social media out of control:

WHY YOU NEED A SOCIAL-SAVVY CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

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The responsibility for social media falls squarely in the marketing department, right? Not anymore. You’ve surely heard pundits use the phrase “customer service is the new marketing” over the past five years or so. Well today, with customers flocking to social channels for customer service, the catch phrase is now: “social customer service is the new marketing.”

What does this mean? At its simplest form, it means that social media has become an extremely powerful customer service channel. And because it’s a public forum and not a private exchange between your customers and your engagement specialists (agents), it’s made “customer service a spectator sport” in the words of Jay Baer, author of Hug Your Haters.

The volume, complexity, and urgency of customer service-related posts make delivering responsive and high quality care extremely challenging to do. Yet companies must master social customer care or risk public relations disasters and customer attrition as disgruntled customers tell the world about the company’s mistakes. What was once the domain of marketers and public relations staff has now grown to incorporate all of the most important aspects of customer care—with an audience that’s impatient to hear how your brand responds.

This executive brief looks at the shift to social customer care and presents best practices for taking an out-of-control and growing social care problem and turning it into a well-oiled part of a seamless, omnichannel customer service experience that includes all channels—social, digital, phone, email, chat, and SMS.

the rolling snowball of social care

Measured on moving prospects through the customer journey, marketing is intensely focused on delivering content, increasing awareness, and offering products and promotions that resonate with prospects. Social media is a prime channel for marketers, and when campaigns and content hit their mark, hundreds of comments can get posted in response.

Increasingly, customer service questions are being posted as part of the response. In fact, the demand for customer service via social channels is growing and customer expectations are high: 42 percent of customers who complain in social media expect a response within one hour and 32 percent expect a response within 30 minutes. What’s the average response time from businesses? Five hours.¹

Worse yet, one-third of all customer complaints are never answered, with most of the unanswered complaints occurring in social media. Companies that don’t respond at all pay a steep price. Not answering a complaint decreases
customer advocacy by as much as 50 percent. Can brands afford not to act? Not when the public is watching every response.

Can it be true that so many brands don’t value their customers enough to answer their complaints? For most companies, it’s more of a case of accidentally ignoring customers. Brands simply aren’t equipped to handle the incredible volume of customer service requests coming from an increasing array of social media channels.

social media customer care is complex

Getting social media customer care right is hard—really hard. To use a sports analogy, the size and shape of the playing field changes regularly and the players on your team are trained to play a different game.

First the playing field: it’s no longer simply a matter of monitoring Facebook and Twitter. These days, social customer care requires a comprehensive strategy and the resources to support it that encompass a far broader range of social channels:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Ratings and review sites such as Yelp, Google My Business, Amazon, and ConsumerAffairs
- Native website review management such as Bazaarvoice and PowerReviews
- Industry-specific review sites such as TripAdvisor and Trustpilot
- Instagram and Pinterest
- Blogs and forums such as Reddit and PissedConsumer
- Human Resources review sites such as Glassdoor and Indeed
- Google+
- Newly emerging social sites

As Facebook, Twitter, and other media companies embrace their roles as customer care platforms, they are adding features such as response rates and times that let customers know how well brands are responding to inquiries. On Facebook, rapid responses to customer posts can earn your brand a Facebook badge that reads “very responsive, typically responds instantly.” On Twitter, brands can now indicate that their page provides support and list the customer care hours of operation. Many companies don’t even know about these capabilities, let alone have strategies to take advantage of them.

And when it comes to your team, your players are likely trained in traditional, scripted contact center methods. To guide social care interactions to a satisfactory outcome, it takes a well-trained communicator whose expertise includes both proven dialogue techniques and a deep understanding of your brand voice as well as product or service offering.
getting social care right

Delivering responsive and effective social customer service is not impossible, but it does require a new, holistic strategy and cross-departmental collaboration. Core components of your company’s strategy should include:

- Understanding the customer journey: If you currently have a channel-centric strategy, you need to shift to a customer-centric one. The goal is to first understand the customer experience—including needs, perceptions, and pain points—across the complete customer lifecycle, across all channels, and at each moment of truth. By gathering and analyzing data from the end-to-end customer journey, you can identify gaps and opportunities to improve the customer experience.

- Designing the ideal customer experience: This is where you take your current customer journey and turn it into the ideal customer experience. The goal is to define the ideal omnichannel experience—including social as well as phone, IVR, chat, email, and SMS—so that customers receive high quality customer care in their channel of choice at that moment.

- Delivering an authentic human conversation: Don’t make the mistake of thinking that digital channels require less human interaction and conversation. In fact, digital channels—including social—require even more human communication skills than ever. Hire and train engagement specialists to be conversation professionals who can frame adverse situations thoughtfully, educate customers, and anticipate customer needs. Authentic conversation based on scientifically proven dialogue habits is the best approach across all channels to drive a significant and lasting impact on customer satisfaction.

- Adopting new customer care features: As social networks such as Facebook and Twitter add new customer care features, adopt them quickly. For instance, on Twitter, annotate that you provide customer support via Twitter and register your hours of operation. You can also add a “click to call” or “click to email” button on your Instagram page.

the upside of social care

There’s no doubt that implementing the above strategy will take time, effort, and investment. Will it be worth it?

While you will need to create your own business case for social customer care, consider the following. Twitter commissioned a study to show the revenue benefit to businesses that help their customers via Twitter. The research showed that responding to service-related tweets:

- Boosts willingness to spend by as much as 20 percent
- Increases likeliness to recommend by 30 percent
- Generates the greatest revenue impact when responses are fast
Conclusion

While social customer care is complex, when done well, it benefits both your business and your customers. Customers like it because it’s more convenient and less frustrating than using other channels. Your brand gains more satisfied customers, greater loyalty and advocacy, and improved revenue potential.

Better yet, you don’t have to go it alone. You can take advantage of STARTEK’s deep, agency-grade understanding and proven strategies for delivering a differentiated customer care experience across all of your channels, including digital and social media. We’ve helped brands like yours achieve unparalleled levels of engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, and revenue.

About STARTEK

World class customer engagement starts with world class conversations – and that’s where we come in. We’re STARTEK, and we specialize in orchestrating the ideal customer experience at the point of conversation between you and your customers. Powered by the science of dialogue, our customer engagement specialists and communication scientists understand the human component of the contact center better than anyone. In fact, our omni-channel engagement solutions have helped countless brands, including JD Power award-winning companies, connect emotionally, solve issues, and improve net promoter scores. Whether engaging on the phone, online, in person, in your contact center or in ours, STARTEK can help you turn your strong customer relationships into unbreakable ones. Because the outcome of every conversation matters.

To learn more visit www.startek.com.

REFERENCES

2. Ibid