How to handle negative customer feedback

Relate
by zendesk

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Ideally, you get ahead of problems before they grow fangs and come knocking. But when you don't, and customers communicate angrily, look at negative feedback like this: a gift.

1 Say thank you

All feedback, even the negative kind, is free advice. Today's fuming customer is tomorrow's improved product. Who knows how many customers you might have lost had this one not flipped out? Thank them; it's gratitude time.

2 Validate their feelings

First, figure out what they're feeling. Anger, betrayal? Then reflect it back to them: "You must be incredibly frustrated to be dealing with this hassle." Sounds simple, but truly feeling heard can help your customer connect with you. Then you can solve their issue.

3 Understand them

Avoid frustrating your customer and do whatever you can to keep them from repeating their story. Do the homework to get up to speed on the ticket. And as quickly as possible, convey to them what's happening so they know that you really get it.

4 Be accountable

If there's ever a time to be defensive, this definitely isn't it. Did your company make a mistake? Own it and apologize. If the product zigged when it should have zagged, apologize for the disruption and inconvenience.

5 Clarify expectations

Make sure to use your knowledge base, but watch your tone. It's all to easy to sound rigid and condescending when reading documentation. Use this as an opportunity to empower the customer in the direction of self-service, which research shows they love.

6 Communicate next steps

If you haven't yet covered workarounds, this is the time. Acknowledge any additional effort required for the customer to use the workaround, or the gap between what the workaround does and what they want. Be clear about what else they can expect if the issue isn't fully resolved.