

HOW TO COMPLAIN EFFECTIVELY



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CONSUMER COMPLAINT ROADMAP

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HOW TO COMPLAIN EFFECTIVELY

Welcome to the Complaint Roadmap, a handy information tool which helps you complain more effectively and directs you to the right complaint handling body when dealing with businesses, service providers, and retailers.

We hope you find this booklet quite handy.

*Consumer Affairs Department
Information Unit*

Sample Complaint Letter

*(Your Address)
Your Email Address, if you have an email address)*

(Date)

The Director
Consumer Affairs Department
4th Floor Heraldine Rock Building
Waterfront
Castries

Dear *(Sir/Madam)*:

On (date), I (bought, rented or had repaired) a (name of the product with serial or model number or service performed) at (location).

Unfortunately, this product has not performed well (or the service was inadequate). I am disappointed because (explain the problem: for example, the product does not work properly, the service was not performed correctly, I was billed the wrong amount, something was not disclosed clearly or was misrepresented at the time of sale).

To resolve the problem, I would appreciate (state the specific action you would like: money back, credit note, repair or exchange, for example). Enclosed are copies (do not send originals) of my records (include receipts, guarantees, warranties, cancelled cheques, contracts, and any other documents associated with the purchase).

I look forward to a favorable response from you. Please contact me at the above address or by telephone (mobile, home and/or office number).

Sincerely,

(your name)

If you fail to get an acceptable resolution on your first attempt, request to speak to a higher level authority, such as a supervisor, manager or the owner of the business. When all the above fail, you can approach the Consumer Affairs Department of the Ministry of Commerce, Business Development, Investment and Consumer Affairs, and lodge a complaint.

As long as you have a legitimate complaint, the Consumer Affairs Department will be able to assist you. The Department may not be able to settle your case; however, some contact will be made on your behalf to the authorized company or agency to open up communication.

Strategies for Success

Do not be afraid to complain. Good businesses will be pleased to correct any mistake that they have made. They know that customer goodwill is the best form of advertising.

Always keep a file of important information related to your purchase, include the sales receipts, repair orders, warranties, cancelled cheques, contracts and any letters you have written to or received from the company concerned.

Do not procrastinate. When a product is defective or unsatisfactory, it is important that you return it quickly so that you do not lose the right to get your money back or to collect damages in some cases. Always check the return policy before you buy.

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

Everyone has consumer rights and should act responsibly in exercising those rights. A right is a just claim to something (whatever that may be). You have the right to know what you are purchasing and to see the item (if it is a tangible item) before it is purchased. In the case of a service, you have the right to obtain what you pay for. You have the right to complain when you are not satisfied with a good or service, and the right to get your money back when you have a legitimate complaint. Some stores allow you to return items within a few days of purchase, therefore, the sooner you realize that the item is faulty and return it, the greater your chances of getting a satisfactory settlement

Assessing your complaint

Documentation

Review the problem and consider your options based on the consumer rights. Write down the facts of the case, ensuring that you write down:

- a brief description of your complaint
- what your rights are and which rights apply in this case
- your reasons for seeking redress from the producer/supplier
- what solution you would like from the producer/supplier
- verbal agreements and information given to you by the producer/supplier.

Tangible Evidence

Collect all printed information that pertains to your case, such as:

- Receipts, bills, cancelled cheques, repair orders, written agreements and instructions received from the producer/supplier,
- Any advertisement or brochure you may have responded to,
- Warranty, guarantee and other information that describes the product or service and how it should function;
- All written correspondence and communication between you and the business.

Procedure for Lodging Complaints

You should lodge your complaint as soon as you have established that there is sufficient cause to do so and within reasonable time after the problem is discovered. When lodging a complaint at the Consumer Affairs Department, consumers should have in their possession the following:

The original bill and a copy of the bill

The warranty card

The Hire Purchase Agreement (where necessary)

The Mortgage Bill of Sale (where necessary)

The complaint item (if portable)

Any evidence supporting the complaint e.g. photographs

Defective parts of the complaint item, if the items cannot be brought in.

Complaining Effectively

Prior to lodging a complaint with the Consumer Affairs Department, the consumer must first attempt to solve the problem himself/herself by going through the following steps:

Give the merchant the first chance to solve the problem. Contact the salesperson, retailer or business if you have a complaint about the goods or services that you have bought;

If there is a customer service department/section in the store where you made the purchase, use it. If not, talk to someone in authority, such as a manager. A face-to-face discussion sometimes offers the best solution;

Be firm, but polite and business like. Calmly and accurately describe the problem and what you would like them to do to solve it;

Request specifics as to how and when something will be done, and get the contact person's name in case you have to refer to this conversation later. Write down any details of your complaint and keep it in your file. Make sure that your notes are dated with the correct dates of all transactions and communication;

If a personal visit does not produce satisfactory results, ask for the address and telephone number of the company headquarters and contact their Customer Service Department. Write a letter to the Manager, General Manager or Owner. Provide all the details of the problem and your efforts to resolve it. Ask for a resolution. Send a copy to the manufacturer, if possible, and be sure to keep a copy of your letter.

If that does not work to your satisfaction, you may contact the Consumer Affairs Department.

Taking legal action should be your last resort. However, if you decide to sue, remember that there are often time restrictions on filing lawsuits. You may have to check with a lawyer about any statute of limitation that may apply to your case.

Presenting Your Case

If possible, place a telephone call to inform the supplier about the problem and try to resolve it. Should there be a need to go to the company or to meet with someone to examine the item, receipts, or billing statements, a convenient time to do so can be arranged over the telephone. You may ask a friend to accompany you if you are concerned about being unfairly treated or you need a witness.

Be polite and remain calm when presenting the problem. Communicate effectively by clearly presenting the problem you have experienced with the product or service. Have all relevant information handy when you contact the producer/supplier, and give a clear but brief explanation of what is wrong and what you would like the company to do to resolve the problem.