

Right Customer Service Wrongs

The Motley Fool

By Elizabeth Brokamp

Most of us have a story or two to tell about lousy customer service.

There's the time at Denny's when, after a long wait to be seated and extremely slow service, the waitress dropped our tray of food and drinks right into my lap. When she failed to apologize or offer any sort of discount, I asked to speak to the manager. The manager's surly reply? "What do you expect me to do about it?"

Or the time when a J.C. Penney beauty salon waxed off half of my eyebrow right before my father in-law's wedding. "Oops! I can't believe I did that," the woman said, then proceeded to write up an invoice for full price. When I pointed out that I had come in with a full set of eyebrows and now only had one and a half, their initial response was, "I'm sure it'll grow back."

Are we modern consumers too demanding? Or is good customer service hard to find these days?

It's definitely not in our imaginations, agrees Professor Lopo Rego, an assistant professor in the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business. Professor Rego, who studies customer service and satisfaction, says, "All measures of customer service and customer satisfaction have declined significantly, especially in the past 10 years."

It seems that where customer service is concerned, there is such a thing as too robust an economy. With an unemployment rate of 4.5% as of February 2007 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. businesses have been forced to lower their hiring standards, especially in low-paying industries like fast food and discount retail. These indifferent or downright rude employees are often aware that lousy customer service probably won't get them fired. And even if it does, there's another employer down the street who's hiring.

The good news is that today's consumer has more outlets for dealing with lousy customer service than ever before. If you receive outrageous customer service, here are some ways you can seek recourse:

[Angie's List](#), [Thesqueakywheel.com](#), and [My3cents.com](#), where you can write reviews and detailed complaints that reach other consumers directly.

Contact the [Better Business Bureau](#), which now allows you to file complaints online.

Put your grievance in writing and send it directly to the company. Your account should be factual (not exaggerated), include as many specifics as possible (dates, name of employee, make and model numbers, etc.), and suggest a reasonable resolution. Need help? Look at this [sample letter](#) offered by the Federal Citizen Information center.

Be persistent and don't be afraid to take your complaint to the top. If you aren't getting the results from the person with whom you're speaking, ask for their manager or call a different day. When shifts change, you may get an employee who takes your concerns more seriously.

If you used a credit card for a purchase that's faulty or in dispute, find out from your credit card company what consumer protections they offer. You may be covered by an extended warranty or at least be able to stop payment.

Lodge a complaint with your state consumer affairs bureau or attorney general's office, the folks who have the power to initiate sanctions if the company's actions skirt the law.

This feature may not be reproduced or distributed electronically, in print or otherwise without the written permission of uclick and Universal Press Syndicate.