

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2004 - VOL. CCXLIV NO. 89 - ★★ ★★ \$1.00

## Customer Service Leaves Many Consumers in a 'Rage'

By RAYMUND FLANDEZ

An increasing number of Americans report being extremely upset with how a "serious" complaint of theirs was handled by customer service, according to a new survey by the Customer Care Alliance.

This year's report found that 73% of those that had a product or service problem experienced what the CCA termed "customer rage," a five percentage-point increase from the group's 2003 report.

Only 16% of the respondents said they felt completely satisfied or received more than they asked for. More than half of the complainants felt that they received nothing from the companies that caused their problems.

The CCA, a Virginia-based consortium of three customer-service firms, partnered with the Center for Services Leadership at the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University to conduct the study.

Over the past three decades, companies have tried some new approaches to keep customers happy. They have established call centers, expanded budgets that give irate customers monetary relief such as coupons or reimbursements and installed automated telephone response systems. Last year, North American com-

panies spent \$1.75 billion in software that helps manage every aspect of their relationship with their customers, according to Gartner Inc., a consulting firm.

But the report found that more than half of the respondents decided never to do business with the company again, or threatened to talk with management. A quarter yelled or raised their voice, while 6% cursed or used profanity.

Still, the report said it may be easier than the companies think to regain consumer confidence. The study concluded that the majority of complainants did not want a free product or service from the companies. Nor did they want compensation for their troubles.

Apart from getting their product or service fixed, the respondents would have settled for an explanation, an apology, a chance to vent their frustrations, and assurance that the problem won't occur again. Eleven percent wanted revenge and 3% took legal remedies.

For many, lost time from the efforts fueled the rage.

It took an average of 4.3 tries by the customer to get a problem resolved, the survey found. The financial-services industry, according to the survey, is worse than some others at what is known in the industry as "ping-ponging" customers.