

Are you being obtuse?

The definition of obtuse I am referring to is this one, from Merriam-Webster: difficult to comprehend; not clear or precise in thought or expression.

Have you ever visited a website or picked up a brochure that makes you wonder what is really being said? Sometimes there is too much information, sometimes there is not enough and sometimes what is there is hard to understand, unclear. And in certain cases, the information is being presented in a hard to comprehend way ON PURPOSE.

Let me tell you why I am writing this. I ordered my business cards from a place called Overnight Prints. I have ordered my cards there before, and they are of good quality. They are also fast. As the name implies, they print "overnight." Well, I ordered my cards on Thursday and on the next Tuesday, it occurred to me that I had not received a notification that the cards had shipped. I checked my account on line, and it told me that the order was "in process." I wrote an email to their customer service asking why my cards had not yet printed. A few hours later I received a notification that my cards had shipped. Hmmm.

More than 24 hours later I received an email response from customer service telling me that my cards had shipped. I replied telling them that when I checked the cards had NOT shipped, and that I expected they would have shipped by Monday at the latest, and that a more than 24 hour response was not acceptable. The CSR replied that their new policies suggest that if you choose ground shipping (the least expensive choice) your cards are also printed later. I replied that shipping time is not equal to printing time. Amazon, for instance, will ship your book within 24 hours, and depending on how you pay for it, you may get it the next day or the next week. I also told the CSR that perhaps they should make this

little rule of theirs clearer by saying: We expect to print your order on DATE and ship on DATE. Fairly simple and straightforward in my opinion. Well, apparently Overnight Prints is committed to being obtuse. This is the response I got back from them:

Our print and ship time differs by product. Please see charts below for more details. For Business Cards & 4x6 Postcards the print & ship times are as follows:

| Shipping Service | Your Order Will Ship... | Your Order Will Arrive In... |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Next Day Air | The Next Business Day | 2 Business Day |
| 2 Day Air | The Next Business Day | 3 Business Days |
| 3 Day Select | Next Business Day | 4 Business Days |
| Ground w/ Priority Printing | Next Business Day | 4-6 Business Days |
| Ground | Within 3 Business Days | 5-7 Business Days |

Clearly, if you truly want overnight printing from Overnight Prints you need to pony up more money for SHIPPING. If you pay less money for SHIPPING, your PRINTING will also be delayed.

As a customer, I am irritated. I have ordered from this outfit before and I am still paying a fairly high price for printing as well as a high price for ground shipping. I know the shipping will be slower, but the printing should be the same. If you have changed your policies, it is not clear. Your wording is not clear. And when I point that out to you, you revert to your unclear wording. Why endanger a customer relationship over lack of clarity?

In any case, it is a good exercise to try to see what your customers are seeing when they read your marketing materials. Are you being clear? Or are you being obtuse?

