

# How Do You Handle the **P I T A** Customer?

## Another Survival Tactic in a Tough Market

By Scott O'Neill

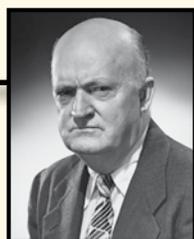


"All I know is, it better be the way I expect it when it's done!"

That's what Steve S. told me just before he hung up the phone. We had just talked about building a custom wood garage door to match his new fencing.

### PITA Customer #1

Meet the PITA customer, also known as the Pain In The A-- customer. We all know that bending over backwards for the customer is essential to get business accomplished. It's also true for the PITA customer, and especially so in a tough economy.



So I took on Mr. S. and did so with vigor. He's definitely a Type A personality—a high-achieving, fast-talking, demanding businessman who is very clear about what he wants. Some might kindly describe him as "a bit pushy."

Yet 2011 means doing more to stay competitive. In this case, it meant brushing off Steve's pushiness and seeing the opportunity in the challenge.

### "Flat-Out Unacceptable"

Steve told me he had spent over \$35,000 on his custom wood fencing. The garage door would "have to match the fencing perfectly," or the door would be "flat-out unacceptable." Frankly, he almost scared me out of doing business with him.

His demands were specific. He wanted "mixed wood species" on his garage door. The fencing had pecky cedar and other boards that were perfectly devoid of knots. He wanted the door's wood nuances to appear just like the fencing—nicely varied.

### Sweating the Details

I took several steps to address his demands. First, I even met with the manufacturer at the

jobsite to discuss the client's demands and how to implement three types of wood in the door.

We ended up using clear western red cedar, knotty incense cedar, and pecky cedar boards. I even calculated the percentage of each type of wood, basing my calculations on the percentages used for his fencing.

I warned Steve about the pecky cedar and how it might interact with weather, particularly on a moving door. We found a special sealant to help preserve and protect it. He loved that I delivered the sealant without his asking.

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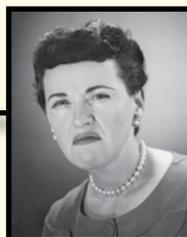
Little steps like these eased his demanding approach. On the day we installed the door, he completely trusted that I would take care of him now and into the future.

His job was tricky. But in the end, we netted a sale of nearly \$7,000 and a very satisfied client to boot!

### PITA Customer #2

Carol D. was another PITA customer with high demands. She had a wood-sided home with a commanding view of the San Francisco Bay Area. The back of her home featured floor-to-ceiling windows, and she wanted to evoke the same feeling on the front, where her garage door dominated the architecture.

Again, I took several steps to meet her needs. I met with her twice onsite to help allay concerns she had about color and about moving the furniture inside her garage.



We discussed many different design approaches, but she really couldn't figure out what would look right. She even referred to herself as "the world's most difficult customer" due to her lack of vision.

### The Slow Approach

I reassured her that we would take a slow-and-steady approach to make sure she would be happy in the end. Using images of her home, I showed her how different designs would look on her garage.

When I finally showed her an all-aluminum/glass door concept, she loved it. We then honed in on colors to play off her wood siding. I suggested a mid-bronze color and digitally superimposed it on the image of her garage.

Her sale took four months to complete—all for just one garage door. Yet the result was an upscale sale of a unique garage door and a highly satisfied customer.

Steve and Carol's stories illustrate the value of the PITA customer. Cultivating their business can yield great profit margins and more referrals, resulting in good business in a bad marketplace. ■

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