

Rights and responsibilities of consumers

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Recently, the Fair Trading Commission launched a Consumer Charter which culminated with officers of the Commission distributing posters and pocket flyers in Bridgetown. The purpose of the Charter is to remind consumers of their rights and responsibilities so that they can make informed decisions when they go out into the marketplace.

Consumer rights and responsibilities are inseparable. Each consumer right listed below is paired with its corresponding responsibility to demonstrate that as consumers without partnership between Rights & Responsibilities, we cannot operate efficiently.

1. The right to be informed – To be given the facts needed to make an informed choice, and to be protected against dishonest or misleading advertising and labelling.
The responsibility to inform yourself – When planning to purchase a product or service, it is your responsibility to seek out as much information as possible on it, including its quality, features and the price of competing products.
2. The right to choose – To be able to select from a range of products and services, if available, offered at competitive prices with an assurance of satisfactory quality.
The responsibility to be wise – Avoid making any impulsive or hasty decisions based on enticing advertisements or overstated claims about a product. Shop around and compare prices and quality so that you get the best bargain.
3. The right to safety – To be protected against products, production processes and services which are hazardous to health or life.
The responsibility to be careful – You should always read and ensure that you understand any warnings and product information. The product should be used as stated in the instructions as failure to do so could be hazardous to your health.
4. The right to be heard – To have consumer interests represented in the making and execution of government policy and to be heard in respect of claims against misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services.
The responsibility to speak up – If you observe breaches of the Consumer Protection Act, such as 'No Exchange, No Refund' notices, you should bring it to the attention of the Fair Trading Commission.
5. The right to redress and to be treated fairly – To receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services.
The responsibility to go through the proper channels – Give the business an opportunity to resolve any problems first before contacting the Commission. We recommend that you submit a complaint letter and give the business 14 days to respond. Ensure you co-operate with reasonable processes and rules.

6. The right to education – To acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services, while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities.

The responsibility to use educational material – The Commission will provide consumer educational material to people of all ages through different forums but it is up to you to use this information to make sound choices in the market place.

7. The right to goods of acceptable quality – The product has to be fit for all the purposes for which it may be commonly used, has an acceptable appearance and is safe and durable. If it has minor defects, businesses should be honest and inform the consumer.

The responsibility to make the best choices – It is important to compare the quality of similar products.

8. The right to rely on the seller – That the product would do whatever the seller says it will.

The responsibility to inform the supplier of the specific requirements needed – If the product is to be used for more than one purpose, make the supplier aware.

9. The right to competent and timely service – Service will be carried out with reasonable care and skill and where no time of completion has been agreed, will be completed within a reasonable time.

The responsibility to engage the services of competent persons to provide the service – Check previous work carried out by supplier.

10. The right to pay an agreed price or a reasonable price – Where no price for a good or service has been agreed, you need only pay a reasonable price, i.e. what other suppliers would charge for the same or similar good or service.

The responsibility to compare prices before purchasing – Before concluding a contract, make sure that the price is agreed on in writing and the contract signed.

11. The right to accurate weights and measurements – The consumer is entitled to receive the equivalent of the amount paid.

The responsibility to carry out necessary checks – Ensure that weighing instruments and fuel dispensers are set to zero before use.

These 11 rights and responsibilities were prepared by the Commission in collaboration with the Department of Commerce & Consumer Affairs, the National Initiative for Service Excellence, the Office of Public Counsel and the Barbados National Standards Institute.