

Active Listening in the Digital Age: Bridging Social Media and Customer Care



We are witnessing a global shift into the digital sales space like never before, with market leaders like Wal-Mart overhauling their e-commerce and Facebook unveiling new e-retailing tools through Facebook Live, social media has taken center stage. The interconnected nature of retail consumers and their expanded use of social media is rapidly reshaping the competitive landscape as retailers make better use of social demographics while their social media platforms maintain positive messaging and expand their brands online. Utilizing not only Facebook, but platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest in conjunction with a strong social care plan, these companies have been able to generate significant growth directly through e-retail and as a supplement to existing retail outlets.

But not every social media platform has a plan to scour the overwhelming volume of data that social media can swamp you with and even those that do often find themselves missing key interactions as they muddle through. The key to consistent success in leveraging a social media platform can be found by outlining a strong social care plan which encompasses feedback and calculates the return on investment (ROI) as a primary component of your overall customer service offering.



1. Listening

The first stage in developing an effective social care plan is devising a management strategy the volume of conversations that happen across all the various social media channels. Many services have become fixated with answering every post and are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of feedback, but the goal of a well-designed social care program is to properly filter these conversations rather than attempt to cover them all.

Not all conversations require an immediate response and the use of a listening platform can help filter and prioritize relevant conversations while eliminating the distracting “noise”. Through the use of modern social media aggregates, a strong listening platform can automatically score posts according to relevance, urgency, and influence. This system of scaling priority helps provide perspective over the bulk of incoming data, all while weeding out extraneous conversations so that your team can better focus on tackling client concerns. This same prioritization also enables clients to manage real-time customer conversations that matter the most, proactively monitor the conversations and eliminate pain points, on a best-effort basis.

2. Monitoring

Another common challenge when introducing social care is the difficulty in tracking matrices as conversations bounce between multiple channels. Ideally, customer questions can be addressed through the platforms they arrived in. That said, many of the popular social media platforms have unique restrictions, such as Twitter’s 140-character response limitations. Although suitable for quick comments or questions, this format would not be able to support a complex or in-depth response, and so transfer to another channel is preferable. This “channel redirection” may seem tedious at first, but its benefits are twofold. Customers get a quick resolution to their more complex problems, while companies route customers to agents with the right skills. However, how do you decide the right platform and measure customer satisfaction when agents from different channels are involved? To overcome these problems, companies need to engage with their technology and solutions providers to design a comprehensive social media approach that fits into their vision of a social care plan.

Over the last several years, Dell has made significant strides in finding ways to manage these conversations. By building an effective listening platform and integrating it into their overall customer care strategy, Dell's support team can manage up to 25,000 social conversations each day. Leveraging social interactions is not limited to CRM only, but this real-time customer feedback has been also utilized for research, product management, brand awareness, and helpdesk support.

3. Sentiment Analysis

As useful as metric tracking and agent performance information may be, without context their misuse can easily lead to weaker returns. Sentiment analysis is a kind of metric that adds context to the matrices through classifying the tone and intent of social interactions, which helps in gauging the customer interactions and agents' performance. Classifying the tone or sentiment of social feelings into positive, negative, or neutral categories also helps in prioritizing the social media engagements, measuring brand reputation, and assisting in the event of a potential crisis.

But perhaps the most useful aspect of sentiment analytics is its synergy with your listening platform to prioritize customers. Responding to unhappy customers at the earliest is the key, as at this stage customer service will directly shape customer impressions of your company, an impression which then reverberates out into their social media space. Making customer engagement happen in real time for improved customer experience and enhance brand reputation is the goal, but limitations on manpower necessitate prioritizing where your team can make the most impact.

4. Social ROI

Deploying technologies and social media solutions can significantly improve customer service returns. That said, how do you go about measuring the satisfaction levels and incremental brand reputation growth that has been achieved through social media initiatives?

Social media ROI measures the return on your investments in time, money and resources that have been put toward social media care plan. This maps traditional customer care business metrics with social media metrics, and gauges the changes to traditional processes and metrics when social media is applied to business initiatives.

Through the use of a solutions service provider, the whole lifecycle of a social care plan can be tracked and its data utilized to measure returns. Many social care solutions are available to extract, analyze and present performance data.

The use of social customer service will only increase as consumers spend more time on social channels. Social media has opened a "back door" into customer service, forcing companies to formalize their approach or be overwhelmed by the volume of data. Ultimately, the key to success is ensuring you have the infrastructure in place to manage that volume and the metrics to measure and prove the program's impact on customer service.