

Troubleshooting

These are the top five questions I hear from my promotional products coaching clients...and what I suggest you do about them.

** The information provided here is not intended to be a substitute for legal or financial advice and is just the opinion of the author. **

Question #1

Help! I've done everything right on my end and the order arrived with a mistake, what should I do?

Answer #1

First, take a deep breath and stay calm. We are all human and mistakes do happen. If you don't already have a sample of the product with the mistake, get one. You need to be able to assess the problem ASAP.

Call your customer and apologize, (I know it may not be your fault, but YOU have to accept the responsibility.) Tell your customer that you stand behind everything you sell 100% and that you are working with the manufacturer to resolve the problem to their satisfaction. This is why you need to have strong relationships with your suppliers and work only with the best. (Read more about choosing suppliers in **Chapter 18**.)

Call the supplier and speak with your customer service rep or their supervisor. **Document the problem verbally and in writing.** Although, you may want to scream, you'll get better results staying calm. Is this clearly a supplier mistake? In my experience, a good supplier will re-do the order as quickly as possible and also accept responsibility to work this out to your satisfaction.

If this order falls into the "grey area" where there is fault on all sides, then you may have to negotiate with your customer to find out what would satisfy them. If the supplier is offering a discount, and the customer is willing to accept it, then you may wish to cut your loses and move on from there. Keep in mind the amount of time and energy it may take to fight this battle.

Also, learn from your mistakes. Ask yourself: *"Knowing what you know now, what will you do differently on your next order?"*

(Go back and read and use the **Order Entry Checklist on page 138** in this section and **Chapter 18** on choosing suppliers. It should help greatly in eliminating future mistakes.)

One important point to keep in mind: Your customers will remember how well you handle a problem far better than they will recall what the problem was.

Question # 2

I want to expand my business, should I hire someone to sell for my company?

Answer # 2

This is a difficult question to answer without knowing your exact situation. But here are some things to consider. (1) When you hire an outside sales rep you will have to train them to sell according to your company's guidelines. (2) This may take away from your selling time and you will have to do additional administrative work to process their orders.

These days many small promotional products businesses are seeking to hire in-house administrative help and sales support to give the owner increased selling time, rather than hire an outside sales representative.

It's your decision, but if you do go the route of hiring someone, make sure they understand clearly your company's policies and procedures. Clear communication is key here. **Have written policy and procedure guidelines that they sign off on before starting to work for you.**

If you are using independent contractors rather than employees, know that there are many legal restrictions. It's a good idea to check with your accountant or a lawyer for additional advice before bringing on employees or independent contractors to see what situation is best for your needs.

Question # 3

Should I fire a customer? I have a customer that is a real pain, there's always a problem with their orders, what can I do?

Answer # 3

You are a professional and deserve to be treated with respect from all your customers. *Evaluate the amount of time you are spending on this account versus the amount of money you are making.* It's a good idea to evaluate all your customers on an annual basis. Using the numbers 1, 2 and 3, evaluate your customer list. Assign a (1) to choice customers. They are a pleasure to deal with personally and professionally. They buy on a regular basis, send referrals your way and pay their invoices on time. Assign a (2) to the next tier of customers. They may not always be easy but they pay on time and buy consistently. Assign a (3) to the really difficult customers. You know who they are. They take up an inordinate amount of time for a small amount business, and no matter what you do they never seem satisfied. Decide if they are worth your time. There is nothing wrong with turning down business. Savvy professionals know their limits and are willing to let go of problem accounts.

Question # 4

I always seem to be taking care of endless paper work or problems with orders. There never seems to be enough hours in the day to get everything done and be able to increase my sales, what can I do?

Answer # 4

This is a common problem in the promotional products industry. Here's what has worked for me. **I prioritize my week and my day and work on the most important things first. I decide what's important by which things will be my biggest income generators.** I keep a list in my Outlook® task bar and refer to it every morning. Additionally, I pick the three most important things I want to accomplish every day and make sure I get those done.

I've brought in part-time help to assist me in the myriad of tasks I have to do every day. Now, before you say "I can't afford that!" read on. Many colleges and universities have special intern programs for marketing and advertising majors. Many times a student can work for you for free or at a reduced rate and get credits for the semester. I have found college interns to be bright, fast on the computer and eager to learn. Additionally, I have found excellent help from moms with small children who have a few hours to work during school time and appreciate the flexibility. **Lastly, ask yourself how much more money you could be making if you weren't bogged down in paperwork and then decide what its worth to you.**

Question # 5

I'm having a hard time staying motivated, what can I do to keep myself going?

Answer # 5

Sales professionals can easily "burn out" if they don't take good care of themselves. Plan regular breaks and make sure you are getting enough rest. Treat yourself to something special. You'll return with renewed energy.

Join an email support group such as the one I have for readers of this Manual. If you're reading this you will be getting an invitation to join this group. The email support will keep you from feeling isolated when the going gets rough. All of us in this industry have similar challenges.

Keep a success journal. Every day write something positive that happened that day in your journal. Another idea is to keep a book filled with testimonials from your happy customers. It's a great reminder of what a good job you're doing. Working with a business coach or business success team will also help to keep you motivated.

Know that everyone feels not motivated on some days and this too will pass.