

Using Social Media in Customer Service



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Published on www.lorman.com - January 2018

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More companies are turning to social media than ever. The vast majority of them do so to take advantage of the prime marketing opportunities that go along with being active on sites like Twitter® and Facebook®. However, there are additional benefits to maintaining an active presence on popular social networking sites. Most notably, these sites can dramatically enhance a company's ability to provide top-notch customer service. If you're looking for ways to boost your company's level of customer service, becoming active on social media sites is the way to go. Learn more about using social media in customer service in this in-depth paper.

Top Ways to Use Social Media in Customer Service

When it comes to customer service and social media, the possibilities seem to be endless. After all, the primary goal of any social networking site is to bring people together. These sites are designed to enhance communication between large groups of people. With that in mind, it's easy to see why social media can be such an effective tool to have in your customer service arsenal. By understanding the many ways in which social networking sites can be used to engage in effective customer service, you will be better equipped to take advantage of doing so.

Respond to Complaints

Even if you've fine-tuned your products and services to an incredible degree, there are still going to be issues from time to time. The difference between successful companies and those that miss the mark largely depends on how they handle customer complaints. These days, more people are airing their grievances about products and services on social networking sites than ever. One option is to ignore the problem, but that doesn't accomplish anything. A much better option is to respond quickly, directly and helpfully to such complaints. Social media makes it easy.

Monitor for Problems

It only takes a few seconds for a customer to post a complaint about your product or service on a social media website. For that reason, it definitely pays to monitor such sites closely. By doing that, you will become aware of potential problems very early. If you notice several people complaining about the same thing, you will learn about a common issue long before it devolves into a serious problem. On a site like Twitter®, you can opt to receive alerts whenever your company, brand, product or service is mentioned. By monitoring those mentions, you will be able to take a proactive approach to the situation.

Build Loyalty

Customers are mightily impressed when companies proactively lend them a hand. The majority of those who complain about issues online aren't truly expecting to get responses. As you monitor for mentions of your brand and company, be prepared to proactively respond to them. Don't wait for someone to directly address you with an issue. Seek these things out and act upon them as quickly as possible and you will build loyalty in no time.

Answer Questions

It's important to foster an environment of transparency and openness on your social networking profiles. By doing that, you will encourage people to post questions and problems directly to your profile, which will make it easier for you to handle them. In order for this to be effective though, you have to make a point of answering each and every question. Don't just pick and choose the ones that are easy to resolve. People who visit your profile need to see that you are willing to help.

Drum Up New Blog Ideas

As you interact with customers and prospective customers on social media, you're sure to get plenty of inspiration for new blog posts and articles. If you're asked the same question again and again,

write a new post about it. Another idea is to add the question to the FAQ on your website. These interactions allow you to fine-tune the way in which you resolve customers' problems, and they give you the opportunity to show that you take people's ideas and issues into consideration.

Engage in Informal Testing

Before sinking a lot of money into a new product or service, it's smart to engage in plenty of testing. After rolling out a new product or service, monitor social media channels carefully to see what people are saying. Is the new product or service being received well, or is it falling flat? The great thing about handling things this way is that it's practically free. You can gather all kinds of useful feedback without having to spend a huge amount of money. In the long run, this approach will help you give people what they want.

Tips for Using Social Media in Customer Service

If you've never used social media for customer service before, you should learn the basics to avoid making serious mistakes. That's not to say that using social media in this way is inherently risky. It's actually quite intuitive. However, there are steps you can take to make the experience as effective and beneficial as possible.

Maintain an Active Presence

Your customer service efforts on social media sites are going to fall flat if you don't show people that you're actually active on those networks. If people run across your Facebook® page and see that you never post updates, they are going to assume that you're not available to help. Similarly, they're less likely to send you tweets on Twitter® if your profile shows that you hardly ever post new tweets yourself. Maintaining an active presence on sites like Facebook® and Twitter® doesn't require a lot of time or effort. If you can't get into the swing of things, it's well worth it to hire someone to handle your social media needs. To engage in effective customer service on these sites, your company has to be approachable. The best way to get there is by being as active as possible.

Respond Quickly

People who seek out help on social media sites primarily do so in the hopes of getting a fast response. This is where you can really stand out in a big way. After all, it only takes a second or two to respond to a tweet or to a post on your Facebook® wall. Don't put off your responses until later. Do what you can to respond immediately. Even if you can't provide immediate help, respond right away to let the person know that you are working on it.

Make it Personal

Social media gives you the opportunity to put a personalized touch on your customer service efforts. When posting tweets or Facebook updates, include a first name. Whenever possible, use a real employee's photo for your avatar or profile picture. Show customers and prospective customers that real people work for you company and are ready to help. Avoid using canned replies to people's inquiries. When they see that someone is actually reading and responding personally, customers are sure to be impressed.

Handle Sensitive Issues Offline

While many issues can be handled across a tweet or Facebook® post or two, there are times when it's better to take the issue offline. If a customer is especially irate, for example, you should reach out and try to make contact through some other channel. When an issue is too complex to be resolved in this way, respond with a direct email address or phone number and continue working on it from there. As you gain more experience in conducting customer service through social media, you will have an easier time determining when to handle problems online and when to move them offline. Also, keep in mind that the customer doesn't always check the social network to see if you replied to their questions or complaints.

Follow Up with Customers

After assisting someone through Facebook®, Twitter® or another social networking site, make a point a following up later to see how things are going. If someone complains and never responds to your initial communication, follow up again later to let them know that you are still concerned and want to help. Set up reminders to make these follow-ups to keep them from slipping through the cracks. Nothing impresses a person more than being remembered, so this will go a long way toward enhancing the effectiveness of your customer service efforts.

In this day and age, no company can afford to turn its back on social media. Don't limit yourself to advertising on social networking sites. There are even more exciting opportunities for using these sites for customer service. There's no reason at all that you can't use these sites for marketing and customer service at the same time. When people see that you're doing everything you can to be available and to reach out, they will have a more favorable impression of your company. These activities will strengthen and enhance your brand too, so put them to work right away.

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