

A few months ago I told you about a story of bad customer service. It is time for another. The computer where I write is not that old, probably two years at the most. Like a responsible computer owner, I have virus protection software installed. I buy the one year at a time contract, which coincidentally renews about this time every year. I know when it is time to renew because a screen pops up and tells me it is time. Typically a couple of clicks of the mouse, enter debit card information, and my computer is protected for another year and the pop up goes away. Except that didn't happen this year.

The pop up, reminding me to renew the anti-virus I had already renewed, has been happening every time I sit down at the computer, even though the renewal fee cleared my bank account. When I sat down to write a column this week it happened again, and I decided I have had enough. I called the Best Buy support line number on the computer screen, worked through their automated maze of options and finally got a hold of Terry in the account maintenance department. After answering several security questions, I told Terry my issues. His response, "No problem." He then clicked on several screens and told me that he could not help me I needed to be transferred to another area.

After several minutes on hold, Brandon answered. I was again asked the security questions and the nature of my issue. I dutifully explained my conundrum. Brandon responded, "No problem." He tried several things, I know because I heard the keyboard clicking, but was unable to solve my issue. Brandon needed to transfer me to the Geek Squad where they could certainly help me. I would need to give them temporary access to my computer, but that should stop the pop ups.

After several more minutes on hold, Rob answered. I again answered the security questions and told him the nature of my issue. "No problem," was his answer when I asked if he was going to be the one to fix my issue. He accessed my computer, and after several minutes of doing what I am sure the others also did, informed me that he could not help me and he was going to transfer me to the account maintenance department. I "politely" informed him that was where I started this ordeal almost an hour ago and was not happy. An insincere apology was begrudgingly given and I was again transferred to "someone who knew what he was doing". Not a good sign.

Devin answered and I did not have to answer security questions or explain my pop up issue. He tried several of the same things the others tried and put me back on hold. After several minutes Devin informed me that my problem was due to software upgrades and should automatically be fixed within 24-48 hours. No problem, yeah right.

My hope is that if I keep telling you about bad customer service you will be able to recognize it and root it out of your company. This particular incident happened on the phone, where the potential for bad service is greatest since you cannot look the customer in the eye. None of the four people offered me anything to cover my trouble and over 1 hour, 20 minutes on the phone. All I got was transferred in a circle with people who were semi-polite but could not provide any help. "No problem" turned out to be a big headache. I imagine the people I talked with were computer savvy, but lacked customer service skills. This will affect my decision where to buy my next computer.

How is the phone service you provide? Do people have to answer security questions or re-tell their problems every time they get transferred? They shouldn't. Calling your customer service line should enhance the sale, not make people question it. It has now been 24 hours since my phone fiasco, and no resolution. I hope the next 24 are better, or Terry, Brandon, Rob and Devin will be hearing from me again. No problem.

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.*