

Managing your Casino Complaint Department?

By Steve Karoul

Do you have a Casino Complaint Department? Do you ever check on it? Unfortunately Casino Complaint Departments are not on the top of the executive priority list. However, I do believe that they are an important area that needs an occasional review by management. Many casinos tend to delegate complaints back to the originating department. For, example, if the complaint is about a bad meal, the complaint letter is forwarded on the Food & Beverage Department. If the complaint is about a disputed gaming decision, it is usually forwarded to the Casino Manager or his designee.

I am a great believer in “Empowerment”. Empowering employees to make decisions is an area that is grossly under-utilized in most casinos today except for when it comes to customer complaints and then it seems to be alright to “empower” employees to handle these situations. Unfortunately most of the employees that become empowered to handle customer complaints are not properly trained nor properly supervised. There is often a lack of consistency in the problem solving methods as well as in the conflict resolution process.

This can be serious flaw in your organizational structure that you may not even be aware of. Casino customer complaints need to be treated seriously and the problems need to be properly resolved quickly. The key words are properly and quickly. If not, the casino runs the risk of losing a customer for ever. First, you need to educate your Complaint Department staff or as often is the case, your Complaint Department individual, that customer complaints are extremely important and need to be treated as such. Second, you need to educate them as to why customer complaints are important. Most uneducated employees often treat casino customer complaints as a nuisance. They need to understand that the real problem is the customer who just walks away unhappy without complaining to anyone and takes his business elsewhere. That customer is truly a “lost customer”.

Oftentimes casinos do not even know when they lose an upset customer and may not actually know for many months if they know at all. Usually they get a hint of a lost customer if they run an Inactive Report to show them which customers have not visited their casino in the past six months or more. However, by then it is usually too late to salvage an upset customer who after six months now needs to be classified as a lost customer. In all likelihood, that customer has probably found another casino to take his or her business to.

Another problem that often surfaces is a lack of sensitivity or understanding by upper management. One method to help resolve this disconnect is to force all management to work at least one weekend per month. Casino customers like to see management on the property and on the casino floor. Casino customers enjoy the opportunity to interface with management and occasionally voice their opinions or complaints. Another similar idea is to dedicate an office on the casino floor specifically for handling customer complaints. It would be ideal if that office were staffed on a rotational basis by a member

of the casinos executive management team. By sharing this responsibility equally among executive management, front-line employees will quickly grasp the importance of customer service as well as the importance of resolving customer complaints quickly and properly.

Here is an actual complaint letter that I just wrote to a major retailer in the United States:

Dear Co. XYZ- I have been a loyal customer of Co. XYZ for over 40 years so I hope that you will pass this on to the Corporate Office so that they can better understand why they are losing a customer after a 40 year relationship. I used to love to shop or just browse at Co. XYZ and used to like the variety and the "value" that I found there. In fact, I received the Co. XYZ Gift Card for my birthday because friends and family know that I like Co. XYZ. However, I have recently noticed that the variety is declining and the "value" also seems to have disappeared. I purchased a Maxtor 160 GB External Hard Drive today at Co. XYZ for \$119.99 believing that Co. XYZ always offered its customers the best value. I drove across the street to purchase a video game as a gift for a young child and while walking through Best Buy I happened to pass the Hard Drive section. I was shocked. I saw the exact same Maxtor Hard Drive that I had just paid \$119.99 at Co. XYZ for \$79.99 at Best Buy. I drove back across the street to ask the Co. XYZ manager to please check the price thinking that it must have been wrongly priced. He informed me that it was correctly priced. I told him about Best Buy and he said that it must be a special sale price and I informed that it was not. I then asked for a refund which I received. The sad part is that my 40 year relationship with Co. XYZ is over. I have experienced similar price differences this past year but \$119.99 against \$79.99 is the straw that broke the camel's back per se. I will give my Co. XYZ gift card to someone else as a gift and now take my future business to Best Buy. Sorry. I felt that after 40 years that I owed you at least the courtesy of an explanation and possibly it will help you to retain other customers before it is too late for Co. XYZ. Best wishes....Steve Karoul

My complaint letter submitted through Co. XYZ's website was polite and to the point. I received what I thought was a computer generated response thanking me for my E-mail and informing me that it would be passed on to the proper department. It has now been four weeks since I E-mailed my complaint letter but to date I have not received any additional response from anyone at Co. XYZ. This is a perfect example of a lost opportunity to salvage a lost customer and in fact, a lost customer who had previously been a loyal customer for over forty years. How many customers has your casino lost over the past year? Do you know why?

Therefore, it is important to review your own casino's ability to properly handle customer complaints. Many casinos do take the time to write a written response to all complaint letters but many do not follow up after that and therefore never know whether their efforts to salvage a lost customer were successful or not. Consequently, it is recommended that you make every effort to contact the upset customer either in person or by telephone. Instruct your staff to send an initial response letter informing the customer that you greatly appreciate that they have taken the time to write about their recent bad

experience, etc. and that you take all such complaints very seriously. Explain that you would like to discuss the matter in greater detail and ask permission to schedule a call that would be convenient to them and also ask them for the best telephone number to reach them on. Human to human contact is much more personal than a cold letter or an impersonal E-mail. Face to face contact is always best but a telephone conversation is still better than a letter or E-mail.

Once your staff is able to make contact either by telephone or in person, they can better assess the complaint and then make every effort possible to try to salvage the “lost customer”. Obviously, anyone responsible for dealing face to face with angry or upset customers needs to first be properly trained in conflict resolution. Proper conflict resolution is not natural and is something that needs to be taught to people. There are often many different psychological variables involved with conflict. You need to learn when to be flexible, when to offer some form of compensation and when to hold your ground and not offer anything. This may sound complicated but it really is not. The efforts you make to salvage a lost customer are normally far less expensive than what you would spend in marketing costs to develop a brand new customer. In addition, it is far better to have a happy satisfied customer talking positively about your casino than to have an angry upset customer talking negatively about your casino. Which would you prefer? No question, a happy satisfied customer is best. Good luck.

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