

# Alternative dispute resolution – client disputes

## What is alternative dispute resolution?

Small business faces regular potential conflicts between other businesses, customers, suppliers, partners and employees. Many can be dealt with quickly and effectively through negotiation, yet some disputes that remain unresolved may affect the profitability and productivity of a business.

Alternative dispute resolution is the practice of resolving such disputes without using conventional legal channels (eg the court systems).

## Client disputes

Disputes with customers are common and need to be handled quickly and professionally to maintain goodwill and reduce the risk of financial loss.

Small business operators must be fully aware of their obligations under consumer laws and have procedures in place to ensure compliance. If a complaint does arise, it is better that the matter be resolved directly with the customer as quickly as possible. This is consistent with the approach recommended to consumers by consumer affairs organisations.

- **Office of Fair Trading:** <http://www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au/oft/oftweb.nsf> The Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development assists businesses and consumers, and provides advice on a range of issues including how businesses can avoid customer complaints and what to do if they should receive one.
- **Department of Justice and Attorney-General:** <http://www.justice.qld.gov.au> Dispute Resolution Centres are located throughout Queensland to provide a free, confidential and impartial mediation service to the community.

There is a wide range of government agencies and industry associations available to assist in handling consumer disputes. Please refer to the Yellow Pages under “Business and Professional Organisations” for more information.

## Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Alternative dispute resolution – disputes between businesses
- Alternative dispute resolution – disputes within your business
- Alternative dispute resolution – external disputes
- Control your business problems
- Manage conflict