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INTRO

Following are some core details and practices that are the basics of the philosophy and practice of customer service. Also included are some suggestions on approaches you can deploy, step-by-step, when contacting a customer via letter or phone.

These topics aren't so much about "reputation management" as they are not simply tactics and strategies. A shopper wants to research, by viewing honest feedback and objective representations, a business's commitment to their customers. That is why star-ratings on so many sites are so important. Ratings, stars and reviews are key for a potential buyer when they are trying to make the best decision about which product to buy or which seller to buy from. The problem is that reviews and feedback often provide a distorted and inaccurate view of an actual product or of a store. The system is being gamed and is broken as it stands. The problem for sellers is that you have no choice but to live within this broken system.

STARS AND RATINGS

Stars and ratings are still useful to both buyers and sellers, as there is not a whole lot more to go on other than word of mouth. From www.yelp.com, where I frequently go to find places to eat, or www.tripadvisor.com, for traveling or looking for a hotel, to concepts like Angie's List and www.eraled.com, and even to the rating system provided by the BBB, Amazon and eBay, I view the whole experience as utterly lacking. Fundamentally, every transaction is based on trust.

So, what can you do to be trusted? Be trustworthy. Be reliable. Be dependable. Be consistent. Recognize human frailty of course; the goal and intent are the heart of the matter. As sellers, as individuals, as business owners, our intent at all times should essentially be to mean what we say, say what we mean, and be people of integrity. There are just so many loopholes, so many ways to game the system, and it is that fakery that is so distasteful. I began helping sellers repair their feedback because of the very fact that the system is broken. I genuinely want to see sellers treated fairly in this environment. The majority of the time, you can follow the steps below yourself. This content summarizes portions of what I've learned in the process of serving sellers, as well as being in positions of responsibility and interacting with customers for over 20 years. I love to serve and help others, and I realize that isn't everyone's forte. If it isn't yours, you should seriously consider still offering the greatest service possible by contracting some of your responsibilities out.

WHOSE CUSTOMER?

One thing to consider (and there is a little debate here): is this customer YOUR customer or are they Amazon's (or some other marketplace's) customer? Make no mistake, [Amazon](#) thinks of this customer as their own. Much of the TOS is set up to make this perfectly clear. These online shoppers are devotees of this particular marketplace for many reasons. The main thing that is important to keep in mind is that you **MUST** treat this customer as your own, even if they truly aren't. You want them to feel you are in their corner. You are there for them. You don't want to make them have this feeling just because it helps your business. If you don't have this mindset already, what you are really aiming to achieve is that these buyers "feel" this way about you because you **REALLY** do care about **THEM** and their experience. For the majority of transactions, most customers will never even think about **YOU**. They often don't even know they are buying from a third-party seller...especially if they are a Prime subscriber. What you have to be committed to is setting yourself apart. When the opportunity presents itself, it is your time to shine. I've seen way too many situations where owners debate, cajole, attempt to convince, argue with or short the buyer. Let's face it, that just makes the situation worse. You can avoid many of the negative repercussions of an upset buyer by handling the whole situation beautifully from start to finish.

WHY CARE?

Why ARE you reading this? Why are you bothered by this situation? Why even be concerned? I've had several clients who were not AT ALL concerned about customer experience. They had several reasons for this. They were selling so much and were so busy that they didn't have time to mess with it. Or, they chose not to allocate any additional funds, time, or any resources to try to satisfy customers. Eventually, they contact me because they have so many negative reviews or failing metrics, it has finally caught up with them and affected their ability to gain the Buy Box or, worse yet, has put their entire account in jeopardy. They thought they were insulated due to their size. They were putting out so much volume they thought they didn't need to pay attention to the basics. Eventually, their lack of focus caught up with them. What you want to avoid at all costs is letting the situation pile up to the point of putting your entire account in jeopardy. Account suspension notifications can be downright frightening. Taking care of your account goes a long way toward prevention. While issues regarding account termination and account restorations are very different subjects, you should note that if you ever need help, you can go here: [Account Restored](#), or here: [Cynthia Stine's Account Reinstatement](#) to get valid and reliable support should you need it.

WHY IS FEEDBACK IMPORTANT?

What is so important about feedback? There is the difficult-to-assess cognitive significance your rating has for buyers who notice your feedback percentage (which usually only comes into play when a buyer is searching beyond the Buy Box). You have to consider the significance of how a lower rating weighs into a buying decision when competitors have higher ratings. The comparisons are inevitable. Buyers draw a relationship between more feedback at a high rating and the chance of stability and the reliability of the seller and transaction. Your track record shows you have stood the test of time and are not a fly-by-night seller or working out of a smoky basement. As an important indicator of how this current transaction is expected to go, the percentage number itself always weighs heavily into the subconscious or even conscious equation. As much as it speaks to the psychological consideration of the percentage, [Amazon's](#) algorithm for determining Buy Box eligibility is also responsible for this feedback number. Shmuli Goldberg from [Feedvisor.com](#), an astute observer of these metrics, has expressed how feedback figures into the Buy Box calculation algorithm as follows in the abridged link I've provided here: [Buy Box Metrics](#).

When comparing sellers for the Buy Box, Amazon groups sellers by several rating brackets. Note that these are different from the way that Amazon groups these scores in the Amazon Seller Central dashboard.

The Buy Box groups are:

- 100-98%
- 97-95%
- 94-90%
- 89-80%
- 79-70%
- Less than 70%

Although any improvement in the Seller Rating will have a positive effect, **jumping from one bracket to another will have a more significant effect on the Buy Box share than moving within the brackets themselves.** For example, improving one's Seller Rating from 94% to 95% would give a greater comparative bump in the Buy Box share than moving from 95% to 96%.

If one's Seller Rating is less than 70%, there is very little chance that they will be able to win the Buy Box at all, even with other low rating sellers competing for the same product.

So, as much as anecdotal evidence points to the significance of having a high feedback percentage pertaining to gaining the Buy Box, we know [Amazon's](#) tracking of those metrics is significant from a whole other angle. You will have the Buy Box more (more eyeballs on the product you have listed), and you will also be more likely to be rewarded with the sale if the buyer looks beyond the Buy Box.

BUYER EXPECTATIONS

There are some very specific reasons why customers show up online and on [Amazon](#) in particular. These customers have different expectations and a very different mindset than they might have otherwise if you had a brick and mortar store and/or you knew them personally as a shopper. You are ultimately flying blind in this transaction. [Amazon](#) is not. They have data, they have the scale, they have a great deal of protection, and you are completely subject to this third party marketplace as far as its rules. Furthermore, you are squarely in the control of the whims, wishes, preferences, attitude, etc. of the buyer and what their emotional state is on any given day. If you could interact with this buyer personally, an unpleasant experience they brought to your attention would be and often is so much easier to address. The impact of your interaction, personal style, ability to handle the situation, and opportunity to work with both verbal and non-verbal cues is infinitely greater. The biggest point here is you actually GET TO interact with them. The lack of that interaction is part of the reason this buyer showed up online to shop in the first place. Many times, the buyer PREFERS to remain anonymous. They just want to buy their product, have it delivered, and have a happy and seamless experience.

THE LANDSCAPE

That expectation is where things can start to go awry. If ANYTHING whatsoever happens during the course of the transaction to cause it to be ANY less than perfect, YOU are invariably the one at fault. One slight caveat comes if your products are Fulfilled By [Amazon](#). This offers a great measure of protection I recommend all of my clients use to their advantage. It is also a great way to scale your business and get preference for your items when it comes to the Buy Box. However, if you are not in FBA, and this customer is not in your brick and mortar shop, you are subject to all of the dangers associated with reputation management when you are an online seller. Because of your tenuous position of not being in control of your store because you are in a marketplace you don't control, you lose many advantages you would have to otherwise control and handle this unpleasant situation. The buyer has the terrifying potential of directly affecting your ability to sell. They can complain via seller feedback, product review—or even worse—directly to [Amazon](#).

Every part of this process is closely monitored. All of your metrics (which YOU should closely monitor) are constantly and automatically being observed by [Amazon](#)'s search functions and may at any time give rise to grave situations directly affecting your ability to sell (i.e. account suspensions, warnings, inability to gain the Buy Box, etc.).

So, what can you do about it? How can you wade through the treacherous terrain of which you have very little control? In a nutshell: do everything right. You already knew that, right? And it is so incredibly unfair. If you are a business owner, work for yourself, etc., reasons for doing so include flexibility and control of your financial destiny. How unsettling is it to give up control and put yourself and your livelihood solely in the hands of others—whether they be foreign nationals in a call center halfway across the world or a nameless, faceless, disgruntled buyer? Why should you have to live in fear that a customer is going to lob negative feedback or negative product review bomb your way from the safety and privacy of their keyboard?

OPPORTUNITIES AND MINDSET

You simply have to switch gears and take an approach that allows you to focus on your game and not the negative situation. You absolutely must consider the consequences of responding in anger, responding too hastily, outright giving up, or becoming demoralized. There are better ways to handle your anger. Well-known Amazon and [eBay](#) entrepreneur John Lawson provided these seven top suggestions in a recent training session on handling complaints aired on social media:

1. **Take a Breather:** Get away from an emotionally based response. Diffuse yourself.
2. **Keep in Mind:** It is Business and NOT Personal. This is just another business transaction.
3. **Just the Facts:** Stick COMPLETELY to the FACTS without any back and forth.
4. **Other People are Watching:** People are looking at how you handle this transaction/this customer. This is a one to many transaction where a review is publicly seen. You are representing your brand to the world.
5. **Take it OFF-LINE as Quickly as Possible:** Apologize. Give them a direct way to contact you. Deflate the situation.
6. **Think Win-Win:** Offer something that makes sense for both parties.
7. **Learn Something from the Transaction:** This is just another learning opportunity. What can you improve? How can you handle this type of customer better?

So, you know you really must look at every trying situation as an opportunity. Your feedback and reviews are a barometric reading. They are a wake-up call. They give you a pulse on your account. They also provide you an opportunity to shine by taking a bad customer experience and converting it to a good one, meanwhile creating a new relationship and a loyal customer evangelist. You really ought to pause and consider so you can recognize and identify any patterns. Is there something amiss with your processes, product, people, service, or otherwise? What needs to be fixed? Or, how can you better protect yourself and prevent future similar situations? When I've analyzed large accounts to remove bulk negatives at once, there are always trends that emerge. Here is what I saw (generalities to protect the account-holder) for one corporate seller with 149 negatives:

Issues	Total count	% by issue
Uncategorized	37	25%
Inadequate packaging	28	19%
Item(s) never received	27	18%
Wrong item sent	16	11%
Shipping delay	15	10%
Manufacturing issue	14	9%
Not sturdy enough	3	2%
Manufacturing issue AND inadequate packaging	2	1%
Missing parts	2	1%
No response	2	1%
Out of stock	1	1%
Missing items	2	1%
Wrong item AND late ship	1	1%

If you can establish patterns of your own drawn from customer feedback or reviews, you may derive the process improvement actions, which will help eliminate issues organically. Part of your plan of attack should be to use this information to help prevent future issues by staying committed to addressing current and past issues with vigilance and always keeping track of your metrics.

INSERTS

A second and extremely critical practice is to include a card or flyer with every order. Every order is one of your best opportunities to connect with buyers by including a personal note asking for feedback or a product review and letting that customer know you are there for them. This is both good service AND it helps defray and deflect the temptation for the buyer to follow through with actions that could hurt your account. You want the buyer to reach out to you directly as opposed to going directly to [Amazon](#) to resolve their issues. When they go to [Amazon](#), you lose control. You also are subject to incurring Order Defects, which are included in your critically important metrics (and held against you when they aren't up to snuff). You are contacted through messaging...mark against you. You are late in replying....mark against you. Buyer requests a return....mark against you. Buyer files an A-Z Claim....mark against you. Buyer leaves negative feedback or a critical product review....mark against you. You can avoid most of these situations most of the time by simply including a contact card. While this card is quite simple and almost anyone can create one, we at www.feedbackrepair.com have helped many sellers create inserts following the best practices and are certain it will achieve the desired effect.

Whether you do it yourself or you get us to help you, DO IT. It is one of the least expensive ways to protect your seller account. Have fun with this. Be creative. Don't do it just to do it. Do it because it is an important part of the buyer experience. Make your insert catchy and interesting enough that the buyer will not only notice it but also want to keep it. Spend a little extra. Don't make it super small and unnoticeable or easily lost to save a few dollars on printing cost. Include a reward or discount code. Include a refer-a-friend code. Make the format or appearance unique and memorable. This may be your single best opportunity to communicate that you CARE about the customer. If they feel they can reach out to you for help, you may actually get contacted. Give out contact methods you will check, numbers you will answer. And don't HIDE. I have seen SO MANY storefronts where it is like pulling teeth to find a phone number or email address. Make yourself available to your customer. Here is my personal cell phone number: 620-446-2077. Here is my email address: scott@feedbackrepair.com. Unfortunately, no matter when you call me, I'll probably be awake. Take the same approach with your customers. Make it easy for them to reach you.

AMASSING FEEDBACK

A final, but no less significant area, where you'll want to focus to protect your account going forward is insulating your account by amassing as much positive feedback as possible. This strategy will act as a buffer to protect you from the inevitable situations over which you have no control, no matter how hard you try. At a conference I attended, Horst Schulze, former Chairman and CEO of the Ritz-Carlton hotel chain, recounted an instance where his staff was going through rigorous training. They were emphasizing the importance of "owning" situations that arose with guests. They were striving for the very best customer experiences, the best customer satisfaction ratings in the industry. They were empowering their associates to make decisions to please their guests. The stated goal was a minimum of 95% fully contented guests. Why not higher, you might ask? They found that they were always going to encounter guests who could not be satisfied, no matter how intent they were in doing so. Inevitably, there would always be a guest who wanted their room painted purple, and they simply had to draw the line somewhere when it came to outlandish or unreasonable requests. That said, they still sought to maintain the highest customer satisfaction scores. You should adopt these goals as well, and I recommend using one of any number of services to achieve this.

While you can do it yourself and probably should if you are not a Pro seller, it is far easier to simply engage with [Salesbacker](#), [Feedbackz](#), [Feedback Genius](#), [Feedback Five](#), or [Mr Feedback](#). There are others, but I know all of these to be reputable and worthy of consideration. It just makes sense to take advantage of your volume of sales by trying to solicit more feedback than you would normally gain if you did nothing. While the fraction of increased feedback is small, it is still worthwhile given that the rate will increase and help you in the long run.

STARTING THE REMOVAL PROCESS

When it comes to actually having feedback removed, that is our favorite topic simply because it is so satisfying to see unmerited feedback completely eradicated. While our first plan of attack is always to contact Amazon directly for removal, our other suggested methods are worth considering for their effectiveness as well. These methods and steps may well have equal value in removing negative product reviews (if the reviewer is a real and genuine reviewer as opposed to a competitor) as they will with the removal of negative seller feedback. Should you decide you don't have the desire or the time to follow these recommendations yourself, at www.feedbackrepair.com, we offer a done-for-you service to take care of these items and far more. As we suggested before, you must analyze what is really being communicated and why, so that you can better your business, better your products, and provide the very best customer experience. You can also read between the lines to determine exactly how you should respond.

Previously, we mentioned the buyer desiring anonymity. This is something you need to keep in mind. You could send an email. That may or may not work. You can try that first and see if you get any traction. You can use the same basic tenets of the letter format and convert that to an electronic format. The same principles will apply. An email has many of its own inherent limitations and is less personal and far less likely to get your customer's attention. And, while it is a marginally invasive contact method, you are still **INVADING YOUR CUSTOMER'S SPACE**. This is the very same space they sought to protect by being able to place an order anonymously. They may simply have wanted convenience. If there was a problem of any kind with the order—broke, late, didn't fit, poor quality, etc.--they just experienced the inconvenience they were trying to avoid. They may have wanted the item very fast or because it wasn't available locally or was too expensive locally. There are so many different expectations they are holding, and you don't know what those were.

Often, if you read their comments carefully or listen attentively, the buyer WILL REVEAL exactly which of these pain points they are experiencing and why they are disappointed, upset, discouraged, mad, what-have-you. They didn't want to deal with someone to begin with. They wanted "x" and they wanted it yesterday and for a low dollar figure with no hassles. It is so easy for you to fail when those expectations aren't met. And, they would often rather complain and move on and cut their losses than have to deal with you invading their space.

LETTERS

That is one of the reasons I REALLY like personal letters. They are VERY soft as a communication method and perhaps the least invasive. They communicate so much about your sincerity when you've taken the time and gone to the effort to write the letter. Part of the reason it stands out so much is that it hardly ever happens. What percentage of YOUR mail is hand-addressed, hand-stamped, or hand-written? It gets your attention. It will get theirs as well. This is a significant hurdle you are overcoming. You get past the impersonal email that gets deleted or ignored. I LIKE email if you are going to reach out to me. It is a far more convenient and has an easy interface. But, not everyone works that way. The letter simply more effective than email and is still far less intrusive than the phone call. The phone call should ONLY be attempted if you are REALLY good on the phone. We'll get to that in a moment. Here are the steps you want to follow for your letter and why:

Some of these principles are personal preference. They can be debated. They also work.

Personal stationery. Skip the white copy paper and #10 business envelope.

Handwrite the return address and the mailing address.

Use an actual stamp (not a meter mark or label).

If you are concerned about tracking, use a return receipt. These are pretty expensive and reduce the appearance of personalization slightly. However, it is a worthwhile step and reasonable trade-off so that you aren't left guessing whether the buyer ever actually received your correspondence. Furthermore, the return receipt highlights the importance and urgency of the letter. It indicates the content is something serious. If the letter wouldn't have been opened before, it definitely will be now. And, they won't just throw it in a pile and wait to open it later.

You are going to need to be prepared for both a letter and a phone call to...

- Apologize.
- Take responsibility.
- IF there is anything that needs explanation, be BRIEF.
- Don't defend. Just explain.
- Try to avoid personal pronouns.
- You have to include an "ask." This is your call to action. You need them to reach out to you to either take the next step or fix the issue. You are giving them every opportunity at this point, after the fact, to correct the issue they brought to your attention.

Finally, you have to be willing and ready to give something away. This could be a replacement, a refund, a gift card, an OVER-refund where you pay them \$25 in the refund instead of the \$18 they paid to begin with (to compensate them in some small way for the inconvenience). You want to be able to offer something big enough, significant enough, to move the customer to action. One caveat to this, which bears mentioning, is that I am NOT advocating that you simply roll over and give away the store. While you are dealing with a touchy situation, you do need to use wisdom and very carefully assess what may well be perfectly acceptable to negotiate. You are obviously NOT in the driver's seat, but you may have a little wiggle room to keep some profit or break-even and STILL both satisfy the customer AND get the feedback removed. You want them to be a satisfied customer absolutely, but you also want them to remove or alter their feedback to properly reflect how they now feel differently about you or their experience based upon this new information/interaction. You are truly attempting to alter their perception of the whole transaction.

This isn't a tactic. This is because you ARE altering their experience. You are fixing the issue. You are doing this because you care about them. And, you want other buyers or potential buyers to have an accurate view of your true commitment to their satisfaction. This commitment IS more expensive in terms of actual hard dollars. It will also pay off, as you will be rewarded with loyal customers who become repeat customers and tell others about you (organically). Capitalize on this by making it easy for them to tell others about you. Include discount codes they can share.

Sample text:

Dear ##buyername##:

Thank you for your purchase of Order and Item Description on #X DATE#.

We apologize that this order did not meet your expectations for the shipping speed. We completely accept responsibility for that. We would like to go above and beyond in an attempt to make up for that inconvenience by providing ##(insert [Amazon](#) gift card amount here)##.

We want to do everything we can to ensure that our customers have a satisfying buying experience. If there is anything further we can do for you, please let us know.

Would you be willing to consider changing the feedback associated with this order? As a fledgling company, our feedback rating is absolutely crucial to our ability to attract and sell to other customers. Unfortunately, [Amazon](#)'s policies are such that once a buyer leaves feedback for a seller, that feedback cannot be amended. It can only be removed. Would you be willing to do this to help preserve our selling privileges? You can do that by going here: www.amazon.com/gp/feedback/leave-consolidated-feedback.html and including this ORDER #.

If you will contact us via either [Amazon](#) messaging, via regular email (greatexperience@gmail.com), or by phone at 620-446-2077 we can give you instructions on how to claim your free gift as well as how to remove the feedback.

Thank you so very much in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Scott Margolius for MyStorethatCaresAboutYou.com

Of course, there are many different types of letters. The one above is pretty generic but fully functional. It would need to be tweaked for your situation to address various types of issues: late shipping, a missing package, broken or faulty product, etc.

PHONE CALLS

So, let's say the letter doesn't work...most likely you don't get any kind of response. Send another one. Make it different. Switch it up a bit so it obviously isn't the same letter. It is a follow-up. If that one fails, send another. If that one fails, it is probably time for a phone call. In some cases, the very first thing I do or recommend is to pick up the phone. I can't recommend that for everyone. It all depends how competent and confident you are on the phone. Many of my customers have indicated fear of talking on the phone. Maybe you aren't a native English speaker. Maybe it is too much of a hassle to track down that customer or even actually reach them at the right time of day that corresponds with your availability. For many reasons, a phone call might not be your best first step.

However, we can provide that function for you OR you may also choose to make this your first action. One thing I really like about the phone call is you have immediate feedback. You don't have to wait and wonder if a letter or email was received. You know exactly where you stand and what you can do next. You can check this issue off your list and move on. Many often consider a phone call the method of last resort. It IS about the most disruptive to the buyer's life, the most intrusive to their personal space. It's about one step away from showing up at their front door unannounced. That's the exact opposite of what the buyer may have been looking for when they placed their initial anonymous transaction. That is what you ought to prepare yourself for mentally. In reality, I've never had someone upset with me for contacting them to apologize and fix an issue. They are more often than not simply surprised to be receiving a call from a business owner who cares and wants to help them. While they may have started out hesitant or annoyed at the interruption, once you quickly and adequately convey the reason for your call, things change. You can develop a quick rapport.

1. You apologize.
2. You address their concern.
3. You ask what you can do to "make it right."
4. You wait for their response.
5. You may already fully recognize what you think might make them happy. You might throw out some suggestions you think might appeal to them. You stand ready to offer any number of solutions that you have pre-considered.

6. You include an “ask” insofar as requesting they consider removal of the feedback or review if they would be able to consider themselves now satisfied with their overall experience.
7. Keep the call brief.

The buyer may still not be happy with the product or some other part of the transaction experience, BUT they should AT LEAST now be happy to know you are on their side and willing to help. You also should be ready to provide the same links you provided in the letter or even walk them through it (this is best) while you have them on the phone. If they can’t get to it right then or they aren’t in front of their computer, here is the next essential step. Get their personal email address. Let them know you are going to email them via that address as well as cc: their [Amazon](#) address. You can give them the link again, but also ask them to reply that they would like to remove the feedback or alter their product review as they have become satisfied with their overall customer experience. If you can get this response, that is gold and can be used to get a feedback or review removed, even if the customer doesn’t take that specific action themselves.

Also, keep in mind that you can email a buyer directly outside of the buyer-seller messaging system. You can go to Orders at the top of your Seller Central login. Click on the OrderID. Click on the buyer’s name next to “Contact Buyer” in the middle of the page. At the top of the next page next to “To:” you can copy and paste that `xname@marketplace.amazon.com` address into your email provider of choice, send a message to that buyer from one of your registered email addresses, and have that message go to the buyer outside of the buyer-seller messaging system. This will also keep that correspondence from affecting your metrics.

If you have been able to glean actionable information from these materials, we stand ready to help even more. If you need further help or detail in any area, feel free to reach out.

Regards,

Scott Margolin

620-446-2077

www.feedbackrepair.com