



Best Practice Guide for Parcel Complaints



The parcels markets is now a regular feature of people's lives, with the average household receiving 15 parcels a year,¹ and 1 in 3 of us sending a parcel at least once a month.² Whilst consumers report they are for the most part satisfied with parcel services, our research found that when things go wrong they can be frustrating and difficult to resolve for consumers.

The 3 consumer advocates have created this guide to support parcel operators create complaints handling processes that are clear, concise and easy to navigate. It's based both on our research with consumers, who have told us their frustrations with and expectations for the complaints process, and on our conversations with operators. We hope it can be used by operators to guide them towards complaints handling processes that are simple to understand, stress-free, and create the best outcomes for consumers.

Defining complaints

In its Consumer Protection Conditions, Ofcom describes a postal complaint as:

“any expression of dissatisfaction made to a postal operator, related to one or more of its products or services or the manner in which the postal operator has dealt with any such expression of dissatisfaction, where a response is explicitly or implicitly required or expected to be provided”³

We understand that consumers don't just contact parcel operators to express dissatisfaction with a product or service. Many consumers will contact the parcel operator to check details such as when their parcel will be delivered, or to change the delivery address.

That said, there are many contacts in between asking for an arrival date and lodging a formal complaint, where contact is made because the consumer has an issue with the service.

¹ Citizens Advice, *The market that doesn't deliver*, December 2019

² Citizens Advice, *Consumer use and experience of parcel sending services*, December 2018

³ Ofcom, *Consumer Protection Condition 3 Complaints Handling and Redress 3.1.2 (d)*, March 2017

We therefore define a complaint as **any contact with the operator in which the consumer is attempting to resolve an issue with the service, or express dissatisfaction at the service they have received.**

Current dynamics of the complaints process

The parcels market can be confusing for consumers. When receiving items bought online, there's often a lack of clarity as to who to contact when things go wrong. The consumer's contract is with the retailer but many will contact the parcel operator if they have a problem with the delivery, and most operators will happily handle these complaints. So whilst the responsibility ultimately lies with the retailer for these parcels, many consumers will find themselves interacting with operators to resolve their problems.

Consumers sending parcels also experience a range of issues, from confusing packaging guidelines to lack of clarity on what they can and can't send with each carrier. When trying to resolve problems with parcels they've sent, Citizens Advice research found that nearly half of consumers had difficulty finding the correct contact details to resolve their issue. A quarter said they had to wait over 2 weeks for a resolution to their problems.⁴

This guide has been developed from research on parcel operator complaints carried out by the 3 UK consumer watchdogs.

Citizens Advice Scotland commissioned a survey with consumers, and carried out interviews with parcel operators. It found that complaints process are not well developed across the industry. Of the operators it interviewed, 7 in 9 don't have a specific complaints policy on their website. It also found that consumers want a complaints process that is easy, clear to find and accessible, and that it's important to them to be able to contact the operator by email or phone.⁵

⁴ Citizens Advice, *Consumer use and experience of parcel sending services*, December 2018

⁵ Citizens Advice Scotland, *Postal Complaints: Improving the complaints experience for consumers*, December 2019

The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland analysed 391,000 consumer reviews on trustpilot, and reviewed the websites of 11 parcel operators as to whether they are simple and transparent, and whether information on the complaints process is easy to find. It found that in 55% of cases the websites were not simple to use, that 64% of websites were not transparent, and that information on complaints processes was difficult to find in 45% of cases.⁶

Citizens Advice commissioned 30 in depth interviews with consumers who had made a complaint to a delivery company in the last 3 months. This research found that when problems do occur, they impact on consumers by causing uncertainty for a long period, and means they have to spend unexpected effort and additional time resolving the problem. Suggestions as to how these processes could be improved included practical changes such as clearer channels of communication and easy-to-find contact details, and soft touch changes such as customer service representatives showing empathy and understanding.

The Guide

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⁶ The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, *Stamp Out Complaints*, June 2019

Best practice guide: 4 steps to successful complaint handling

1

Make it quick and easy for consumers to complain

- ✓ Offer a range of ways to complain:
 - One free option
 - Provide a telephone number and email address
- ✓ Have a dedicated “how to complain” webpage, which is one-click away from the homepage
- ✓ Have a simple and transparent complaints process for consumers:
 - Tell consumers about their consumer rights and their right to complain
 - Detail timescales
 - Outline the escalation and appeal process



Contact

2

Take ownership, treat consumers as individuals and manage expectations

- ✓ Take ownership of the complaint:
 - Acknowledge the complaint within 24 hours
 - Provide contact details
 - Explain the complaint and appeal process
 - Detail the timescales
- ✓ Treat consumers as individuals:
 - Listen to and empathise with all the consumer’s concerns
 - Understand the consumer’s individual circumstances
- ✓ Manage expectations:
 - Explain what will happen next, when to expect a response and what to do if they are still unhappy



Interaction

3

Show you care and provide support

- ✓ Keep in regular contact with the consumer
- ✓ Investigate the issue, be flexible and show discretion
- ✓ Empower staff to resolve issues on first contact
- ✓ Explain what went wrong and apologise
- ✓ Arrange for a fair solution
- ✓ Provide closure
- ✓ Refund and compensate where relevant
- ✓ Check how consumers feel about the outcome of their complaint



Follow up and Resolution

4

Have a strategic focus on complaints and complaint handling performance

- ✓ Get consumer feedback:
 - Carry out post-complaint satisfaction surveys with consumers
 - Ask for consumer suggestions about how to improve to help prevent future problems
- ✓ Develop KPIs for complaints and complaint handling
- ✓ Publish complaint data including complaint numbers, complaint outcomes, key issues and what you will do to make things better



Prevention and Monitoring

Make it quick and easy for consumers to complain



"It was easy to find out how to make a complaint. I found the information I needed on the website and I was able to call someone to speak to about my complaint. It was hassle free and quick."

Take ownership, treat consumers as individuals and manage expectations

"They understood where I was coming from and took ownership of my complaint. I was clearly told what would happen next and how long it would take to investigate my concerns. It was simple to escalate my complaint and I was supported when I did this."



Show you care and provide support



"I feel they cared about the problems I experienced. They kept in regular contact. They sorted out my problem, told me how it happened and we reached a decision which was fair."

Have a strategic focus on complaints & complaint handling performance

"I was impressed. They followed up to ask if I was happy about how my complaint was handled. It was clear to me that senior management wanted to make things better."



1 CONTACT

Make it quick and easy for consumers to complain.

“We really want to hear about any problems you’ve experienced with us. To make it easy there are a number of ways you can make a complaint:

- Call us on [phone number]
- Complete our online form
- Email us at [email address]
- Speak to our Live Chat team
- Write to us at [office address]

We are here to help from [insert] am to [insert] pm Monday to Friday, and [insert] am to [insert] pm on Saturday and Sunday.”

2 INTERACTION

Take ownership, treat consumers as individuals and manage expectations.

“To help us investigate your complaint, please tell us:

- Your name, address, and any tracking numbers
- Who sent the item and the address it was going to
- What has went wrong and when it happened
- What you would like us to do to put it right

We’ll acknowledge your complaint within 24 hours and respond to the issues you have raised within 10 working days.”

3 FOLLOW UP AND RESOLUTION

Show you care and provide support.

“If you are still not happy with the outcome, all you have to do is contact us on any of the details above. Our escalated complaints team will then review the matter and provide a response within [] working days.

If you live in Great Britain, Citizens Advice Consumer Service provide independent advice about your rights.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk or call 03454 04 05 06 (Welsh: 03454 05 05 05)

If you live in Northern Ireland, The Consumer Council provide independent advice about your rights.

www.consumercouncil.org.uk or call 0800 121 6022”

4 PREVENTION AND MONITORING

Have a strategic focus on complaints and complaint handling performance.

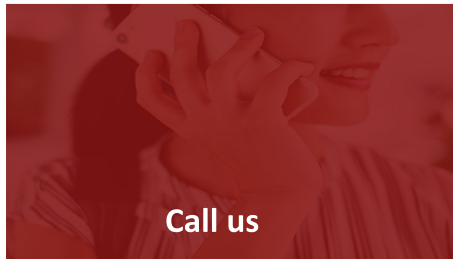
“Please complete our post complaint satisfaction survey [insert link]. Each year we publish the number of complaints we have received, how we are using this information to making things better and how well we handled your complaint.”

Consumer Complaints

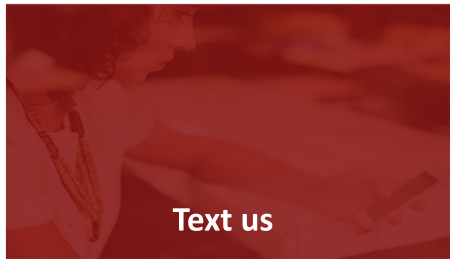
How do I make a complaint?



Make a complaint



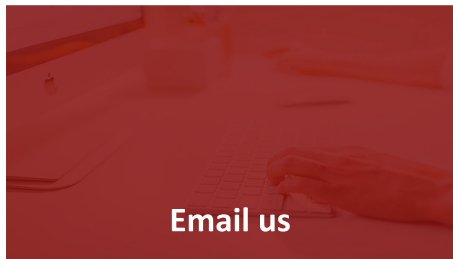
Call us



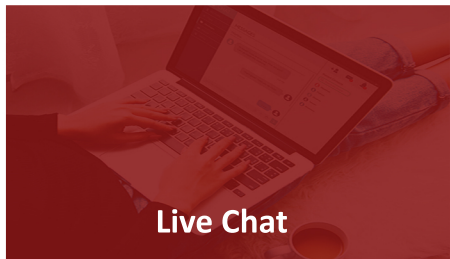
Text us



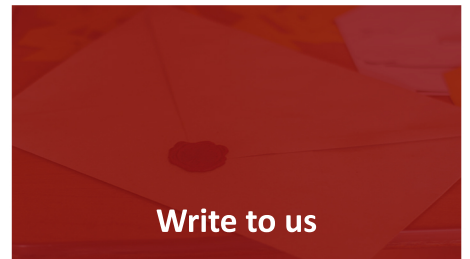
Online Form



Email us



Live Chat



Write to us

What we need



When to expect a response



What to do if you are still not happy



How to find out about your consumer rights



Provide feedback on how we handled your complaint



We're committed to being transparent about the complaints we receive

