



UNTANGLING

Problem Solving for Student Businesses

911 COMPLAINT RESPONSE GUIDE

Q. What is your first response to a complaint?

A. **“Thank you for your complaint.”**

Yeah, seriously: **only those who care enough about your business** are going to engage with you and also be honest with you. And they may turn into your most loyal customers.

Complaints are likely to be legitimate, though in some cases, they may not. Either way, assume they are relevant and don't consider them personal or annoying; consider them a way to help your student business improve.

Here are a few guidelines to responding to complaints:

1. Show you care. And **do** care. This is **your** customer.
2. **Remain calm**; keep your emotions in check. Your customer is probably already showing enough passion for the situation.
3. **Avoid** competitive communication: it does not matter who is right or wrong. It does matter that your customer is valued and respected as your customer.
4. **Listen attentively**. Acknowledge what the client is saying.
5. **Acknowledge** also what the customer is feeling; he or she may need time to express her/his feelings before you can begin to solve the problem and be constructive.
6. **Thank** the customer for letting you know about the problem(s). When people are upset and understand that you care and are going to respond, their mood often improves immediately.



7. **Offer a sincere apology.** You are probably sorry that it happened, in fact, no matter the cause.
8. Often it's helpful to **move on to the next step** rather than trying to make excuses. Your customer is in the mindset of anger, looking for a solution. He or she doesn't care about why it happened.
9. Tell your customer that you are going to fix the problem the best you can. Get the facts, restate the facts or concerns your client has, as you understand them. Reframe the problem into something that you are both **working together** to resolve.
10. Offer a **response to the problem**, focusing on what is possible. Don't promise what you can't deliver or you will still have an angry customer. Do be clear on what the limits are and try to negotiate solutions that work within the parameters of your business and the desires of your customer.
11. Offer your customer **reparation** in some form. Especially if it is a situation that could have been prevented or for which your business is responsible. Depending on the situation, offer the guest a dessert, a coupon, a credit, a free service in the future, or a discount on the current issue.
12. Get them back in your business as soon as possible. Let them know that you will do a better job the next time. Offer a discounted or complimentary meal or service for when they return. This is not about the cost of a free meal, product or service; this is about turning a customer that cared enough to share their concerns into a loyal customer.

General prevention recommendations

- Do keep your client aware of any changes or delays.
- Do follow through on commitments.
- Do return phone messages promptly.
- While some issues may be out of your control, be direct with the customer and give her or him the option of solving the problem together with you; you will both be happier.
- If there is a situation where the customer does not seem to be acting in good faith, where the situation is never going to be resolved, close out the transaction and be willing to lose revenue. "Cut your losses."