

Ian Baines – Managing Director
Electrolux U.K.
Addington Way
Luton
LU4 9QQ

12th. February 2011.

Dear Mr Baines,

I feel sure you share my conviction that despite every effort to maintain the highest standards of quality control and after care, products will continue to fail and customers will suffer disappointment and inconvenience. However it is not the failure that remains in the mind of the customer, it is the way the problem was resolved by the manufacturer or supplier.

We have been satisfied Zanussi customers for many years. Our fridge, the freezer, the dishwasher and the washing machine are all Zanussi products and have proved reliable. I still have a 20 year old Zanussi fridge that is housed in an outhouse and keeps the beer cool.

However, when our three year old and immaculate Zanussi Freezer ZFU 325W failed, we called your Service Dept. for attention. The Invoice is enclosed. The Engineer who called was obviously anxious to get away as soon as possible. Within minutes, he declared that the compressor had failed and blocked the system and we had better buy a new freezer. Anxious to collect the £57.60 due, he wrote an invoice and we paid him. He gave every impression that he was not surprised at this failure (perhaps it might be a common fault with this and similar models.)

Now, this is where good customer service is important. I suggest that what the engineer should have been trained to say was:

"I am extremely sorry that this fault has occurred. Although your freezer is out of warranty, our quality control department is anxious to identify unusual failures of our products. If you decide to have this freezer repaired, I estimate that with a new compressor and a replacement xyz plus the labour it will cost £xxx which is almost the cost of a new machine. If you wish, I can make immediate arrangements to have this machine uplifted back to our Depot for full inspection. I can also ask our sales people to call you and advise when they can deliver you a new freezer. They may well offer you any additional discount to compensate for the inconvenience you have been caused"

That would sound to me like a company that really cares and realises that when a freezer fails, the owner needs a quick repair or a new one as soon as possible. It also means that the manufacturer makes another sale. Instead, the engineer we saw was neither empowered nor inclined to widen his responsibilities for good customer relations. Once he'd received the £57.60, he lost interest and made for the door. Having received an unsatisfactory visit from the Service Engineer, we thought that we might try your Customer Service Department to ascertain policy regarding young but failed products. Our e-mail said the following:

Topics: Customer Care

First name: Brian

Last name: Hennessey

Email: [REDACTED]

Contact phone number: [REDACTED]

Product type: Zanussi Freezer

Product code / model no.: ZFU 325W

Subject: Reliability

Message: We have a Zanussi dishwasher a Zanussi washing machine. Both extremely reliable. We purchased a ZFU 325W from John Lewis in late 2008 with a two year warranty. It failed to function this week and your engineer was called. He suspects that something has broken in the compressor which has released oil into the gas pipe and is now blocking the gas circulation and the compressor cannot pump correctly. He says we need a new freezer. I realise this machine is out of warranty but surely it is environmentally unacceptable to throw this machine away. Surely a repair is more sensible and less costly than buying a new freezer although I appreciate that your prime concern is to sell more units. We need a freezer no higher than 1160 x650. Can you help or provide some advice.

Thank you

From the response, it is clear that your Customer Service staff are not considered capable enough to deal with a specific customer enquiry. They are prevented from expressing an opinion or suggesting a solution. They are obliged to select sentences or passages from pre-determined responses that probably appear in a training manual.

For example:

I am concerned to learn of the problems that you have experienced with your appliance and appreciate this will have been a source of disappointment to you.

This is a completely unnecessary statement. It refers to an "appliance" rather than our "freezer" – a clear indication that our enquiry is not being treated specifically as the sentence is a standard opening response. Of course any customer is "disappointed" when a product fails, there is little need to draw further attention to it.

Whilst Electrolux makes every effort to ensure that products are manufactured to the highest standard, it is possible for failures to occur from time to time. Nonetheless, this company does give sympathetic consideration to requests for assistance with the cost of repairs outside the manufacturers warranty.

Another unnecessary declaration – of course every manufacturer aims to avoid failures and every customer knows that failures occur from time to time. However, we now come to a worthwhile sentence in that the Company will consider assistance with the cost of repairs outside of the warranty,

However, the manufacturer cannot accept liability for component failures for an indefinite period and likewise may not be in a position to meet the costs of returning the product to full working order.

Another negative and unnecessary statement. The policy is covered by the word “assistance” in the previous paragraph.

Taking into account the age of your appliance, I regret I am unable to provide a contribution to the cost of the repair on this occasion.

Having raised our hopes regarding “assistance” with the “cost of repairs outside the manufacturers warranty” we are now advised that “I am unable to provide “ (it should read *WE are unable to provide* as he or she is speaking on behalf of the manufacturer and not paying for repairs from their own pocket) In addition, he or she is unaware of the actual age of the product. These two statements should never appear together in any communication from your Customer Service Department.

We may however be able to assist you with the cost of a new appliance, if it would be possible for you to contact us here at the customer care department on the below number we will be happy to discuss this with you. Further to this we will need to contact the service agent that diagnosed the appliance before we can consider what we call a 'Contribution Exchange'.

There is little point in contacting the Customer Service Department to discuss a discount on a new freezer until the service agent has reported his diagnosis. (why can't your staff insert the word “freezer” instead of “appliance”? This word is often associated with products to assist the incontinent.) The fault had in fact been diagnosed by your Service Engineer and if it was part of your service/sales policy that he should report his diagnosis immediately to Customer Services, the whole procedure could have been speeded up and a new Zanussi freezer installed almost before the food had thawed out.

Essentially a 'Contribution Exchange' is where we, the manufacturer can offer you a new appliance at a reduced rate.

Yes, I feel sure that even customers bordering on the illiterate would understand what a *contribution exchange* means. If there is some doubt, why not call it a “discount if you buy a new one from us” However, the word “exchange” suggests that the manufacturer will take the old one back but that has never been suggested by Electrolux.

May I offer my apologies for any inconvenience this may have caused, and despite recent events trust you will not be deterred from considering Electrolux products in the future.

This worn out sign-off line never did carry any real sincerity. It even suggests that inconvenience may not have been caused yet we all know that when you have to unload a freezer, find somewhere else to store the contents, pay out for a new unit and hope it is delivered on time it is all VERY inconvenient and so much so that an insincere apology copied from the training manual is no comfort at all. There would be no need for such sentences if manufacturers were straight forward and clear about what they will or won't offer their customers.

Should you wish to reply to email correspondence, may we please request you include/attach any previous history (using reply with full history) and contact details, this enables us to resolve matters more efficiently.

You will never resolve matters more efficiently if you fail to read customers enquiries carefully and respond with a positive proposal specific to their concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Hennessey