



## Here's How to Use Your Website to Create and Keep Loyal Customers

**Or, how to keep 95% of unhappy customers who will defect to your competitor this year.**

It's a fact that **every business has customers who complain** about *something*. A (very) small percentage of unhappy customers are chronic complainers who have nothing else to do but make life miserable for a business owner. These customers should be encouraged to buy elsewhere. The rest of those unhappy customers, however, represent **golden opportunities for cementing long-lasting relationships**. Giving customers an easy way to complain via a business' website can be **one of the most effective ways to keep loyal customers**. Here's how you can do that relatively easily.

### How to Capture Customer Complaints Online

Offering customers a way to vent their dissatisfaction about a product, service, the way that a transaction was handled, or whatever can be as easy as creating a properly designed web form on the website. This form should be reserved just for **complaints**, comments, and suggestions. It should appear on the **Contact Us** page of the website where you would expect someone to find it. When a customer submits a form it should be sent to a specific person with some authority in the business and who has clear instructions to handle those emails without delay (within, say, 24 hours). Even better, the name of that person should be listed below the form and include a phone number.

The "complaints/comments/suggestion" **web form should trigger an automatic reply email**. This email (also referred to as an "auto-responder") should assure the customer that the email has been received. It should also assure the customer that the issue will be handled within a specific time period unless otherwise notified and include a phone number if too much time passes without a response from the company.

### The Importance of Promoting an Invitation to Complain

**The web form should be promoted** both online and offline. Customers need to know where they can complain – otherwise, the business defeats the whole purpose of having the web form in the first place. If the complaint form is buried deep in the website then customers will get

the idea that the business is really not serious about hearing complaints. If the business has the attitude that every complaint represents an opportunity to deepen a customer relationship and improve the business overall then the idea of inviting complaints shouldn't be hard to do.

## The Benefits of Inviting Complaints on the Website

Inviting customers to submit their complaints on the business' website has several important benefits.

1. Giving customers the opportunity to complain on the website is **easy and relatively non-threatening**. Up to 96% of dissatisfied customers will never complain – mostly because they want to avoid an unpleasant confrontation. These customers will simply buy what they need someplace else. The website can enable a business to **recapture as many as 95% of those dissatisfied customers** and subsequently deepen the relationship.
2. Offering customers a way to voice their complaints (and, hopefully, get them resolved quickly) is far better than having them post complaints on public micro-blogs such as *Twitter* or on reviews websites such as *Yelp* for all the world to see. In the end, unhappy customers just want to get their complaints resolved fairly without making a Federal case out of it. As ubiquitous as social networking blogs are these days it is to the business' advantage to offer an easy, efficient way of resolving complaints through its own website than through a third-party online channel.
3. **Openly inviting complaints inspires confidence** with customers – even the happy ones. Website visitors, in particular, have fewer reservations about a company when it's clear the company wants to hear from satisfied customers as well as dissatisfied customers in order to serve them better.
4. Information received electronically from an online customer complaint form is easy to store, forward, analyze, process, and resolve. **Electronic information reduces administrative costs** and speeds problem resolution which, in turn, increases the likelihood of creating loyal customers.
5. **An web form on a company's website offers the customer a structure** for communicating his or her dissatisfaction. Instead of having the customer send a rambling, free-form email to a company email address, the web form provides some degree of order so that all of the pertinent information needed to resolve the issue is submitted. Fields on the web form should include, at minimum, the customer's first name, last name, daytime phone number, home phone number, full mailing address, email address, and a multi-line "comment" field for briefly describing the issue or complaint. The comment field should be limited to no more than 200-300 words (about 1000-1500 characters) to enforce brevity. An optional field for uploading supporting documents should be considered.

## Conclusion

Businesses that leverage their websites (and other online media) to invite comments and complaints from dissatisfied customers recognize that customers have more power than ever to determine their continued viability in the marketplace. Poor customer experiences can be communicated at the speed of the Internet and can significantly impact the reputation of a business. Finding creative ways to openly encourage the communication of complaints directly to the business rather than through online third-party channels enables the business to turn unhappy customers into loyal customers – usually at a fraction of the cost of acquiring a brand new customer, or worse, rebuilding a reputation.



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