



ARE YOU READY TO EXPORT - Video Summary

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Tip Eight:

Customer Service

Customer service can make or break your business. But make no mistake. Customer service is not simply giving your customers everything they ask for. Customer service is about looking at what you are able and willing to do for your customers to give them the best experience possible with your work.

Do you have a customer service policy? Make one now. A list of what you're willing and able to do for customers in every situation you can think of. The more you have clearly written down, the easier it is to enforce.

We all want our customers to be happy. But recognize that there's a difference between "I really wanted the blue one instead of the red one I ordered" and "this item is not at all as it was described on your website." Know how you will work with customers in each of those situations in a way that's satisfying on both sides.

I sell my work online and colour is the primary thing I'm selling. I have a good camera, an excellent photography set up and work hard to ensure that what I see on my calibrated computer screen is identical to the item on my table beside it. Still we can't be in every home, calibrating every computer screen, and colour shifts do happen. Full descriptions of what they should see on their screen help.

But once in a while, people are not happy. My policy in these cases is to exchange their purchase, with shipping at the cost of the customer. I've yet to find anyone unhappy with this.

If, on the other hand, there is something defective or the photo and/or description was completely wrong, of course a full refund or exchange with shipping covered.

Do you offer commissions and custom orders? Write down what the commissioning process is and what they should expect, including what portions are complementary and at what points in the process they should expect to make decisions and provide payment for your services.

Do you wholesale? Have a wholesale policy that you can send to potential clients. Lay everything out in writing: what is the expected minimum order, who pays for shipping (they should. Always.), what sort of timeline should they expect for delivery, when do you expect payment, and so on.

Policies like these are living, breathing documents. You will add to them and edit them as you gain more experience and a better understanding of your customer's needs and your ability to meet them.

Customer service does not mean you allow yourself to be abused or insulted. Have a policy about how to deal with customers determined to be unhappy, no matter what you offer them. There is nothing wrong with deciding it's not worth your time or effort to work with someone who will not be satisfied. What will you do in these cases to a) sever the relationship with that client and b) have your customer service record remain intact?

Above all, good customer service is about responding. Respond to inquiries, even the ones that are beyond your scope. (I've even found referrals to other craftspeople who are better suited to the work usually comes back to me in a positive way.) Respond to concerns. None of us wants to hear that anyone has had a problem with our work, but responding to those concerns is more likely to result in positive feedback to others. "The teapot wasn't to my taste, but I really like how she worked with me to find something else.