY

By Karen Fegarty

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Many companies are trying to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Imagine the power of your site or marketing message if you include ways for your customers or potential customers to interact with you on a personal level, immediately.

Studies have shown that if you can address customer questions or concerns at the point of initial contact or at a buying decision point on a site, conversion to buyer is greatly increased. In addition, customer satisfaction is truly enhanced

Take a look at the following great tools that will allow you, to become Interactive.

Live Person - Live Person's "Click-to-Chat" functionality can be quickly added to your website. All that is required is that you download a small file and insert a couple of lines of code to your HTML page. Your visitors will not require any plug-ins or software to chat with you.

Features include:

Chat with your visitors - You can accept or decline the request to chat you may also "call" a visitor on your site and ask them whether they would like to chat. If operators are unavailable or offline, the customer is given the option to email your company.

Statistics - you will see complete info on all your visitors. Where they came from, what pages they are looking at and how much time they spend at your site.

Sounds - You can hear notification of a visitor to your site or a request to chat.

Multiple Operators - You can assign multiple operators to handle incoming chats.

Simplicity - Easy to establish, you can be up and running in minutes.

Pricing at this time ranges from no charge for the FREE version, Express \$19.50/month and \$89.50/month for the Pro. All features listed above are included in all versions. Additional features and functions are available with Express and Pro services.

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InfoSystems - Info Systems offers a number of web-based interactive products.

Browse-N-Talk tm is a "Click to Call Me" button that, strategically positioned on a web page, allows visitors to click on it and immediately connect via the regular telephone to a customer support or sales

person.

Call Mail tm allows subscribers to send e-mails with a "Click to Talk to Me" button in the signatures.

The recipient of the e-mail clicks on the button and is immediately connected via regular telephone with the sender

Vox2eMail tm is an indispensable tool for business travelers, managers, staff or customers. It allows them to send an e-mail with a voice message attachment from any touch-tone phone in the world.

Pricing ranges from Free for the Vox2eMail service to various pricing structures for the other services.

Broadc@stHTML Broadc@stHTML from MailWorkZ is an email marketing software product that has fully integrated the Live Person technology.

Customers using Broadc@st to create, manage and send email marketing campaigns can also include the "Click-to-Chat" button right within their email campaign.

Pricing is \$249 to create and send multiple campaigns, each with up to 1000 emails, \$795 to manage multiple campaigns of up to 10,000 emails, and \$2495 to manage multiple unlimited size campaigns. Live Person costs are extra.

Karen Fegarty is co-founder of MailWorkZ. MailWorkZ is the producer of innovative e-marketing tools including Broadc@st, a leading email/bulk email marketing software tool and ezTrackZ online ad tracking. Claim your trial of Broadc@st today <http://www.mailworkz.com/download.htm> and trial ezTrackZ ad tracker at <http://www.eztrackz.com>.



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