

The following is an excerpt from
Customer Service Training 101, Third Edition

By Renée Evenson

CHAPTER 6

Keeping Up With the Times: Online and Social Media Customer Service

**SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE
AND THE FUTURE IS NOW**

When the second edition of this book was published, online commerce was becoming an accepted means of conducting business. Fast-forward to today, and it is mind-boggling to realize how quickly we have moved from tiptoeing into shopping and doing business online to witnessing the stampede of the social media era. This opened up another customer service medium: providing customer and support service via social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook. Customers often prefer the convenience of handling business matters online and through social media rather than driving to a business or wading through lengthy automated answering mazes. Businesses are quickly realizing the value of maintaining not only a website, but also a presence on the social media sites their customers are on.

Customer Service Is Online And Social Media Contacts

Consumers have come to rely on the Internet for their business and shopping experiences because it provides convenience and immediacy, both of which people appreciate. Responding quickly to online and social media queries and promptly fulfilling customer requests builds trust and establishes credibility.

As you can imagine, providing online and social media customer service requires yet another skill set. Written communication, your primary means of interacting with online customers, necessitates good writing skills and proper grammar usage. Special care must be taken to make sure that what you write is what you mean to write. Formulating your thoughts clearly and then conveying the correct message is an important skill to develop. Written communication also necessitates the ability to “listen” well. As in listening to an oral conversation, this may well be the most important component of online and social media customer service. When you cannot see or hear the person, your only means of discerning their message is through their written words, so it is vital that you are able to read between the lines, so to speak, to correctly understand the customer’s intent.

When you conduct business over the Internet and maintain a social media presence, you open your door to the world. Welcoming your customers into your business begins with maintaining an interesting website and social media presence. Responding quickly to customers’ comments, inquiries, and complaints and handling them properly shows that you care about maintaining relationships with them. Following up online to make sure your customers are satisfied with the outcomes of your interactions reflects positively on your professionalism and willingness to satisfy all your customers.

Before we go into online and social media customer service, let’s take a moment to focus on your company’s presence. While it most likely is not your job to design and maintain your website and social media pages, you know your customers best; therefore it will be helpful if you understand how your company is portrayed to the public. And since you are your company’s chief communicator, it will also be helpful for you to provide feedback to your managers.

Brainstorm

As in any customer service interaction, you make the best decisions when you know who your online audience is. You learned how to identify your customer base in Chapter 3 by asking: who are your customers, what do they expect from your business, and how do your products and services enhance their lives. Your online audience is your customer base and echoes the answers to these questions.

As a group, review your website and discuss ways in which you can make it more visually appealing and easy to navigate.

- People tend to prefer a lot of white space on pages when reading computer screens, so keep text to a minimum.
- Photos or other graphics provide interest, as long as they do not slow down the operating speed.
- Make sure the ordering process is easy by monitoring the product-information page, shopping cart, customer registration, billing information, and final checkout.
- If appropriate, include warranty or guarantee information and information about technical support on your site, as that may increase customer trust.
- Customers may learn about your company through a search engine, so select words and phrases for your title pages they are likely to use for keyword searches.
- Include a “contact” button for easy emailing.
- Link your website to your social media accounts.
- Designate employees to monitor and reply to email requests.
- If you offer live chat, respond quickly, handle requests correctly, and make sure the customer is satisfied before ending the chat.

As a group, review your social media pages and discuss ways in which you can make them more visually appealing to customers.

- Choose attractive and relevant content.
- Post pictures to build brand awareness, such as your company logo, products, or your support staff.
- Post regular updates. Change pictures, share tips, showcase new products, or add photos of the customer-service staff in action.
- Advertise specials, sales, or anything out of the ordinary.
- Include status updates for announcements.
- Offer your customers and potential customers something for free, such as providing tips, a link to your newsletter or blog, or contests and giveaways.
- Ask for customer feedback.
- When a customer publicly posts a complaint, respond with an assurance that you want to resolve the issue and ask the customer to message the details. Then take the issue offline.

- Designate staff to monitor and respond to customers.
- Provide the same level of service as you would for in-person or telephone customers.

If you are new to this arena, Facebook and Twitter may be your first choices for your social media presence, since those are currently two of the most utilized social media networks for businesses. Other sites such as Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, and Tumblr may also prove to be advantageous to you. It will be most helpful for you to find out where your audience is and establish a presence. New sites are being created continuously, so it is essential to keep up to date on which ones are pertinent to your business. In addition, sites created specifically for customer reviews can help customers make purchasing decisions. Some popular ones are Yelp, TripAdvisor, Angie's List, and the Better Business Bureau. It is in every company's best interest to manage review sites that are germane to their industry. Remember that while it may not be your job to establish a presence on these sites, it will be helpful to your company if you provide feedback on what you feel may be significant to your customers.

Picture This ... The Wrong Way to Handle Online And Social Media Contacts

Ethan was hired for his first full-time job after graduating from college. Realizing that his wardrobe needed updating, he searched online and found a company that carried a brand of clothes he liked. He placed his order and, because he needed the items quickly, he upgraded the shipping option to two days, which would get the order to him by Wednesday, in plenty of time for his first day on Monday.

Wednesday morning Ethan checked the tracking, which showed deliver for the following Tuesday. He called the company and explained the situation. The employee apologized, explained that the expedited option had been overlooked, and unfortunately the order would not be delivered until Tuesday. There was nothing she could do because it had already been shipped, although she could credit the shipping rate back to the regular rate.

Ethan hung up, furious because he felt the employee did not understand the urgency of the situation. He felt that she could have offered to place a new order and ship it overnight. If that was not possible, at the very least she could have

shown more empathy and credited the shipping to no charge. And she could have offered a discount coupon for a future order. He wrote a displeased comment on Twitter. *@xyzcompany Worst customer service. Paid for 2-day shipping, did not happen. Employee did nothing to help.*

He was not surprised when the company failed to respond.

What Went Wrong?

The employee apologized but did not offer any resolution other than to reduce the shipping rate. When he posted a negative comment on Twitter and the company failed to respond, Ethan vowed never to order from the company again.

How Did the Customer Feel?

Ethan had every right to be upset, especially because his perception was that the employee did not understand the urgency of the situation. He needed the clothes before Monday. He felt she could have done something more than just reduce the shipping charge. Ethan was so angered by the employee's uncaring attitude that he posed a Twitter complaint, which made him even angrier when the company did not respond.

When you conduct online business, you open your door to customers around the globe. Consider that customers who transact business online put their blind faith in your company. When potential customers view your website, they have no idea what your brick-and-mortar business looks like. They have no idea if you even have a traditional brick-and-mortar business. They cannot tell if your company is a multimillion-dollar corporation, a small business run out of a strip-mall location, or a one-person operation based at home. Valuing your online customers and giving them exceptional service can develop into long-term relationships. Customers who interact with a business online deserve the same level of service as face-to-face and telephone customers. It does not matter how large or small your company is; what does matter is that you handle your online customers with professionalism and courtesy. Master the following steps and you will be able to handle these interactions successfully:

Step 1: Welcome Your Customers

Step 2: Find the Best Solutions

Step 3: Show Appreciation

Customer Service Training 101

In Ethan's situation, the employee could have offered some sort of compensation other than merely reducing the shipping rate. When Ethan posted a complaint on Twitter, the company should have responded and made restitution. Mistakes can happen. It is what a company does afterward that can make or break a relationship.

Customer Service Training 101: Quick and Easy Techniques That Get Great Results, Third Edition, by Renée Evenson

© 2018, Renée Evenson

All rights reserved.

Published by AMACOM Books

www.amacombooks.org

Copies of the book can be obtained from AMACOM at www.amacombooks.org or from Amazon at www.amazon.com.