

Although I'm sure many people would disagree with me, in my opinion, buyers won't always look for the lowest price when they're making a purchase. Other factors like image or convenience may be just as important. For me, the key thing is getting quality goods that are worth what you pay for them. I really think most people do actually expect products to meet minimum standards in terms of quality.

I'd say that buyers feel happier buying from a reliable firm than one they hardly know. This means choosing a company with a record of selling quality products. In practice, it usually means one that's demonstrated solid financial performance, preferably for some time. Buyers, including me, don't want to be let down. The old saying "*Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM*" still applies. Or at least that's what I think.

Lack of availability of goods or delivery of damaged items that finally arrive days after you've ordered them can really damage a company's good name. It's not surprising really, when you think how important these issues are to customers like me. For many companies, the need to get things to the customer quickly is crucial. And even with direct sales and the internet, there still need to be smooth systems in place for getting the product to the customer.

I know from experience that things like lost orders, inaccurate invoices and poor correspondence don't impress clients. People expect to be treated well – from the way their initial inquiry, order or complaint is dealt with, right through to a quick phone call to check that any problems have been sorted out. In a number of companies, like the one I work for, this type of thing is viewed as a strategic activity, with dedicated staff and documented procedures.

I'd say the level of support offered is really critical for many products. For complex technical products, this might even be the most important factor when a customer's determining whether to go ahead and buy or not. If they can't ring for help 24 hours a day, many people will simply decide to go elsewhere. I personally think there's no point in paying out a lot of money unless you feel secure about using it in the future.