

On April 10, 2008, I purchased a sectional couch from Viking International and used my Visa card to leave a \$2260 deposit. The couch was to be delivered in “approximately 12 to 14 weeks”. According to Viking’s website:

At the time of order, we strive to provide you with an accurate arrival date. This arrival date is based on confirmation information from the manufacturer. On occasion, these dates change. VikingHome will strive to make you aware of changes to the original estimate as they become known to us - that is our promise to you.

On August 12, almost 18 weeks after the order was placed, I had heard nothing from Viking and called them for an update. Anne Forberg told me that my order had been delayed indefinitely, that they’d known about this for several weeks, and that they’d made no effort to contact me. In other words, they’d broken their promise.

I told Anne that in the absence of further information I’d have to consider canceling the order; she told me that to do this, I’d have to talk to Marie. Marie, however, was unavailable. She would, however, contact Marie and have her call me.

Marie never called. I eventually called back, and had to call back over a dozen times before Kim (not Marie) was able to tell me that my couch was now expected on or about September 6, and that Viking would discount the price by 20%. On this basis, I decided to hold off on purchasing a different couch.

At one point in that conversation, I said something about the possibility of a cancellation. Kim became extremely belligerent and said that, as a matter of company policy, there was no possibility of a cancellation. I observed that there’d already been a breach of company policy when nobody called to alert me to the delay.

On September 8, 21 and a half weeks after the initial order, I had heard nothing, so I called Viking. Anne told me she had no information about the expected arrival time of my couch. She said she would check with the manufacturer and get back to me. I leapt to the apparently unwarranted conclusion that she would do this in a timely manner.

Two days later, on September 10, I called back to see what Anne had learned. Her answer, in an exasperated tone, was “I *told* you I would call you back after I’d spoken to them.” I asked when she planned to speak to them, and she refused to answer. I asked how much longer this had to go on before they’d let me cancel the order, and she replied that it was not cancellable at any time. I asked if she literally meant that I could not cancel even if the couch were delayed ten years. She replied that the cutoff was at the eight year mark; only orders delayed eight years or longer could be cancelled. I asked if she was serious and she assured me she was.

On September 16, almost 23 weeks after the initial order, Kim called to tell me

that the couch was “on the water” (which I took to mean that it had been shipped from Europe by boat) and could be expected to arrive in the first week of October. This is the one and only time that anybody at Viking ever made any attempt to contact me. There had previously been at least a half dozen occasions when they’d promised to gather information and call me back, but not once had they followed through. (They also ignored emails.)

On September 29, I phoned the Bank of America, which issues my Visa card, and asked them whether I’d be justified in disputing the charge for the deposit. They listened in detail to the story and said there was no doubt that this charge should be disputed. They were particularly amused by the notion that it was reasonable for Viking to hold my deposit for eight years without delivering a couch. I therefore filed a dispute.

On October 3, fully 25 weeks after the initial order and well into the first week of October, Viking had no information about a likely delivery date. With a little Internet-based detective work, I managed to find the number of the company president’s personal cell phone. I left a message and he returned my call. He appeared to be quite familiar with my case history, agreed that I’d been treated very badly and that I should have been able to cancel my order weeks earlier. He offered to cancel it on the spot. When I told him I’d disputed the deposit charge with Visa, he assured me that he would not dispute my dispute, so that Visa would refund my money. However, he also encouraged me to be patient and accept delivery of the couch.

It is now October 20, more than 27 weeks after the initial order. Viking has made no further attempt to contact me and as far as I know has no intention of ever delivering a couch.