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Tivo At the Plate: How to Hit a Grand Slam and Still Strike Out

I recently had a very bad customer service experience with one of my favorite companies, Tivo. I moved and the Tivo in the old house was dying and I wanted to buy one of the new dual-tuner models that I saw on sale as refurbished units. So. I went online and ordered one of the new units for my new house and then began searching online for how to cancel the old and dying unit (the RF input was broken and causing much static).

Well, I immediately realized it would not be easy. Nowhere was "cancel" listed as one of the main options, and only after performing a search and being routed to numerous pages did I find that you cannot cancel online and must phone them directly. My warning radar went up immediately as memories of news stories about American Online began rolling through my head.

After finding the number and calling I was met with one of those amazingly annoying voice recognition systems that wants to ask you fifty question about your "problem". Well, I just wanted to cancel so I barked "customer service" several times (I was told that that is the trick to bypassing those systems) and, after a bit of a delay, I got a real person.

The call agent was quite nice and even though she asked why I wanted to cancel the old unit she sounded as if she would wrap up the problem in short order. I was wrong. The agent gave me a "cancellation number" that I then had to give to the next person she was going to transfer me to. Uh oh.

Sure enough, this next "agent" was a customer retention specialist, otherwise known as the Gestapo, and she was quite unwilling to have me leave. Finally, after I again had to bark out that I wanted to cancel, she put me on hold while she "retrieved my account" – she had obviously already had it up in front of her but the stalling was part of the game.

So, I waited. And waited. And waited. I counted six minutes having gone by and then I hung up, called my bank, and had my card number changed that was used by Tivo to debit my account – that only took five minutes. I was very, very frustrated.

My frustration was extra deep however because I love my Tivo. It is a wonderful product with a cult-like following but, unlike Apple, Tivo's customer service is abysmal. It's also unacceptable. We all expect such juvenile behavior from corporate giants like AOL and Microsoft, but from a niche company like Tivo we expect much, much better. Shame.

So here I sit, watching my new-refurbished dual-tuner Tivo, not willing to ever give it up, but feeling taken and betrayed by the same company whose products I still love. Now though, if a rival comes along that meets my needs, I will be far more willing to jump ship since Tivo has lost my undying allegiance.

How many library customers out there feel the same thing? How many have been burned by one or two bad customer service experiences and now will not vote for a bond initiative or new library tax? How many people still use our services but do so almost reluctantly, willing to switch to a competitor at a moment's notice?

We must be certain that all of our services, all of our representatives, reflect our core values, our true mission. Tivo fell down and hired some very aggressive, very nasty customer retention specialists and, as a result, may have lost a very, very loyal customer. Let's make sure our libraries aren't doing the same to our customers.

Posted by Michael on July 11, 2007 07:53 PM | [Permalink](#)

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This makes me think of the old adage: If you have a good customer service experience you may tell one person, but if you have a bad experience you'll tell 10.

Nowadays you have to worry about your customers telling the whole world via the internet!

Posted by: Laura Savastinuk | [July 12, 2007 10:12 AM](#)

Great. A power surge blew the modem to my old Tivo (a 14-hour model from 2001) and I need to call and cancel the service. Now I know what I'm going to have to go through, and I'm *not* looking forward to it!

Posted by: nanette | [July 12, 2007 01:20 PM](#)

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I don't know why, but I have a soft spot in my heart for telemarketers/CSR's. Maybe it's because I've worked in retail and know the pressure to sell, sell, sell, even when it's not in the best interest of the customer.

My point is: the customer service person isn't the one to blame. She was trained to handle the call the way she did, and in all likelihood could have gotten fired for handling it any other way.

The lesson there is clear- we need to make sure that our policies don't get in the way of good customer service, as well as making sure our people are nice and pleasant. Even if a person is super nice, but still can't help you with your problem, you'll be frustrated.

Posted by: [Karin Dalziel](#) | [July 12, 2007 05:05 PM](#)

I went through asimil,ar experience trying to cancel - I moved to a house where there is no Cable service for awhile.

SO I called and went on hold for 40 minutes. Finally a cheerful person came online and gave me a case #. So I waited another 20 min and the line disconnected. Now I've called back, got the 20 min wait message and it's now been 17:58. Will be interesting to see when someone finally comes on and if it is exactly 20 min. I think it just makes you wait 20 min at a minimum.

arrgh. Love the product, hate their customer service.

Posted by: Gil | [July 24, 2007 09:44 PM](#)

Wow, I've had nothing but good luck with Tivo customer service. I called to cancel a while back because my cable company can't provide reliable service and I am without tv until I figure out an alternative. The Tivo people offered to put my account on hold so that I can keep the old subscription price once I'm on cable again. I know that they were trying not to lose me entirely, but I was happy. I wonder if I'll have an experience like yours when I call to cancel entirely.

Posted by: [Kaijsa](#) | [July 25, 2007 01:25 PM](#)

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