

Consumer Corner

Finding Great Online Customer Service

(NAPSA)—Following a few tips could help online shoppers receive great customer service—something one recent study found may be harder to come by than you might expect.

The study sent the following two e-mail messages to 100 of America's top online retailers: What credit/debit cards can I use to make payment, and what are your shipment charges?

An overwhelming 34 percent of customer service e-mails were left unanswered, with just over 50 percent providing accurate and complete information in responses. Additionally, the study, conducted by a leading Customer Interaction Management (CIM) software solutions provider called Talisma Corporation, www.talisma.com, found that:

- Ninety-seven percent of online retailers had no knowledge base to help prospective buyers make an informed decision.

- More than a quarter of phone calls answered did not provide accurate information.

Finding The Best Customer Service

So how can consumers help ensure they'll get the service they need? Experts offer these tips:

- **Consider The Source**—Do a little research before shopping on a Web site. Check consumer message boards, the Better Business Bureau Web site and other trusted sources to see if reputable complaints have been lodged against an online retailer. You can also talk with friends and family



It's a good idea to research an online retailer's customer service before making a purchase.

to learn about their online shopping experiences.

- **Look For Ways To Connect**—If you prefer to talk with a representative, be sure the retailer provides a phone number on its site, and consider calling it before you make a purchase, to test the customer-service waters. If you'd rather chat online, be certain that option is available. The study found that only 30 percent of businesses audited could provide customer service via live chat.

- **Buy Into Security**—Be certain the site you shop on provides security services and protection against identity theft. If no protections are provided, odds are good that the site—and its customer service—is not reputable.

To download the customer service report and obtain a list of the online retailers that were surveyed, visit http://talisma.com/tal-emails/us/retail/ret_us_form.asp.