

The Interplay of Communications and Customer Service

Social media plays a pivotal role in today's customer service journey. Through platforms like Twitter and Facebook, consumers can directly interact with companies and brands, find answers to pressing questions, and communicate with qualified employees without having to pick up the phone. Businesses reap benefits as well: Recent research from Sprout Social shows that if a brand responds well to a customer inquiry or complaint on a social site, **45% of consumers** will return to social media to "highlight the positive interaction."

At the same time, this customer experience opportunity doesn't come without risk: It has given consumers the power to air their grievances to the masses. As Jay Baer, founder of the strategy consulting firm Convince & Convert, [wrote in Adweek](#), about 40% of customer complaints now occur on social media sites, review sites, and online forums. As a result, customer service has become "a spectator sport."

In years past, a negative customer experience or incident would often result in a lost sale, but today it can spiral onto the front pages or morph into a trending hashtag, leaving a trail that consumers and the press can follow for years to come. This shift requires organizations to pivot their approach to customer service and communications: Your company can't simply *prepare* for a potential crisis, but needs to form a strategy that stops that crisis in its tracks.

Signals Help You Gain Foresight

It all begins with leveraging social media's ability to locate conversation triggers and eyewitness reports. By identifying signals and early warning signs of noteworthy events, like devastating hurricanes that affect your services or delivery times, brands have the power of foresight and the chance to formulate a response. In many cases, their communication team represents an untapped resource. Leaning on the skill set of these professionals can help get you through customer service calamities as they unfold.

Product recalls, security breaches, even seemingly unproblematic events like new product launches and ad campaigns, all require awareness, agility, and a careful touch. While there's no way of knowing exactly how the world will react to any event (Who could have predicted that a [display glitch](#) would cast a shadow on the iPhone X release?), working closely with corporate comms, brand communications, and PR teams can help companies form a response that's both appropriate and on brand.

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According to the Forbes Agency Council, which is comprised of leading PR and media strategy executives, organizations must always “be proactive, be transparent, and be accountable.” In other words, when you find yourself immersed in a potential watershed moment, gather your strength and swim.

Signals Allow You to React

Let’s examine the approach of Domaine Carneros, one of the wineries affected by the recent California wildfires that devastated parts of Napa Valley and Sonoma. On Facebook and Twitter, the brand shared updates about the disaster, air quality, its hours of operation, and its efforts to rebuild the local community—all in an attempt to keep customers informed. Early on, the winery [Tweeted](#), “Wildfires in Napa area. Domaine Carneros currently closed for business this Monday morning. Our thoughts are with all of those affected.”

Had the brand not been following the path of the fires and interpreting the mood on social media, it would not have been prepared to react with a statement that accurately reflected the situation, while also displaying empathy. The natural disaster forced the winery to close its doors for several days. [On Facebook](#), Domaine Carneros let its customers know about a last-minute change: Rather than re-opening as planned, it would “give [its] staff another day to get back on their feet.” One thousand customers engaged with the post, and instead of prompting a negative response, the change in plans was met with positivity.

When Domaine Carneros reopened, it made use of trending hashtags to promote its dedication to the local community and build even more rapport with customers. Days after the fires, the company crafted a [Tweet](#) that read, “The sun is shining & the Chateau doors are open! Come support our community, we look forward to seeing you. #napavalleyspirit.” Customers

engaged the Tweet with excited messages about their plans to stop by.

Signals Build Loyalty

While social media can help companies prepare for a crisis, it can also aid them in generating customer loyalty through corporate storytelling.

Using popular hashtags or creating a new branded hashtag enables companies to unearth positive customer stories and share them on their social feeds. Rewarding customers in this fashion shows that your brand cares—an effective way to recruit advocates who will spread positive corporate messaging on your behalf.

The image shows a screenshot of a Skyscanner flight itinerary for a return trip on Wednesday, March 15, 2017. The itinerary lists several flights with layovers, including a long wait in Bangkok. A red circle highlights the number '413786h 25' next to the Bangkok layover, with a red arrow pointing to it. To the right of the itinerary is a tweet from James Lloyd (@Skyscanner) dated August 23, 2017. The tweet asks for recommendations for a 47-year layover and lists suggestions from other users, including 'Missed Songkran but you've got another 46 years to enjoy it...' and 'Unless you're a huge fan of The Terminal, I'd probably recommend spending those years outside of the airport...'. The tweet has 2,715 shares and 1k comments.

Skyscanner response to complaint

Social media is also an ideal platform for expressing your company’s tone of voice, which further helps to define and build affinity for your brand. Last year, a Skyscanner customer [complained on Facebook](#) about a glitch in the company’s system that indicated a layover of 47 years in Bangkok. The brand responded with both humor and understanding: It offered numerous suggestions for what the customer could do in the city during that time, including checking out the Thai

New Year’s festival (“Missed Songkran, but you’ve got another 46 years to enjoy it”) before thanking him for reporting the glitch and assuring him that it would be taken care of. Immediately, Skyscanner received a positive public response and accolades for its efforts.

In today’s volatile social media landscape, companies need to be prepared for every possible customer experience scenario. In order to effectively mitigate risk, align your customer experience and communications activities, make social media-based customer service a part of corporate communications, and leverage real-time social media signals. The result: You’ll be able to anticipate and resolve a crisis more quickly, while amplifying positive customer experiences in a way that creates lasting brand loyalty, advocacy, and trust.

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