

EBOOK SERIES

Build your brand through exceptional customer service

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Introduction

By 2020, the customer will manage 85% of its relationship with an organization without interacting with a human. This is, in part, because social media has permeated every aspect of our lives. There are 2.3 billion active social media users and counting, with users in possession of an average of 5.54 social media accounts each.

From Facebook to Twitter, Instagram to Periscope, social media platforms have an unparalleled ability to inform and influence. Users are empowered - they have the capacity to self-educate and research before making a final purchase decision, and a public platform through which to reach out to brands and expect an immediate response.

92% of companies view customer experience as one of their top priorities in the long term. 60% use social customer service as a competitive differentiator.

Social media has revolutionized the way brands can interact with their consumers. Direct, authentic interaction that can build brand loyalty and customer trust is only a tweet away. At the same time, the rise of social media has triggered a sharp shift in customer expectations, and if brands fall short, social channels are the mouthpiece through which they can very publicly voice their frustrations or concerns.

Social customer service isn't a luxury. In our interconnected age, it's an all-important necessity for brands that want to set themselves apart and nurture a well-regarded reputation among existing and potential customers.

Increasingly, brands are beginning to understand the urgent need to be visible and available to customers on the social channels of their choice. If managed effectively, a social customer service strategy can help brands to acquire more customers, encourage repeat purchases, tailor their products and services to customer needs and preferences, and drive conversions more efficiently.

This ebook explores the essential components of social customer service, and will help you to navigate them successfully, from choosing channels to measuring your effectiveness.

Choose your social channels carefully

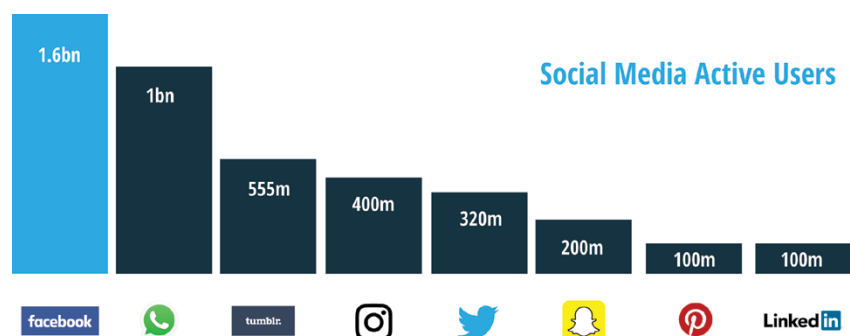
With a superabundance of social media platforms to choose from, brands can often feel under pressure to establish a presence on as many as possible. However, maintaining even one social channel can often be an all-consuming occupation in itself. Not only will this place an unfeasible level of expectation on the employees running your social media accounts, it is a potentially brand-damaging approach.

Online consumers anticipate that their queries or concerns will be addressed on social media promptly, with 42% expecting a response within one hour. For businesses that don't have a substantially sized social customer service team, the more social channels there are to manage, the less likely it is that you'll be able to respond to customer comments within this time period. And if this failure to engage quickly irritates a customer enough? 95% of dissatisfied customers tell their peers, and publicize their negative experience.

Successful social media management requires time, thought and effort, and the straightforward truth is that there are some social media channels that certain brands just shouldn't adopt.

To preserve a high quality online presence, when it comes to choosing your channels, less is more. If a social media platform doesn't align with your overall goals, or if your customers aren't using it, don't consider it. We've outlined some criteria by which you can make your selection below:

Size



**Data from Statista*

The larger and more popular a social network, the more likely it is that there will be high levels of user engagement. For example, Facebook, the first platform to exceed one billion active users dominates the market, whereas Pinterest was the fastest independently launched site to reach 10 million unique monthly visitors.

While there is undeniable value in setting yourself up on a social channel that has significant market share and a loyal user base, size is not the sole factor on which you make your decision, particularly when you consider that more users will mean more competition for their attention from other brands.

Similarly, there's no point in setting up a LinkedIn account if your target customers aren't working professionals, or you're not trying to drive B2B sales. This is why you should only take social network size into account in combination with additional factors.

Customer demographics

It's likely that your brand has taken the time to create specific customer personas. These detailed profiles will assist you in choosing the most appropriate platforms – if demographics such as gender and household income can define the consumers you want to market and sell to, they should determine the social channels you use. In essence, be where your customers are.

[Hootsuite](#) has compiled a variety of demographic data for key social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. They looked at a number of factors and general statistics, from average age to level of education. This provides a valuable reference against which you can make an educated decision on which social channels to adopt.

Don't forget to make sure that your decision aligns with not only the customer personas your brand has created, but your overall goals as well, be they brand awareness, lead generation, customer retention or all of the above!

Available resources

Another important factor that is often overlooked is the availability of resources to maintain your brand's presence on social media platforms. Often, the management of these online communities can be a salaried position in itself, so for smaller businesses with budget restrictions, it makes particular sense to streamline your online presence to make the process as manageable as possible.

You need to consider that social media is 24-7 and customers expect almost instant responses, regardless of when they reach out. If your brand isn't in a position to recruit a team of social customer service representatives, then you need to prioritize and limit your chosen platforms to a maximum of 2 or 3. This relates back to the importance of not spreading yourself too thinly, and provides you with the best opportunity to maintain a consistent approach towards nurturing your online following.

You can prioritize your selection based on the criteria we've already outlined above.



Assign a social customer service champion

Some brands will entrust the responsibility to an intern, others will recruit a specific social media or community manager for the task. Whoever you decide to charge with the role of overseeing your organization's social customer service, it's important that they embody a number of key qualities.

Your chosen social customer service champion will be in charge of the platforms that publicly represent your brand. By extension, they will be responsible for cultivating your brand's online persona, as well as maintaining valuable relationships with existing and prospective customers. It's a complex role that carries great authority, and failure to execute it effectively can lead to potentially brand damaging consequences.

According to survey conducted by [Sprinklr](#), 74% of respondents cited being "extremely frustrated" when having to conduct a company multiple times for the same reason. Other primary sources of annoyance included:

- Being on hold for a long time when contacting the company (69%)
- Having to repeat the same information to multiple employees or through multiple channels (66%)
- Dealing with employees or self-help sites/systems that cannot answer certain questions (64%)
- Dealing with employees with are unfriendly or impolite (66%)



Whether you're recruiting internally, or externally, you need to be able to evaluate whether an employee is sufficiently adaptable, empathetic and confident to answer customer queries and solve their problems. We've outlined some of the crucial characteristics you should look for in potential candidates below:

Industry expertise:

Your social customer service champion will be expected to answer a variety of questions, not only related to your brand's products and services, but the industry in general. There's no way to anticipate the queries your customers can have, which means that it's important that whoever manages your social media accounts has a deep, up-to-the-minute knowledge of your industry, its challenges and advancements.

During their interview, you can test their industry expertise with a series of relevant questions, and ask how they stay informed and updated. The more knowledgeable your customer service champion is, the more confident you will feel letting them troubleshoot and advise on your brand's behalf.

Proactive:

Consumer research carried out by [Brandwatch](#) found that overall, only 46.6% of brands engaged with any tagged @mentions on Twitter. This is an unacceptably low figure that doesn't even take into account the number of tweets in which users have mentioned brands, but forgotten to tag them.

Carrying out a simple keyword or hashtag search on Twitter alone can reveal a plethora of customers with queries, compliments or concerns. It is the goal of your social customer service champion to ensure that as few customer comments as possible go unanswered. This means that whoever assumes the role will need to take an enthusiastic, pre-emptive approach to finding tweets and comments to respond to, rather than solely focusing on whatever queries are most visible.

83% of customers say they like – or even love – when a company responds to them on social media.

Articulate:

Being able to respond to a question with a clear, succinct answer is a skill with which not every employee is equipped. Whether it's a public Tweet or a more discreet response via Facebook Messenger, your social customer service champion needs to be able to represent your brand through thoughtfully-crafted conversations.

While still a customer-facing role, your social media platforms need to be managed by someone who has an excellent command of written language and tone, and can engage with customers fluently, and without the confusion that can sometimes accompany online

interactions. Using a scenario-based exercise in an interview, asking candidates to write their responses to possible customer questions, is a great way of gauging their ability to interact appropriately.

Innovative:

Any successful brand will want to constantly seek ways to differentiate itself from its competitors – exceptional social customer service can provide your brand with the potential to achieve viral levels of popularity! You could use software such as [Canva](#) to create bespoke images to post on social and attract the attention of customers who weren't expecting a super personalized response.

You could send a Twitter follower a free sample or gift tailored to a comment they've made on the platform. Whatever you decide to do, developing a competitive edge through social customer service is essential to build brand awareness. Whoever is responsible for your social media will need to adopt a creative, inventive approach in order to achieve this success.



A three step system to maximize your social customer service champion's performance:

1. Establish KPIs:

Setting clear Key Performance Indicators is the first step to being able to measure success. Setting targets for average response time, customer conversion and volume of complaints is the perfect way to gauge if your employees' methods are effective.

2. Define successful engagement:

It's essential to agree upon what constitutes a successful customer engagement so both you and your social customer service champion are on the same wavelength. Offer examples from other brands you admire that showcase a positive use of tone and personalization.

3. Review and refine:

Remember to check in regularly with the employees managing your social media accounts to ensure they stay on the right track. Representing a brand online is a significant undertaking, so taking the time to review the content and responses that are being posted from your accounts is essential to support and quality assure these efforts.

Set up social customer service procedures and guidelines

For many brands, social customer service can often be difficult to navigate. There is an abundance of channels to choose from, inflated expectation from customers (who in turn have an abundance of competitors to choose from if you fail to meet their standards), and countless elements that could go just as wrong as they could right.

86% of buyers will pay more for a better customer experience, but only 1% of customers feel that vendors consistently meet their expectations.

Providing exceptional social customer service can present both significant benefits and challenges. Your brand has the potential to enhance its reputation and acquire more customers easily and efficiently. However, there are also new resources and skills required in order to ensure its success.

The best way to do this is by clearly documenting a set of procedures and guidelines that outline every aspect of your social customer service strategy. Not only will this help with training new employees, it will ensure that whoever within the organization assumes responsibility for this role at any stage will be able to maintain a consistent approach.

Below, we've outlined several essential steps you can follow to create your own social customer service strategy and document the most important procedures:

Step one: Define your goals

As with any successful digital strategy, you need to start by defining and documenting your objectives. Why are you using social media as a customer service channel? What do you want to achieve? Answering these questions will give you and your employees a clear impression of how your social customer service strategy is aligned to your overall business goals, and will provide a framework against which you can measure your success, and ultimately refine your approach.

Start by summarizing your high-level objectives – maybe you want to grow your social media following, boost brand mentions or increase the number of customer conversions that stem from social. From here, you can drill down to document the more detailed goals and targets assigned to your social customer service champion, for an all-encompassing representation of your priorities.

Step two: outline your chosen channels

You have already selected the social channels on which you want to focus your attention – now you need to document it. Provide a brief overview of your primary social media platforms, and why you've chosen them specifically. This will provide a clear link between them and your overall objectives, which is important especially if you have specific goals for particular platforms.

You should detail the main features and functionality of each social channel and what you want to achieve with it. Conducting a small bit of research will help you to outline the key pieces of information your customer service representative will need to know in order to get started. For example, we created this [Beginner's Guide to using Snapchat](#) as a resource for any organizations that want to establish a firm understanding of the platform from a business perspective.

Step three: document your main processes

As with every other step of your social customer service strategy, documenting the daily processes involved in executing it successfully will help you and your employees to maintain a uniform approach that will guarantee positive brand awareness and customer satisfaction.

Below, we've listed the main (and most helpful) processes you should consider documenting:

1. A high-level strategy document: This should include the goals and overviews of the social channels you have chosen to adopt in order to build your brand. Additionally, you should capture examples of what your brand defines as positive and negative customer engagement. How would you like your social customer service champion to respond to customer queries and complaints? By clearly outlining your expectations with tangible illustrations, your employees will be able to develop a solid understanding of the do's and don'ts of online customer engagement.

2. A Tone of Voice guide: establishing a distinct tone of voice is an essential step – it is the sole component that will embody your brand's personality and essence, which can often set you apart from your competition. The language you use, and the way in which you use it in your web pages, social media content, emails and any other copywriting, can not only build customer trust and loyalty, it can be the difference between converting a customer, or not. Do you want to convey your brand as formal or informal? Humorous and light-hearted or slick and serious? Once you have made these all-important decisions, capture it in a document that can be shared company-wide.
3. A crisis management plan: Inevitably, there will be instances where your customers will express frustrations with your brand. When it's on a public platform like Instagram, it's important that your employees know how to navigate the encounter faultlessly:
 - Create criteria by which your social customer service champions can prioritize their responses, particularly if your brand experiences a high volume of communications. Knowing what interactions are high priority and warrant an immediate response will help your employees to manage their workload. For example, if a customer has tagged your brand to ask you an explicit question or register a complaint, they should take precedence over a general reference to your brand, or a social media post that you haven't even been tagged in.
 - Always check to see if your brand has had previous interaction with the customer. If you can reference the customer's history, through social media, email or CRM, you can cultivate a much more personalized and tactful experience, which will help to pacify the situation.

- Always attempt to resolve the issue on the same platform through which the customer initially contacted you. Remember they have chosen a specific channel because it suits their preferences and is for their own convenience. Referring them to another employee or re-directing them to another channel could cause further irritation and facilitate a negative customer service experience.
- It's important to define when issues should be escalated, and referred to a more senior employee within the brand – when there are potential legal implications, for example. Creating a template message that can be used to keep extremely dissatisfied customers in a holding pattern will give social customer service champions the opportunity to take some time to assess the situation before escalating it appropriately.

DID YOU KNOW

It takes 12 positive experiences to make up for one resolved negative experience.



Measure your performance

Arguably, analytics are the single most important aspect of any strategy. Measuring the performance of your social customer service strategy, and the impact it has on your brand will allow you to identify strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately refine your approach so you can make the best possible difference for your customers. Yet despite the fundamental role it plays, 78% of companies say that measuring the impact of social customer service takes up the majority of their time, which could result in a reluctance to embrace social customer service at all.

Measurement doesn't have to be a time consuming task. Once you have determined the metrics that matter most, you should be able to carry out your reporting efficiently and effectively. Below, we've listed some of the main metrics that you should be taking into account:

Volume of engagement:

this metric takes into account both the volume of messages your brand receives from customers, as well as the volume of your brand's responses. You can also filter your messages to gauge the volume of different types of interactions, such as complaints, compliments and queries. This data will create a solid starting point from which you can analyze and understand your other metrics comparatively.

Response time:

effective social customer service aims for fast and effective resolution of customer queries. If you have an understanding of your brand's average response time to customer messages, including initial responses, you can garner a deeper insight into your customers' levels of satisfaction, as well as the performance of your customer service champions. If response times are lagging, specific targets can be set to maximize customer engagement.

Resolution time:

as with response times, the time required to resolve customer issues, from receipt of the first message, to the receipt of the final message, is a great way to measure the performance of your employees responsible for customer service. Again, in order to optimize this metric, you can set specific targets for employees. It also provides an insight into how each of your platforms, from email, to social media, performs as a customer service channel. You can conduct a channel-by-channel comparison to identify the ones on which your brand should focus most and measure the ROI of your social customer service strategy.

Customer satisfaction / brand sentiment:

Customer satisfaction and brand sentiment are inextricably linked, and both will help you to understand the overall impact and ROI of your brand's social customer service efforts. Follower growth on individual social media platforms, total monthly 'likes' and 'favorites', the tone of individual customer messages and conversions that are a direct result of an engagement with your social customer service champions will all contribute to gauging brand sentiment. Something as simple as asking a customer to rate their experience with your brand out of 5 after an issue has been resolved can provide you with vital data.

Wherever possible, set targets. This will make overall measurement easier and enable you to evaluate improvements and diminishments in performance and identify patterns of behaviour and action that could account for both. Put simply – the more information you glean, the better your social customer service can be.

Are you ready to build your brand with exceptional social customer service?

By investing in a digital marketing course that is tailored to your organization's specific needs and interests, you can significantly enhance your brand sentiment and awareness with a highly analytical, strategic digital skillset.

