

## Customer Service Is Still Terrible, and We Still Rage Over It

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BY Brian O'Connell

NEW YORK (TheStreet) -- The early start to the holiday shopping season apparently hasn't made the experience any easier on the nerves.

Reports of violence and brawls marked the start of the Christmas shopping season across the U.S.

An unpleasant shopping experience could well be in your immediate future too, according to one academic who tracks consumer shopping "rage" year-round.

Mary Jo Bitner, executive director of the Center for Services Leadership at Arizona State University, says that "more American consumers than ever are dissatisfied with the products and services we buy," and that consumers are "less happy with the service received" after they complain about a botched purchase.

Overall, 56 million households had at least one toxic shopping experience last year, involving \$76 billion in potentially lost revenue on the table for retailers.

"If a company handles your complaint well, then you typically become a more loyal customer. However, if they don't, then you become 12% less brand loyal than if you never complained at all," Bitner says. "The moral of the story: Don't invest in improving your customer service unless you're going to do it right."

Bitner's group at ASU, along with Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, surveyed 1,000 households to gauge the shopping rage factor. What they found was that things haven't improved in 37 years.

"We found satisfaction is no higher than reported in 1976, when the federal government issued a similar study," says Scott Broetzmann of CCMC. "People are frustrated that there are too many automated response menus, there aren't enough customer care agents, they waste a lot of time dealing with the problem and they have to contact the company an average of four times to get resolution."

## What's more:

- The number of consumers reporting "problems" with retailers jumped from 32% in 1976 to 50% this year.
- 68% of U.S. households report experiencing retail shopping rage this year, compared to 60% in 2011.
- More Americans than ever are reporting "yelling and cursing" at business customer service representatives, with the cable and satellite television sector leading the pack in receiving angry complaints.
- Unhappy consumers are turning to social media to register their complaints, with 35% of Americans of using Facebook to complain about a shopping experience, up from 19% in 2011.

While the holiday shopping season is a flashpoint, consumers can expect the syndrome to last year-round, the ASU survey says.



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