

RANDOM

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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

The right way to handle a customer service problem

I use an American Express card for business expenses and this week I needed to have a purchased shipped to an address that wasn't associated with the card. Making the change should have been a quick, easy process. *Should have been* and *was* are two somewhat different concepts, as I found out.

When I called American Express and waded through the automated attendant process, I arrived at the right place. The person I spoke with told me the process wouldn't take long. But then he ran into a problem. The computer system wouldn't allow him to enter an alternate shipping address. He put me on hold while he checked with someone else.

American Express telephone support representatives are among the most polite I've ever dealt with. When he returned, the agent apologized profusely for the delay and then told me that he couldn't add an alternate address. He could, however, change the "business address" to the shipping address and leave the "billing address" alone. I've been at the same business address for 22 years, so that seemed OK.

The change was quick, but wrong

Making the change took just a few seconds, but then the agent wanted to sell me on a \$20 addition that would be charged each time I rented a car with the American Express card. I rent cars no more than 3 or 4 times a year and my insurance policy covers these rentals. After sending several "not interested" signals, I finally convinced the agent that I wouldn't be buying the service.

And that was it. I thought.

A few hours later, I heard from a company that I'd placed an order with. The billing address wasn't matching. While I was on the phone, the company's billing clerk tried submitting the order again with the "business address" as the "billing address". They matched. The American Express agent apparently had been more interested in selling me the \$20 rental car add-on than in doing correctly the task that had prompted my call.

Getting it fixed

It wasn't until Saturday morning at 6am that I had time to call American Express to sort out the problem. This time I didn't navigate the automated attendant system properly and the first person I spoke with wasn't authorized to fix the problem. He understood what I needed, though, and asked me to wait on hold while he got the right person on the line.

When he came back, he had a customer service person on the line. The customer service agent knew exactly what the problem was, so the person who had answered my call only understood what I wanted but also had taken the time to explain the problem to the person he passed me to.

The customer service agent apologized for *dropping the ball*. "We certainly can add an alternate billing address," she told me and then proceeded to do so. She then restored the previous billing address.

And she didn't try to sell me anything.

The American Express agent who made the incorrect changes was probably a new employee. While he'd gotten the sales part of his training right, he wasn't fluent in how to make what I think should be a fairly common change: Adding a shipping address. The agent I spoke with on Saturday morning had probably also been trained to sell, but she knew better than to do so when there was a problem.

At the conclusion of the call, I was convinced that the problem had been solved ("This change will be in effect within 10 minutes") and that the person I had spoken with really understood what I wanted to do.

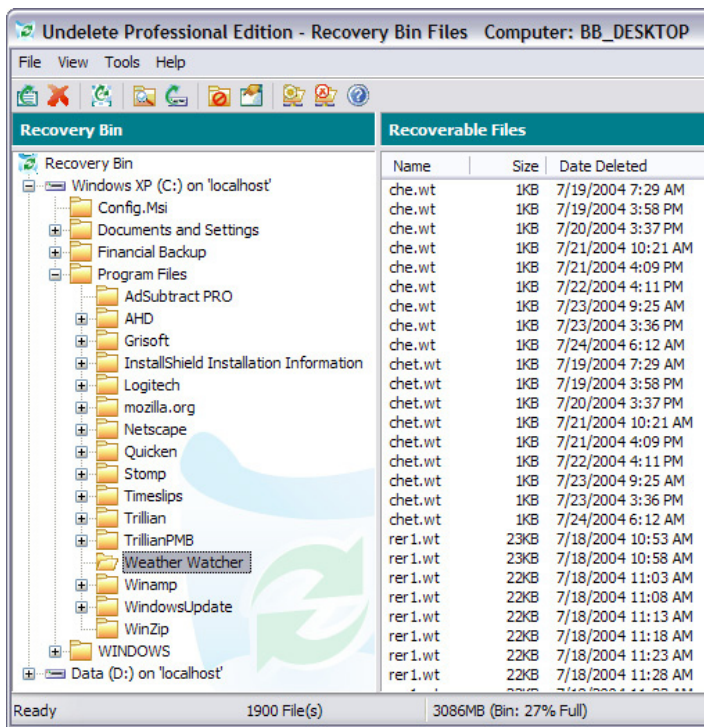
Moral: A company can make a mistake without damaging its reputation if the second person who deals with the problem takes care of it quickly and professionally. **B**

Undelete that!

Windows comes with its own recycle bin that allows you to recover a file after you've deleted it, so you might wonder why anyone would consider spending an extra \$30 to buy somebody else's program that seems to do essentially the same thing. The quick, easy answer is that it does more.

The Windows recycle bin doesn't protect every deleted file, but Executive Software's Undelete 4.0 replaces the recycle bin with its Recovery Bin and makes it possible to get back files that have been deleted.

Undelete has an Emergency Undelete function that can be used to retrieve files deleted before you purchased Undelete if Windows hasn't yet overwritten them. The website explains how to maximize your chances of recovering lost files if you



The screen shot above illustrates a directory that contains 1900 files, many of which have duplicate names. While there's little chance that I might want to recover a data file from Weather Watcher, this illustrates one of Undelete's primary advantages: The ability to restore any of several copies of a file with the same name. If you've ever edited a document and then overwritten a good file with a bad file, you'll immediately understand how useful this can be.

don't yet own the program. Another extra feature helps ensure that files you want to go away are really gone. SecureDelete erases files by overwriting them with procedure designed for the Department of Defense and the National Security Agency. This process is used for some government files, but disk drives that contain top secret files are supposed to be physically shredded. For most of us, overwriting files with a process such as SecureDelete is adequate. Why? When you sell a computer or give it away, it's possible for someone to retrieve files even if you have formatted the disk drive.

Undelete goes far beyond the Windows Recycle Bin by allowing users to recover files that they have deleted from a mapped network drive. There is a condition, though: To be able to recover files on a network drive, the network server must be running the server version of Undelete (\$300 per server).

Undelete is compatible with Windows XP, 2000 and NT. Undelete Professional Edition allows you to remotely recover deleted files on your network when Undelete Server Edition is installed on your server. Undelete Home Edition has all the functionality of Undelete Professional Edition but lacks the network file recovery ability, so you need only the Home Edition if you're protecting standalone computers – either in the office or at home.

For more information about Undelete, see Executive Software's website at www.Executive.com. **B**

When a boast isn't a boast

In a marketing meeting late in July, one of a company's sales reps, who was sitting in on a website redesign meeting, suggested that we put something on the website to tell people what a good job we're doing. While it's a good idea to let people know you're doing a good job for them, just telling them you're doing a good job isn't particularly effective.



"If we tell them we're doing a good job," I said, "it's nothing more than a boast. I can sit here and say, 'I'm a really great person!' but would you believe me?"

Without attribution, a boast is meaningless. Of course you think you're doing a great job. What else would you be expected to say – *We're not very good, but we sure would appreciate your business?*

In fact, a variant of that approach can be useful. Avis made a name for itself as "number 2" but the company said it "tried harder." Must have worked.

Who said it?

As a long-time journalist, I know how important attribution is. Every quotation is supposed to be attributed so that the reader can determine whether the statement is reasonable and believable, whether the speaker is reliable.

Advertising has a similar tenet: Testimonials are better than boasts.

If you're in the enviable position of doing your work so well that you regularly receive letters of thanks, get permission to excerpt quotes – *We're not very good, but we sure would appreciate your business.* with attribution.

Most of us don't receive letters like that on a daily basis, though, and we have to go fishing. There's nothing wrong with calling a client and asking how you're doing. If you're not doing well, the client will tell you and you'll have a chance to solve a problem. If you are doing well, you can ask permission to quote the client. Most will readily agree.

When the client agrees, type the quotation you'd like to use and send a copy to the client with a request that the person you're quoting approve the words, sign the page, and send it back.

When it comes to convincing people that you're good, one attributed testimonial is worth at least 1000 idle boasts. **B**

CORNER on the market by A.J. Stinnett

"The key to career progress is to ask what you can do for your company, not what your company can do for you."