

Customer service: problem solving (Customer service)

Informing a Customer that an Ordered Item Isn't Available

As any industry specialist will attest to, the business world is naturally unpredictable; unforeseen obstacles and dilemmas are common, and can affect even the best-prepared individuals. Accordingly, it's how one responds to unexpected business setbacks that defines his or her career.

The importance and prevalence of phone calls in business has been detailed in previous lessons, but the process of using a phone call to inform a client of an order mishap has not.

In short, in the situation that an item (or items) ordered by a customer is unavailable and/or cannot be delivered as scheduled, it's the duty of the business professional responsible for overseeing the transaction to promptly call this customer and fill him or her in. Phone calls are the best form of communication in this instance, as they are inherently personal and demonstrate focus and compassion. Moreover, high-quality customer care is arguably the most significant part of a successful company-client relationship.

Consider the following example, wherein a customer support professional contacts a client to inform her that her order cannot be fulfilled as was initially planned:

Customer support: Hello, Mrs. Davis? This is Todd Jasper from LDT Appliances, how are you doing?

Mrs. Davis: I'm doing well, thank you for asking. How can I help you? Customer support: I'm calling in regards to the order you placed last week. Unfortunately, we encountered an unexpected delay from one of our suppliers, and we won't be able to deliver your product as scheduled.

Mrs. Davis: Really? I was hoping to have my stuff here on the scheduled delivery date—I was planning on it.

Customer support: I understand, and I wholeheartedly apologize for the inconvenience. We've already spoken with our supplier, and the earliest we can deliver your current order is next Thursday. Will that work?

Mrs. Davis: Thank you for your apology, but I really need the order here by this Friday. I might have to purchase through another company.

Customer support: Your business means a lot to us, Mrs. Davis, and to meet your schedule's needs, I can offer you a similar product—in fact, a newer model that we briefly discussed when you were ordering—to be delivered by this Friday at no additional cost, as we have it in stock. I can also offer you a full refund, if you'd like.

Mrs. Davis: Really? That'd be great—the other product, that is. Thank you so much for getting this worked out! I don't know what I'd do without the item!

Customer support: It's my pleasure. I'll have one of our delivery professionals contact you soon.

Mrs. Davis: Fantastic. Thanks again!

It should be expected that customers, when informed that their order will not be fulfilled, will be upset—in fact, something would be wrong if they weren't upset! But, if customer support professionals remain calm and courteous during the corresponding conversation, the situation can be resolved and a solution that works for everyone involved can be reached.

Did you understand the text?

1) What should a business professional do if an order cannot be fulfilled as scheduled?

- a) Nothing - wait for the customer to call
- b) Cancel the transaction immediately
- c) Contact the customer by phone and explain the situation, with the goal of reaching a helpful solution
- d) Order the same item from another company at a loss

2) What is the typical tone of customers faced with an unexpected order delay?

- a) Happy
- b) Frustrated
- c) Relieved
- d) Excited

3) If a client is uninterested in receiving his or her order with a delay, what should the customer support professional do?

- a) Hang up the phone
- b) Offer a full refund
- c) Offer a similar product
- d) B and C

4) What are the main benefits of reliable customer support?

- a) Trust among clients and an enhanced business reputation
- b) There are no benefits of reliable customer support
- c) Much larger profits in a matter of minutes
- d) None of the above

5) What tone should be used by customer support professionals calling a client to tell him or her about an order delay?

- a) One that's professional, direct, and caring
- b) One that's inattentive
- c) One that's annoyed
- d) One that's overjoyed