

## About the Author/**JOE GREENSLADE**



Joe Greenslade is president of Greenslade and Company, Inc., of Rockford, Illinois, which specializes in supplying manufacturing and inspection products to the fastener industry. He has been active in the fastener industry since 1970.

Mr. Greenslade is an associate member of the Industrial Fastener Institute (IFI) serving on several technical subcommittees relative to fastener quality. He is also a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers serving on the ANSI/ASME B1 Thread Subcommittees and is an alternate member of the ANSI/ASME B18 Fastener Supplier Accreditation Subcommittee.

Mr. Greenslade is the author of over 40 fastener technology related articles, and is the inventor of several innovative patented fastener inspection devices.

# Dealing With Quality Complaints Effectively

No matter how thorough and careful you are when supplying fasteners you are going to receive calls questioning the quality of the fasteners you supply. This does not mean that your products are bad. However, you must investigate the claims quickly and effectively to resolve the questions as required. Frequently a quality complaint proves merely to be a misunderstanding on the part of the customer, but until you clear up the question you have a situation which must be dealt with.

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The way you deal with quality questions has a major impact on the future business you do with a given customer. A sincere, thorough, and prompt response can strengthen a relationship, whereas, a sloppy or very late response can kill all future opportunities with a customer.

Customers learn a great deal more about the character of a supplier when they see how a complaint is handled than they ever will by seeing how purchase orders are dealt with. Anybody can graciously accept a purchase order, but not everyone can deal with a complaint effectively in a satisfying manner.

I make the following suggestions for effectively dealing with customer quality complaints:

1. Respond to all complaints immediately. When a customer has a problem, whether real or imaginary, they want an answer NOW! The longer the delay the bigger the problem can become unnecessarily. A prompt response is interpreted as a sincere concern for the customer. A delay in response is interpreted as indifference.

2. Your first response should be to assure the customer that you are aware of their concern and that you are going to do everything possible to see this through to a satisfactory end. This assures them that you are going to work with them and not ignore them.

**DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY TELL THEM YOU ARE AT FAULT OR TELL THEM TO RETURN THE PARTS UNTIL**

### YOU GET ALL THE FACTS!

3. After assuring them you are sensitive to their situation slow down and get all of the facts. Many complaints can be resolved immediately by helping the customer see that they are looking at the wrong print, part number, PO number or making other such simple mistakes.

Be sure you identify the correct part number, PO and/or shipper number, and everything else that you need to make sure you are both discussing the same parts.

4. Next get the customer to describe completely and clearly the problem they are encountering. You can not logically respond to a statement like, "The darn things are no good!" You must know precisely what is not satisfactory about the parts. Ask them to send you samples of the problem parts and the complete application if necessary.

If the complaint is related to the parts not passing a given test or measurement, be sure to ask which specification they are testing in accordance with, what equipment they are using, and what their specific results are.

If it is a complaint on how they are working in the application, ask if it is a new or old application. If it is a new application ask details about the other components so you can analyze the entire use of the parts. If it is an old application ask if anything about the application has recently changed such as a new operator, new or different driver, different hole size, other component changes, etc.

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***Greater customer confidence will usually result in greater future business.***

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Note: I suggest when supplying "To customer print" parts of individual low cost that you retain a few samples from each shipment. This enables you to pull samples immediately if you do receive a question. These can be discarded after about 6 months.

5. Now get off the phone and gather all of the facts provided by the customer and your corresponding documentation, samples, test reports, specifications and anything else you may need to logically and thoroughly evaluate the situation.

## **QUALITY COMPLAINTS, from page 116**

Compare the complaint with your own findings. If you verify the customer's complaint you should acknowledge that and promptly work toward an agreeable solution with the customer. If you are wrong, admit it. Make good on it promptly and carry on. This may hurt at the time, but this kind of action will usually save a customer for the long haul.

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If you discover that your investigation proves that there is no real problem and that the customer is misinterpreting something, I suggest the following:

a. FAX the customer your reports, specifications, test reports or whatever other evidence supports your point without immediately stating your conclusion.

b. Call the customer and say, "Mr. Customer, I am a little confused by what I have found. Will you go over your information and mine with me so that I can discover why we are not getting the same results?"

c. As you go through the facts step by step you and the customer can discover together that he is using the wrong specification, test equipment, test procedure, etc.

I find this approach to be very unoffensive. It makes it

easy for the customer to learn from the situation and agree without an argument that the products are in fact acceptable. Your prompt and thorough handling of this problem will usually help your reputation and that of your company's to rise in the customer's eyes. Greater customer confidence will usually result in greater future business.

I have taught this approach to sales people for many years with excellent results. One fastener distributor recently told me that within one week of learning this approach he prevented his company from accepting a \$10,000 return that before they would have had to eat because they would not have known how to deal with the situation.

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In my opinion the best way to deal with customer quality complaints is to respond immediately. Ask a million questions to make sure you and the customer have clearly identified the exact problem. Thoroughly investigate the situation away from the phone. Present the findings to the customer professionally and reach a mutually acceptable resolution. If you will follow these simple suggestions you will find you take back fewer parts and you will gain greater respect from your customers resulting in greater long term business.

### ***NEW ADDRESS!***

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