



Developing a complaints policy

How to develop a good complaints policy

It's much easier to resolve complaints quickly, and thereby save time and keep customers if you have worked out a policy for handling the different types of complaints you receive – eg, faulty goods, sold out of advertised products.

When developing your policy, consider the following points.

Your legal obligations

A number of laws may apply to each situation such as the Consumer Guarantees Act and the Fair Trading Act. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs has resources available to help you understand your legal responsibilities. You could also contact your nearest Citizens Advice Bureau. Alternatively, you may wish to consult your solicitor or a trade association.

The legal obligations are the minimum requirement. For example, the law says a customer is not entitled to a remedy when returning goods if they have simply changed their mind. But you may choose to have a policy that allows exchange, credit note or even a refund in these circumstances.

How important the problem is to the customer

Consider whether the customer's circumstances require that the problem be fixed quickly- eg, customers will want heaters fixed very quickly during winter.

Who should handle complaints

This is an important point to think about when developing your policy. Customers want their problem solved quickly and efficiently and don't want to have to make repeated trips to your business.

In a business where the manager or supervisor is always available it may be appropriate for that person to handle all complaints.

In most businesses, that won't be practical. To deal with customer complaints promptly and efficiently, sales staff will need to be able to handle and resolve complaints. Make sure all your staff dealing with complaints have the authority to provide solutions acceptable to the customer.

If possible, assign one staff member to handle a customer's complaint from start to finish and ensure the customer knows that person's name and contact details.

Training staff

Once you have prepared your business policy on handling complaints you will need to train your staff and ensure they understand the importance of applying the policy. You can monitor their actions by ensuring they complete complaint record forms.

Make sure all staff that have contact with customers (face to face, by phone, by written correspondence) receive training. Include telephonists or receptionists in this process, or at least advise them which staff are responsible for handling customer complaints.

Keep staff up to date on any changes to consumer law that could affect your complaints handling policy.

If you have any written material on laws, or your business policy, ensure it is readily accessible to your staff.

Encourage complaints

When your business policy on complaint handling is in place, let people know that you are ready to listen to their complaint and put it right.

- Provide a customer suggestion/feedback box at your business.
- Carry out a survey.
- Prominently display a notice of your complaints handling policy.
- Invite feedback from customers on how their complaint was handled. Remember that satisfying complainants can increase customer loyalty.

Customer complaint record - form example