

Q&A: What is your best (or worst) customer service experience in the design industry?



Squeaky Wheel

"I recently had an issue with an extremely high-maintenance client who was experiencing 'squeaks' from a custom sectional sofa I had specified from the manufacturer, which was at least a year old. I called the manufacturer's customer service team and it was no questions asked. They stepped right in and sent a repair person out to my client's home right away to resolve the issue. The client felt validated and was thrilled, and my reputation and relationship was preserved. What more could you ask for? I will always be a lifelong client!"
—**Dan Rak, Dan Rak Design**



Miscalculation Mishap

"An esteemed furniture manufacturer quoted a six-week lead time and 18 yards of fabric for a pair of COM chairs and an ottoman. Skeptical, we confirmed both in writing, built a four-week buffer into our installation timeline, and sent an extra two yards of fabric to the manufacturer. Upon checking the order four weeks later, we were told fabrication had yet to begin because they actually needed six more yards of fabric, and that the lead time would be eight to 10 weeks once fabrication began. Instead of offering an apology, the rep I originally dealt with actually hung up on me!"
—**Jenny Madden, Jenny Madden Design**



Leg Work

"I once worked with a vendor where the wood stain on the legs of the sofa was the inspiration for the room. I asked repeatedly for photos of the sofa prior to completion. Then the sofa was mysteriously shipped without photos or a heads-up. Then it arrived without stained legs (I was blamed for rushing them). The manufacturer didn't want to ship it back cross-country, so they sent a man to refinish on-site who ended up staining the white mohair and left drip marks on the legs. After four weeks of begging and offering my unborn child, they quite rudely and very reluctantly paid for a new sofa."
—**Brett Helsham, Brett Helsham Designs**



Cut a Rug

"We bought a stunning antique rug for the master bedroom of a Palm Springs home. After the rug was installed, and the very heavy canopy steel bed was placed on top of it, we realized it was too big. The rug company drove to Palm Springs to pick it up and take it back to L.A. to have it cut down. They then reinstalled the rug, moving the bed that weighed thousands of pounds in 100-degree desert heat. They were so fast. The problem was corrected before we presented the home to our clients! The customer service was so impeccable."
—**Shannon Wollack and Brittany Zwickl, Studio LIFE.STYLE**



Lifetime Warranty

"Recently, a client had decided to sell her large custom sectional on Craigslist (which was shocking, as this was a \$12,000 piece). She noticed it had some fading and wanted to have it reupholstered for the new buyer. Fabric typically doesn't have warranties longer than a year. Even though we had installed this sectional over four years ago, and it was being sold, the manufacturer had the piece entirely reupholstered, picked up and delivered to its new owner. No questions asked and at no cost."
—**Anita Dawson, Dawson Design Group**



Take It or Leave It

"We recently ordered a pair of nightstands and they arrived with a chip in the finish. The vendor agreed to replace the nightstands, and when we went to pick up the replacements, the replacements also had chips in the finish. When we questioned the quality, we were told, 'Either take these or do not bother ordering from our company, as this is the quality that you are going to get. So accept it or move on.'"
—**Ohara Davies-Gaetano, Ohara Davies-Gaetano Interiors**

Customer Service Tips from Jody Seivert

Designers can end up in sticky customer service situations with their manufacturers and clients if they don't know how to best address unpleasant issues that arise during a project. Here, Jody Seivert, a training and development coach and consultant, shares her advice on how to ace the customer service experience.



1 | Make "Deposits"

Develop a good relationship with companies by making figurative "deposits" into your relationship bank account: Visit showrooms, make purchases and cultivate relationships with sales reps. It is easier to make a "withdrawal," or call in a favor, when a solid relationship has already been established.

2 | Manage Your Client

If a client request would make you unhappy, don't make that same request to a manufacturer. It is your responsibility to oversee the client's purchasing needs, and triple-check what you are asking the manufacturer to do.

3 | Have Options

Present solutions to both your vendor and clients. Don't demand or expect them to cover the losses, but it is definitely appropriate to ask.

4 | Be Gracious

It may not be your or the client's fault, but it is always better to be fair and understanding with the manufacturer—especially when they are usually the only entity that can resolve the issue.

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