

Customer Service 2.0

Providing poor customer service has always been a dangerous proposition for any business. But the rising popularity of social media web sites has given today's customers a much more powerful punch.



The logo for Jacada, featuring the word "jacada" in a stylized, lowercase, cursive font. The letters are colored in a gradient from red to green.



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Although it has never been in a company's best interest to have an unhappy customer, the arrival of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter have made it much harder for businesses to ignore any weaknesses in customer service. After all, the cost of poor service – once measured in the loss of single consumers – can now have an immediate and far-reaching impact.

For example, millions of people around the world are now familiar with the story of Canadian singer Dave Carroll, who composed 'United Breaks Guitars' after his Taylor acoustic guitar was damaged at Chicago's O'Hare airport. Normally, when airlines damage or lose their passenger's luggage, they might end up paying out compensation in the region of a few hundred pounds. However, in the social media firestorm that followed this incident (Carroll's song became an instant hit on YouTube, with nearly four million views in its first 10 days online), United Airlines lost 10 per cent of its share value, a massive \$180 million.

The problem here is that United Airlines didn't just make a mistake with Carroll, but with millions of other people at the same time. Ordinary, mild-mannered citizens who may have been quietly dissatisfied with United Airlines suddenly had a public forum to vent their frustrations. In this way, social media web sites allow consumers to speak publicly about something that is very important to them, and the effect can be wildly empowering. For any company that is unlucky enough to find themselves in this particular line of fire, the effect can be similar to a class-action law suit, where the voices of many provide much more power than the voice of one person alone.

"One-to-one" service becomes "one-to-many"

Before the widespread popularity of social media web sites, dissatisfied customers might have contacted consumer rights-focused television shows for help, but they now have easy access to a wide variety of options for airing their grievances publicly, all of which give them a loud voice on a global scale. In fact, to say that the social media revolution has given customers a louder voice is an understatement: it's more like word-of-mouth on steroids.

The traditional "one-to-one" model of customer service – whereby one Customer Service Representative (CSR) works with one customer – has protected companies to a certain extent until now, since any damage caused by poor service was relatively limited. In this new world of social media, however, the days of sweeping an unhappy customer under the rug are over.

Instead of "one-to-one" customer service, social media web sites have produced a "one-to-many" model, since a company that uses Facebook or Twitter to address a customer service issue may be interacting with tens of thousands of customers at the same time. In this scenario, there is no limit to the damage that can be caused by one unhappy customer, since a single incident can very quickly spiral into an international PR disaster.



Customer service in the digital age

Although some companies may feel that they are increasingly facing trial-by-Facebook as a result of this shift, it is worth noting that social media sites do not normally provide an effective outlet for solving these problems. Just because someone has taken against a company on Facebook doesn't mean that the company should expect to fix it on Facebook: the real challenge will be to improve customer service internally first.

Despite the enormous power that is currently being attributed to social media, good customer service has always – and will always – begin at a point that is far deeper in a company's infrastructure, including its IT systems and procedures, and in its policies and staff training. It's not enough to apologise on a social media web site when things aren't working: customers will want to know how they can be sure that a similar problem won't be repeated. In other words, they not only want to know what is going to change within the company, but also want to be informed when these changes have been made.

Regardless, one thing is for sure: customers will always be more likely to share negative experiences than positive ones. The good news is that social media outlets have evened the playing field somewhat in this regard, in that millions of people have been given a public voice, on a global stage, for the first time in their lives. In this way, social media can also be used to amplify any positive customer experiences, and to promote them to a much larger audience.

Making social media work for you

The explosive growth of social media represents both challenges and opportunities for today's customer-facing organisations. Enlightened companies have realised that it's not enough merely to keep tabs on (or try to control) what customers are saying about them on blogs and other web sites that feature user-generated content; instead, these organisations are realising the value of gathering this precious feedback and using it to drive real improvements within the organisation.

With this proactive approach to social media, businesses can address key customer service issues before they become PR disasters. In fact, rather than turning a blind eye to this new way of communicating, savvy companies are now providing an assortment of social media touch points for consumers to provide feedback and even interact with one another. As a result, businesses can benefit from the insights being revealed during these consumer-generated conversations, and can use this information to drive product development and marketing decisions.

For companies that are willing to embrace change, social media users can therefore provide the best focus group in the world. By engaging with consumers at this level, satisfied customers can quickly become evangelists for the brand, advocates for the company, and will often begin to help one another to solve problems that would otherwise end up with the customer service department.



Good service needs to be embedded in company culture

Even in the face of the latest whiz-bang technology, the same basic tenet applies: good service is good service, and bad service is bad service. The technology may be new, but the challenge is still the same. Companies should be aiming for exemplary customer service, and the role of technology is simply to facilitate that commitment. Look at the iPad, for example: it may be a beautiful piece of equipment, but people are still using it to read books that were written 200 years ago. Some things – whether they are great literature or first class customer service – might be supported by technology, but actually represent something much more fundamental.

For that reason, negative comments being made in a social networking environment are usually a symptom of something going wrong much deeper within the organisation. A negative image amongst users of social media web sites is not, therefore, the sickness, but just a very public symptom. Companies will need to get to the root cause of what is causing this level of frustration and dissatisfaction amongst their customers, and tackle it at the source.

Ultimately, no company will be able to control what's being said about them on social media web sites, but they can control the level of customer service that they are providing. In other words, if a business sets and maintains a high standard for customer service – from board level right down through the organisation – then it will have nothing to fear from social media, and a great deal to gain.



About Jacada

Jacada is a leading global provider of unified service desktop and process optimization solutions that simplify and automate customer service processes. By bridging disconnected systems into a single, intelligent workspace, Jacada solutions create greater operational efficiency and increase agent and customer satisfaction. Founded in 1990, Jacada operates globally with offices in Atlanta, Georgia; Herzliya, Israel; London, UK; Munich, Germany; and Stockholm, Sweden.

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