

The Mystery Soup!

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Have you ever purchased a canned good at a supermarket, or any packaged good, for that matter, only to find the contents of the labeled product not to be what was expected? The case of The Mystery Soup! deals with one such event. In this situation, based on the label on the product, the contents of the product should have been tomato soup. When the can was opened, it was found that the contents was a light-yellow, creamy substance with what appeared to be bits light-coloured meat scattered throughout. The contents was not red! It definitely was not tomato soup!

The product in question is a generic brand of a supermarket. Generic products are produced under contract for retailers and other intermediary members of the channel (e.g., brokers, wholesalers), so the name of the actual manufacturer is unknown to the consumer. The labels of such products only state that the product was produced for the relevant channel member or it just states the name of the intermediary. In this situation, only the name of the retailer was on the can.

An examination of the content of the can suggested that the actual product might be cream of chicken soup or something similar, who knows! Given the unknown nature of the product, it was best not to consume the product, since it could be hazardous to one's health. Instead, the contents of the product, and the can, were placed in the freezer compartment of a refrigerator for safe keeping, just in case there was something wrong with the product that would require chemical analysis by the company or the Board of Health.

An email was sent to the Customer Service department of the company, explaining the nature of the product. The serial number stamped on the top of the can was also provided to the company, thereby providing a means for the company to trace the origin of the product.

The only response from the company by the customer was an acknowledgment of the email sent by the customer, thanking the customer and indicating that the matter would be investigated. Since months passed with no further response from the company, the customer throughout the can and the contents.

Questions:

1. Have you ever faced such a situation with respect to a purchase (i.e., the contents did not match the label? What did you do?
2. Since the soup situation deals with a consumable, do you think that the customer did the right think in contacting the company? Explain.

3. Did the customer suffer any loss with respect to this purchase? Do you think such a state could affect the customer's future purchases at this store?
4. What are the different ways that a company could deal with "complaints" of this nature received from customers?
5. Review the literature research that pertains to customer relationship management. What does the research indicate about the nature of the responses to customers that a company could provide? What does the research indicate about how customers respond to the nature of the response provided by companies in situations of this nature?

See Gary I. Clark, Peter F. Kaminski, and David R. Rink. (1992). "Consumer Complaints: Advice on How Companies Should Respond Based on an Empirical Study," *Journal of Services Marketing*, 6(Winter), 41-50.

6. What should the supermarket have done with respect to the mystery soup complaint? Why?