



HSBC overhaul complaint-handling style to cut comeback and connect with customers

Sector

Financial

Area of training

Customer letter writing

Delivery

In-person and remote training and follow-up coaching

Delegates

350+

The challenge

Long, indirect and jargon-filled letters that were frustrating customers and resulting in escalated complaints.

The solution

Tailored, interactive class-based and remote letter-writing training for UK and overseas staff, with practice on real HSBC examples and follow-up coaching.

The results

Consistent global standards for clear, approachable letters that take ownership. Reduced comeback from dissatisfied customers.

When a customer is unhappy enough to complain to your customer-service team, you need to be able to trust that your staff have the skills to resolve the issue and leave them satisfied.

Emphasis trained over 350 staff at HSBC to connect better with customers through their letter writing, enabling the bank to live up to its brand promise of being a 'global bank at a local level'.

Towards first-time resolution

HSBC's complaint-handling skills were frustrating customers. There were few controls in place and response letters tended to be long and indirect.

The bank wanted to develop a positive, active writing style, devoid of jargon and 'bankspeak'. It also wanted to deal with problems more quickly and reduce the drain on time and money caused by complaints not being resolved first time.

'We want to know that we'll be consistent in giving a good-quality response, that people will own the problem and that the customer will know what to do as a result of getting the letter,' says John Baker, Manager of Customer Letters and Terms and Conditions.

Owning the customer problem

Emphasis designed a course that examined the whole letter-writing process, including a formula for a logical and effective structure. Participants worked on genuine HSBC letters, enabling them to practise on 'live'

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complaints. The course looked at how to use language to take ownership of a problem and come across in a personal and approachable way.

Emphasis also put together a glossary to help the teams avoid using unnecessary jargon. The training included follow-up one-to-one coaching.

Positive customer feedback

Staff now have a greater understanding of how to handle complaints effectively, by avoiding defensive writing and not hiding behind policies.

'The letters are a marked improvement from where they were before,' says John. 'The response from customers has been positive. We're seeing greater concentration in answering questions, so there is less comeback from customers who say that we can't handle the complaint. That sort of feedback – almost non-feedback – is very positive.'

John also found the training style highly interactive. 'The Emphasis trainers make it a very positive, discussion-based course – not a series of rules in the classroom.'

Global standards

HSBC has since implemented distance-learning writing-skills training for its overseas complaint-handling teams. Emphasis created a bespoke, interactive e-learning course comprising three modules that each take around two hours to complete. This includes one-to-one telephone coaching sessions.

In the UK and abroad, HSBC now has letter-writing standards based around the Emphasis training. The standards encourage ownership: a letter must be in the active voice and the writer must be able to answer specific questions and show understanding of what the customer wants. They must also encourage clarity: no bank-speak or jargon; 'thank you' and 'sorry' where appropriate; and positive, succinct writing throughout.

5 reasons to choose Emphasis

1. Over 25 years' experience

We've helped improve writing and communications skills for over 80,000 delegates and we've worked with over 1,000 companies – including many just like yours.

2. Unique pre-course analysis

Using our unique method, we analyse the writing of every attendee before training, so our trainers have a solid understanding of each person's writing issues from the start.

3. Full course customisation

Our specialist course developers work hard to create a programme that's customised exactly to the problems your team are facing.

4. Post-course support

All delegates have access to our dedicated helpdesk for a year after their course, and we'll send them free tips and resources by email.

5. Our expert trainers

We only recruit trainers who have a strong background in professional writing and communications – and who are able to unfailingly deliver exceptional courses.

Get in touch with our team: call +44 (0)1273 732 888 or email info@writing-skills.com

