



Don't Drop the Customer Experience Ball

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO CONTACT A COMPANY TO ASK A QUESTION, MAKE A SUGGESTION, OR FILE A COMPLAINT ONLY TO FIND THAT THERE'S NO WAY TO DO IT? THIS IS THE WORST POSSIBLE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S NOT UNCOMMON.

In January, I received an email message that told me a company's website would be down for several hours. The message listed the start time and the end time, but didn't specify the time zone. This is a company with customers around the globe and knowing what time zone the outage was based on would have been useful. I wanted to suggest that to the company.

The website had a "contact" option in tiny text at the bottom of the page. When I followed that link, I found frequently asked questions, but no way to actually contact the company. No phone number. No email address. No mailing address. Clearly, this company doesn't want to be contacted – no how, no way.

Better Customer Experience

THAT REMINDED ME OF AN ARTICLE BY HINDUJA GROUP (HGS) GENERAL MANAGER SCOTT YATES. HINDUJA GROUP IS A BANGALORE, INDIA, COMPANY WITH OFFICES IN THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND ELSEWHERE.

EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT A FORTUNE 100 COMPANY, EVEN IF IT'S JUST YOU AND THE CAT, SOCIAL MEDIA CAN IMPROVE OR DESTROY YOUR BUSINESS.

The article addresses customer experience (CX) as it relates to a company's social media activities. One bad customer experience, even a minor one such as what I described in attempting to make a suggestion to a company, can have long-term repercussions.



THIS IS NOT THE EXPRESSION YOUR CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS SHOULD HAVE WHEN THEY VISIT YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA SITE.

Yates suggests taking social media customer experience seriously. "Imagine you're a Fortune 100 company spending millions on marketing to create and support your brand, but you don't prioritize social media support. Your customers are driven

Even if you're not a Fortune 100 company, even if it's just you and the cat, social media can improve or destroy your business. Routinely posting information that isn't useful, failing to respond to customer comments and complaints, and refusing to give customers and prospects a quick, easy way to contact you frustrates them and loses business.

"Simply put," says Yates, "you're doing it wrong. In fact, you're missing the plot. With this nickel-holding-up-a-dollar approach, you may have just lost 20% year-over-year growth."

According to Yates, there are three key ways that social media should be used to enhance your company's customer experience.

to your social media pages – but once they get there, they don't find 24x7 empathy-building communication or proud, positive brand representation, and a fast, solution-focused approach. Instead they are faced with thread after thread of negative customer feedback and lackluster product support."

Be Real

FIRST, ENSURE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE SPEAKS TO A PERSONALITY WELL ALIGNED WITH YOUR COMPANY CULTURE, PRODUCT LINE, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, CUSTOMER BASE.

This means shifting from a defensive to an offensive social media approach, with more proactive posts addressing brand, product, or market issues.

I call this the kind of information people can use. Instead of bragging about how good you are, prove it by proactively addressing problems.

Yates says it's important to avoid company silos so that marketing and consumer affairs will be better funded and aligned in their approach. Understand how consumer affairs should be in close step with – and even fuel – departments like product innovation, product development, and research and development.

This is equally true for small businesses; even if you're a single-person operation or a small company with only a few employees.

Maybe you should be the CEO on Monday, the marketing director on Tuesday, the public relations director on Wednesday, and the development director on Thursday. Fail to think about these tasks at your company's peril.

Yates says it's essential to “bolster your front lines, with agent training that includes product and company culture education and a playbook for how to communicate in line with your brand.” That task is clearly more applicable to large businesses, but it's wise to keep the concepts in mind even if you're running small operation.

Quick Response

SECOND, YATES SAYS YOU SHOULD “TREAT SOCIAL MEDIA CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENTS AS CONVERSATIONS THAT STAND ON THEIR OWN.”

The art of conversation is not lost, he says, so think of these exchanges more like a phone call than an email. While a shift to digital customer care is today's new norm, don't lose sight of the fact that a four-hour response time – much less a 24-hour response time, is not going to satisfy (much less delight) today's customer.”



If there's one point at which many companies fail, it's this one. The internet has fundamentally changed customer expectations. When we ask a question or report a problem, we expect a quick response – minutes, not hours or days.

“Don't hide behind a shadowy 800-number,” Yates says. “Be present and personal, with open communication and practical solutions to customer problems.”

Appeasement Works

WHEN IT COMES TO SOLUTIONS, YATES SAYS IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO BE OVERLY CAUTIOUS ABOUT ENGAGING CUSTOMERS WITH APPEASEMENT “AS LONG AS YOU CAN SOLVE THE PROBLEM, RETAIN THE CUSTOMER, AND NOT COMPROMISE THE COMPLAINANT.”

Last year, I had a problem with a device that I had ordered. To perform the task I needed to do, two components were needed. The



company's website illustration showed both components, but only one was shipped. The company's customer service representative thought that shipping was at fault and sent a replacement order, but that was still just the single device, not what was illustrated.

Then the company did the right thing: They offered a substantial discount on the second item. I suggested a substantial discount on both items and that was approved immediately. Although I was still somewhat annoyed, the response left a highly positive impression at the end of what might have been a customer-losing event.

And that brings us to the third point in Yates's article: “Keep the end goal in sight: gaining and retaining customers. Understand the scale and importance of your social media presence. Specialize your channels and align with your CX support.”

For example, he points out, “If you have a customer with 25,000 Twitter followers, most likely your trainees shouldn't be responding. At the front end of support, build in fast research so agents understand the social profile of each customer posting – from their social presence to their troll factor. If a customer engages consistently in a negative way – this contact should likely be escalated to a veteran team member or set aside so as not to build steam.”

And once you've developed a sound social media strategy, be sure to share the knowledge across the organization. This means integrating robust engagement and reporting tools that are focused on recording and building knowledge from this customer feedback. Yates adds, “While this can be labor-intensive, these insights are valuable to your future growth and success.”

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Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS) helps companies with business process management (BPM) and optimizing the customer experience lifecycle with the goal of making its clients more competitive. HGS focuses on back office processing, contact centers, and human resources outsourcing solutions.

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