

Communications Line Number 57 of 20 December 2007

Strawberries and venom

The saga of the email exchange between the Gourmet Foodstore and the customer from the real estate firm, widely reported on TV last night and in the newspapers this morning, is taking a new turn.

Another email exchange between the very same Ms McHugh and another customer is now doing the rounds. Here is the report of the new incident. (The interpolated comments are the author's not mine.) It begins:

In September this year Lai Tong from Trust Investments Management Limited emailed Margaret from the Gourmet Food Store after an unsatisfactory breakfast she organised for the company. It read:

“Hello Margaret, Thank you for catering the breakfast for us on Thursday 6 September 2007. We ordered this breakfast from you based on the very good quality and presentation of the first breakfast and lunch you supplied. Unfortunately, we were disappointed with both the quality and presentation of the breakfast supplied, and we wish to comment as follows:

- Baps filled - We received filled Muffins instead. These were too big and unattractive with minimal filling.*
- Filled Pockets – Supplied as requested but were not fresh and the fillings were messy; some pockets had strips of bacon which consisted of fat and rind.*
- The Savory and Sweet Mini Muffins were a little tough.*
- The Muesli slices were very nice.*
- The Fresh Fruit platter which was ordered later, was also disappointing, for example the ends of the orange were included which consisted mainly of the white plinth.*

We would appreciate if, in future our request cannot be met, you contact us to discuss alternatives/options.”

The following day Margaret responded thus:

“I am sorry you were not happy with your clients breakfast, I am rather confused to say the least that you waited 4 1/2 days to inform me you were disappointed in the consumed breakfast food, it is rather unbelievable. If I

was so unhappy I would have been on the telephone immediately and had the food replace forthwith. Of which I would have been more than pleased to do after having seen it again for myself.

Re fruit platter what is white Plinth. The only Plinth I know of is a square slab at the base of a column or pedestal. If you wish to discuss this further I am on the numbers below please don't send an email it is so time consuming and impersonal . Regards Margaret”

Lai Tong replied with restraint:

“Thanks for your reply. The breakfast on Thursday 6 September commenced 7.30, the food was delivered at 7.20. Many of our guests had already arrived. Could you have provided a replacement breakfast in 10 minutes?

The 4 ½ days to inform you of our disappointment included a 2-day weekend. All in all we are surprised with the unprofessional response to our complaint.”

And I know you are all thinking “don't do it Margaret!” but no, it would seem Margaret can't help herself, and replies with this:

“I guess because I am the boss I can speak truthfully and not be afraid for my job, Does your boss know you are wasting their time emailing petty nonsense. In my 30 yrs as a successfully trained professional caterer I have never had to respond to such nonsense.

Please don't use Gourmet Food Store again we are not used to part timers who have to much time on their hands, have no understanding, good manners and common sense in dealing with a complaint there and then. You never gave us an opportunity to amend what you said was wrong, we or course were never given the food to make an assessment of our own just some nicely typed out letter fully or criticism with no proof, not good enough !!!!! The food could have been tampered with for all we know.

May I suggest in closing you spend a little more time in finding the word your were looking for in English relating to the orange so I can ask my supplier to remove it before he sends them to me in future.

Kind Wish, Margaret.”

Now back to me. One of the marvelous things about email chains is that there is no editing. People pass on the whole saga, so that it makes it very difficult for any of the parties involved in these exchanges to claim that they have been misquoted, their remarks have been taken out of context or to present other excuses, defences and justifications. Their remarks are there for all to see, and people make their own judgments. Defamation action is not an option – after all they said it, and if that makes them look foolish, a jury would surely say that was at their own hand. So Margaret McHugh may well be talking to her lawyer. It'll be a short conversation and perhaps a polite one.

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The e-mail newsletter of John Bishop.
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