

Oh how super

8 December 2006



'Tis the season to be (off your) trolley. Kerry Underwood explains how being treated like lawyers will drive the supermarkets round the bend

Dear Mr Tesbury Co-op

A Merry Christmas to you. I note that with the Legal Services (Abolition of Freedom) Bill now before Parliament, you are jostling with our loveable banks and friendly insurance companies to tell the public what services are on offer next year. Quite exciting, eh?

In the spirit of the season of goodwill, I thought I would give you a little advice – free of course (you'll have to get used to that!)

The first thing that you need to understand is that your customers will no longer have to actually pay for your produce. Provided that they pay half of the bill, they can wheel their supermarket trolleys out and put everything in the car and there is nothing that you can do about it for a month. Still, think of the savings on store detectives and security staff!

Did I mention that you cannot charge a penny piece unless a main board director has personally signed every bill, even if it is for just one pint of milk? Oh, and by the way, don't forget to put that bit on the back of the till receipt (well not really a receipt more a 'please pay if you feel like it' request) telling the customer how to avoid paying your bill.

Actually you might take a view on that because if you do try and get your money you will have to explain what each and every person in your organisation costs and how much profit you are making on each of them. Bit embarrassing on the old Third World coffee-farmer front, eh?

Then the court will slash your bill anyway. There is none so zealous in cutting fees as the former fee-earner.

No one is quite sure when the law of theft stopped applying to theft by clients from solicitors, so you will just have to grin and bear it...

Don't forget to give every customer a personally addressed six-page letter detailing every member of staff dealing with each product that they are buying, starting with Daisy the Cow and her udder maintenance team and ending with the store detectives,

(which you will not now be allowed to employ as paying for your produce will be at the customer's discretion). Great thing – freedom of choice.

There is also the slightly tedious business of means-testing every customer. If they don't have too much money, then you have to sell them everything half-price or send them to a cheaper store, which as we know is just about any other store in the land for many of your products. Remember too that you cannot sell anyone anything unless they have their passport with them and a utility bill. Makes South Africa's old pass laws seem quite tame doesn't it? It's important this one – all your directors go to prison if you slip up on it.

Every superannuated otherwise unemployable care in the community consumer quango member, as well as Witch (well-named I think), will criticise your every move, not that a single one of them could run the proverbial in-house entertainment in a brewery.

Lots of your customers will expect to pay nothing until they have consumed all your produce. The way this works is that the customer takes what they want and if it's good, you get about half of your money from an insurance company three years later. Generally, your customers will expect someone else to pay their bill! Its something to do with My Human Rights (Responsibilities – What Responsibilities?) Act.

You also have to act as a storage depot for your customers, but only for six years after each and every purchase.

Oh, I nearly forgot. If the customer is unhappy with any aspect of your service, you might have to pay them £15,000, even if just for a teeny dent in the 35p tin of baked beans, or even if it was something you gave them completely free! (And you will be doing lots and lots of that.) Doesn't matter that you have broken no law, no code of practice, not been negligent and that the customer has suffered no loss. Better get those carrier bags that never open sorted! Quite a lot – £15,000 a carrier bag!

So, welcome to my world. Look forward to seeing you. Funny that, I've never seen any of you ever at any local or charity or community-based events.

Funny that.

Funny too that the government of the UK thinks that you are suitable guardians of everything that we cherish in this country.

Merry Christmas.

Tomorrow belongs to you.

Kerry Underwood

— What do you think? Post your comments on our forum at www.solicitorsjournal.com or email: editorial@solicitorsjournal.co.uk

Kerry Underwood is senior partner in Underwoods