

Credit-to-Cash Briefing: Dealing with late payment excuses

The cheque is in the post

Ask for the cheque number, the date it was signed, who signed it, when it was posted and whether first or second class. If they have not sent payment, they won't be able to answer your questions.

The person who signs the cheques is away

This is a common excuse, especially in the summer, over Christmas and around bank holidays. However, it is often used to delay payment. So if you are told the director is on holiday, find out what provision has been made to sign salary cheques and paying utility bills. Very often, a few signed cheques will have been left to settle important accounts. Put pressure on the person you are dealing with by stressing how important your account is, making them feel they will be going against the wishes of their boss by withholding payment.

We've lost /never received your invoice – can you send a copy?

Find out if this is the only reason for late payment and offer to fax a copy immediately. If they don't agree to pay within a couple of days, they are, in effect, admitting that this is a delaying tactic.

The computer is down

Ask how often these problems occur and how long faults usually last. If this is a genuine problem, they ought to be willing to send a manual cheque.

We are waiting for payment from a large customer

Ask the name and the address of the debtor and when they expect payment. Your debtor should be able to some form of credit with their bank on the security of this debt. So suggest they do this and find out how quickly they can arrange it.