

The \$64.64 Question – Will Your Customer Be Right, Wrong, or Gone?

Three days, three customer service representatives, and three ink cartridges taught me a great deal about customer service.

Day One

My HP all-in-one printer-copier-fax-scanner indicated internal trouble. “Print Head Problem” the miniature screen read. After a brief time on the telephone with Technical Support (TS), the TS representative concluded that my all-in-one needed – drum roll, please – a new print head. And he could have it delivered to my front door in seven days. And it was covered by the one-year warranty, too. Jackpot.

“But your website shows I can purchase the same print head and have it delivered tomorrow – for free,” I replied. “Don’t you have access and authority to use your own website to resolve a customer issue?”

Do I even need to elaborate?

I ordered the print head and, with the TS rep’s blessing, agreed to call back when the print head arrived. We would make sure the all-in-one worked and refund my American Express card for \$64.64.

Day Two

The print head arrived. The print head worked. I was back in business. Now, I needed my \$64.64.

A telephone call to TS revealed that TS could not refund my American Express card. That was the realm of Customer Service (CS). A telephone call to CS revealed that I would need to call TS to get my money refunded. After all, it was the dominion of TS.

Apparently, according to TS, I must abide by a “process.” This course would deliver my print head in seven days versus purchasing the same product – from the same company – and having it delivered in one

day? “If I follow the ‘process,’ will TS compensate me for the six days of lost productivity?” I asked.

Oh, why do I try? I perceived a vicious cycle was about to commence. So, I emailed Mark Hurd, the CEO of HP.

Day Three

It worked. Someone read my email. My unpleasant incident was escalated. It didn’t hurt to point out that I address tens of thousands of decision-making executives each year who gain knowledge from my examples of magnificent – and miserable – customer service. And they pay money for lots of computer-related products and services.

The Escalation rep understood my matter. She agreed with my reasoning. The product was defective. It was under warranty. I needed a new print head. It was faster to buy it from HP. I just wanted my \$64.64.

And she could not refund it. A system difficulty, she said. “What can I do to make this right?” she asked. “May I send you some ink cartridges – say, three?”

Three ink cartridges carry a street value of \$113.11. That’s more than \$64.64. I really wanted a refund, but this was a good deal. A 74.98 percent return on investment.

The ink arrived on Day 4. I paid my American Express bill today.

Lesson # 1:

Integrate your systems in a manner that when customer issues crop up, staff members have access to the same information and resolution system. Customers don’t want to move to the next window. Customers want the person at hand to understand and put an end to the problem.

If one system (or person) says “One day” and another system (or person) says “One week,” go with “One day.” The net effect is the same, but your customer increases his commitment with “One day.” Let the accountants settle the books.



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Lesson # 2:

Take ownership of customer issues. Don't transfer. Don't redirect. Don't make it easier said than done. Just help your customer stay productive. Just get it done perfectly.

Tell your front line that they are the leaders of your organization. They are the ambassadors of what you sell. Now, let them lead. Let them resolve. Let them decide.

Lesson # 3:

Straighten out the customer issue and give the customer more than he expects. Do more than make an apology. Upgrade them. Waive more than the fee. Increase their interest.

Waiving a \$5 fee charged incorrectly solves a problem. Giving the customer another \$5 demonstrates your commitment. The customer will reward you – at some point – with his commitment in the form of new business.

HP owed me \$64.64. They gave me \$113.11. That cost HP \$48.47. However, they gained an assurance of future purchases – laptop computers, desktop computers, all-in-one printers, and the related products that accompany.

Now, that's a worthy investment in the commitment of a valued customer.



Jeff Rendel, Certified Speaking Professional, helps organizations develop more commitment from their customers and colleagues.