



BUSINESSSENSE

Complaint resolution – act fast, document everything

In the second article of his two-part special covering complaints, Tim Kelly explains how you should handle a grievance to the satisfaction of both your customer and yourself.

A complaint is best seen as an expression of dissatisfaction. Whether you believe it to be valid or invalid does not matter, what does matter is you listening to what the customer is dissatisfied with.

The first thing that should be done is to acknowledge to the customer that you will document and investigate their complaint. If the customer is stood in front of you and is rejecting the vehicle at the point of collection this might seem an odd thing to do, but by doing so you remove confrontational tension, it documents all aspects the customer is not happy with and stops additional things being added later on.

The art of good complaint handling is to act straight away and nail everything down as quickly as possible. Doing this also gives you time and allows you to control the situation. The ultimate goal is to avoid the worse possible scenario, which is legal action.

Under the 2015 Consumer Rights Act, where the customer has lost faith in the original repairer, they have the legal entitlement to take the vehicle to a repairer of their choice and seek the full cost of rectification at retail rates. The fact you carried out repairs on “the cheap, as a favour” does not matter – cover your backsides and do the job correctly, charge appropriately, document with a contract. You could quite easily lose a case in court and end up with huge costs if it evidenced your repairs as poor.

If you can obtain a resolution with a customer who has a complaint that is valid, do so. Whether this be getting the vehicle back in and rectifying the issues, offering some type of goodwill gesture due to delays or poor communication, or getting to a point where you do not agree, but decide to use an alternative dispute resolution (ADR).

Where you feel the complaint is not valid, it is important that you still follow a complaint process, advise the customer that their complaint has been investigated and, in ALL cases, (valid and invalid

complaints) provide a final response letter outlining your findings and what recourse is available to them should they continue to be unhappy. If you subscribe to an organisation that provides ADR, recommend that action.

Should the customer still have the vehicle and an issue has developed, it is in your best interest to act swiftly and as a business, to control the complaint. I see many repairers (both mechanical workshops and bodyshops) stick their head in the sand and, in some cases, even completely ignore the customer thinking they will go away. This is the worst thing you can do. It has the potential to ruin your business, your brand, and your reputation.

A complaint handled correctly is a business opportunity, one that can give a consumer confidence that they are dealing with a good business that can lead to further referrals and recommendations. It is important to note, where rework is required, that service is “to be carried out in a reasonable amount of time”.

This is another area I see cropping up often when I am dealing with complaints. Advising the customer that you are booked up until Christmas and will book them in then, and then spending ages rectifying, provides perfect evidence for a court to award against you if legal action is taken.

Educate yourselves on the 2015 Consumer Rights Act by scanning the QR code.

