13 WORDS YOU NEVER USE
When Replying to a Customer

by Jay Baer
If you feel like there are more customer complaints than ever, you’re right. Smartphones, apps, and social media have combined to create a crush of complaints that show up every day on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, ratings and reviews sites, and discussion boards and forums.

Answering these complaints is critical. Research in my new book, Hug Your Haters, found that answering complaints in social media and beyond increases customer advocacy by as much as 25%. Not answering complaints decreases customer advocacy by as much as 50%.

After all, no answer IS an answer. It’s an answer that says “we don’t care about you as a customer. At all.”

Plus, when you answer (or don’t answer) a customer in social media, review sites, or discussion boards MANY other people can see how you handled that situation. Today, customer service is a spectator sport.

The best approach then is to Hug Your Haters, which means you answer every complaint, in every channel, every time.
TURN BAD NEWS INTO GOOD

When you answer customer complaints whenever and wherever they occur, you turn bad news into good news - but only if you use the right words and phrases.

The 3 most important ingredients in any response to a customer (especially a public reply in social media, review sites, or forums) are:

1. Empathy
2. Humanity
3. Speed

Sometimes, innocuous uses of less-than-ideal words can give customers a negative impression of your response, ruining your well-intentioned effort to Hug Your Haters.

Here, I’ve collected 13 of the most misused words that appear in hundreds of replies to customers on Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, TripAdvisor, Spiceworks, and hundreds of other online locations.

Don't make the same mistake, avoid the 13 words collected here at all costs.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>1. FAULT</th>
<th>2. POLICY</th>
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<td>The customer may not be right. The customer may be completely wrong.</td>
<td>There may be perfectly sound reasons why your business handles certain situations in a particular way.</td>
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<td>Regardless, talking about whether or not it was the business’ “fault” or the customer’s “fault” sounds defensive and off-putting.</td>
<td>But telling customers that those circumstances are based on a “policy” sounds inflexible and uncaring.</td>
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3. BLAME

Similar to “fault” any time a business uses the word “blame” in a reply to a customer, it immediately sets up a counterproductive right vs wrong scenario.

4. DEPARTMENT

The customer doesn’t care about the org chart.

When using “department” in a reply, it emphasizes the operating structure of the company, which is unnecessary and not something relevant to the customer.
5. OUR

When using the word “our” the person replying to the customer is speaking on behalf of the collective business. This lacks humanity and a personal touch. It is much better to use “I” and “me” instead of “our” and “we.”

6. MISUNDERSTANDING

This one may seem harmless, but “misunderstanding” emphasizes that somehow the customer made an error or was unable to fully grasp key information.

“Misunderstanding” is often used as a polite way of saying “you didn’t listen or read well enough.” Don’t make that mistake.
7. IF

“We’re sorry IF you were disappointed in your stay with us” is common phrasing. The company already knows the customer was disappointed - that’s why they left a negative comment or review! Much better phrasing is “Your stay was less than perfect. I’m so sorry that happened.”

8. BUT

The ultimate, wishy-washy qualifier that is often used in excuses in combination with “policy” and related terms. Don’t say “We’d like to offer you a refund, but our policy prohibits us from doing so.” Instead say, “I cannot give you a refund. I can offer you other compensation instead.”
9. PER

Too formal, not human, and totally unnecessary. “Per our records…” is not a warm and friendly way to address an upset customer - or even a happy customer!

10. JUST

This is an unnecessary limiter, and while not deemed offensive in most cases, it can rub customers the wrong way. “I just called to say I’m sorry” is a good song lyric and a decent customer response. It would be better as “I called to say I’m sorry.”
11. TRY

When used in a reply to a customer “try” sets up an incomplete, open-ended, sequence of events such as “We’ll try to do better next time.” Follow Yoda’s advice: do or do not. There should be no “try”

12. CONSIDER

The best friend of “try” and often used in the exact same way. “We’ll consider your suggestions…” can easily be interpreted as dismissive and insincere.
13. SEEMS

Don’t reply with “It seems you might have had a bad experience” because “seems” is a word used when trying to interpret or make sense of something. It is clear that the customer had a bad experience, because they complained about it. Better phrasing is “I am sorry about the bad experience you had.”

Now that you know the 13 words you should never use when replying to a customer, you’ll start to see them all around you.

For more on how to keep your customers, see my all-new online training course at KeepYourCustomersCourse.com

Use promo code HUG and save $200.