

complaint

Mr E complains that Santander UK Plc blocked his debit card.

background

Mr E tried to use his card for two gambling transactions but the card was declined both times. He phoned Santander less than an hour later, and the block was lifted. But Mr E's unhappy. He says Santander didn't try to contact him about the block, as it claims to have done. He says there were people at home all day and the phone didn't ring. He says Santander's never blocked his card before. It was too late to carry out the transaction by the time the card was unblocked, and he lost out on the opportunity to win. He'd like Santander to compensate him for this.

Santander says the transactions were blocked by its fraud prevention system. It needed to confirm that it was Mr E making the payments. Its security measures are designed to protect accounts against potential fraudulent activity. In this case, the transaction was for a higher amount than usual and it needed to be sure that it was Mr E who was trying to make it.

Our adjudicator didn't recommend that the complaint should be upheld. He said that banks sometimes need to make sure that transactions are genuine. He explained that this is sometimes because a transaction is flagged by the bank's security system as higher risk. Where a card is blocked, we'd expect the bank to remove the block once it's satisfied itself that the transaction was genuine. As Santander had done this, he couldn't recommend that it did more.

Mr E isn't satisfied with the adjudicator's conclusion. He says that he'd made payments to the same company before. So he thinks it was unreasonable of Santander to block his card.

my findings

I have considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. Having done so, I've reached the same conclusion as the adjudicator, for similar reasons.

The bank's fraud detection system doesn't only pick up transactions that actually turn out to be fraudulent, but also transactions which it suspects *may* be fraudulent. This is designed to protect the bank and its customers from fraudulent activity. There will inevitably be situations in which a transaction that has been picked up by the system is genuine. The system takes a large number of factors into consideration when deciding whether a transaction should be flagged as possibly fraudulent. Those factors are matters that fall within the bank's commercial discretion. So I can't interfere with them.

I accept that having a transaction declined can be frustrating. But I don't consider that Santander acted unreasonably in putting a block on some of Mr E's attempted transactions. If it had simply allowed them to go through and they had turned out to be fraudulent, the bank could have lost a substantial amount of money. And Mr E would also have experienced considerable distress and inconvenience.

I acknowledge that Mr E doesn't accept that Santander tried to phone him to confirm the transactions. But I've examined Santander's internal records and am satisfied that it tried to contact Mr E twice within a few minutes of the transactions being declined

I'm sorry to disappoint Mr E, but it follows from what I've said that I don't consider that Santander was at fault in blocking his card. It tried to contact him to verify the transaction and it lifted the block promptly when he contacted it. I can't fairly require it to do more.

my final decision

My decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I am required to ask Mr E to accept or reject my decision before 4 September 2015.

Juliet Collins
ombudsman