



# eBooks



Designed to help you get the most out of social media, whatever your goals might be.

With social media firmly established as the most popular web activity amongst mainstream users, consumers now make their purchasing decisions in a dramatically different way to how they did just a few years ago.

Consumers share, advise, review, complain and compliment brands regarding their customer experiences across the web and social media sites for all to see.

This eBook outlines the essentials for developing effective social media customer service in order to differentiate your brand in this increasingly vocal realm of customer opinions.



# prepare to respond

a guide to customer service on social media

## a guide to customer service on social media

# introduction/ the online customer service imperative

With social media firmly established among mainstream Internet and mobile device users, consumers now make their purchasing decisions in a dramatically different way than they did just a few years ago. Today, they share, advise, review, complain and compliment brands regarding their customer experiences across the web and social media sites for all to see.

Make no mistake – the overwhelming majority of social consumers are listening to online customer experience comments and discussions about your brand. In fact, more than **80%** of social media users claim to have received advice from friends and followers relating to a product purchase<sup>1</sup>. For this reason, brands are compelled to gain proficiency in online customer service.

## **But what does online customer service proficiency entail?**

Fast response to customer issues? Thorough issue and complaint management?  
Anticipation of complaints?

This eBook outlines best practices for preparing your organization to develop robust online customer service via social media. Doing so will help you differentiate your brand in this increasingly vocal realm of customer opinions and feedback.

We look forward to any input you may have. So please, feel free to post comments on our blog at [www.brandwatch.com/blog](http://www.brandwatch.com/blog). We value and read all of your input!

Best regards,

**The Brandwatch team**

# the value of good online customer service/

Many companies have established a broad social media presence but have failed to support it with solid customer support. This gap presents an opportunity for a brand to differentiate itself from the competition by showing that its social media presence is not merely self-serving, but there for the benefit of its customers.

Good customer service has always generated trust, and trust leads to referrals. Over social media, this cycle becomes exponentially magnified, with consumers frequently sharing their customer service experiences with thousands of others in near real-time. So the surest way to positively differentiate your brand's reputation is to provide unparalleled online customer service.

At the same time, provide poor customer service, and social consumers will call you out. That type of bad publicity on social media is increasingly difficult to overcome. As conversations take place beyond your brand's control, prospective customers are much less susceptible to traditional marketing messages and methods. Already, **63%** of social media users list consumer ratings as their preferred source for information about products/services.<sup>2</sup>

With so much consumer activity driven by referrals over social media, you must take steps now to integrate excellent customer service into your social media strategy. You can achieve this with proven tools and processes that enable you to efficiently and effectively gather, organize, prioritize, and respond to online customer service inquiries.

## stats

**58 percent** of social media users say they write product reviews to protect others from bad experiences, and nearly 1 in 4 say they share their negative experiences to "punish companies."<sup>3</sup>

**Nielsen**



# monitor customer comments/

## Gathering your Mentions.

You can't service your customers, if you don't hear what they're saying. Being fully informed of all online conversations about your brand will help you develop the right customer service approach. For example, if **90%** of comments and inquiries about your brand occur on Twitter, you know you need a Twitter-savvy team that can tap into different parts of your organization to manage issues. On the other hand, if technical product user forums dominate the mix, then you require a very different set of customer service skills. For this reason, listening broadly across the various types of social media sites becomes a necessary first step.

For most customer service teams, selecting the terms to monitor should be fairly simple. Start by monitoring keywords about your brands and sub-brands as well as keywords regarding "customer service." Monitor the brand and customer service terms together, as this will likely help you home in on the most relevant discussions.

## quote

"Analysis is the chief split between free and paid services—the bulk of the free tools do not offer much in the way of true analysis. For brands with deep social media breadth, such analysis is more and more key and thus paid, comprehensive tools tend to make more sense." <sup>4</sup>

**Uri Bar-Joseph**  
Optify



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### **Free versus Enterprise Tools.**

Enterprise-level social media monitoring tools offer performance and coverage that ensure you're not missing any of your brand mentions. While free tools can satisfy the need of companies with very low volumes of brand mentions, companies with more than a handful of weekly mentions quickly recognize the need for enterprise-level social media monitoring as provided by advanced tools.

According to recent research findings from Nielsen, **42 percent** of 18- to 34-year-olds acknowledged that they expect customer support within 12 hours of a complaint.<sup>5</sup> With social media users growing accustomed to such high levels of customer service, the downside risk of not discovering social media mentions about your company far outweigh the small cost savings provided by free tools.

# prepare to respond to customer comments/

Once you understand where and when your customers mention your brand, you need to develop an appropriate response plan by defining what you'll respond to and when you'll respond.

## **What.**

You must define the issues that your social media customer service team will handle and those they will not. For example, will you handle issues that touch on customer privacy? What about special issues for which your organization already has an offline task force (perhaps issues get routed to them)? Will you ignore the trolls who are just throwing around broadly negative statements about your brand? At what point will you engage a troll?

## **When.**

Before defining when you will respond to customer comments, understand the initial findings from your social media monitoring. Map the typical volume of comments that require responses to the size of your team. This will help you answer the following questions:

- When will you respond? This could range anywhere from during certain business hours to “24x7x365” customer service.
- How fast will you respond? Instantaneously or in several hours? This will vary greatly by the nature of the customer need. Remember to be consistent. Once you set expectations, it becomes difficult to backtrack from them.

## quote

“The complexities of social business are often ignored – while companies are quick to deploy Facebook fan pages or Twitter accounts, long-term success in social media requires adequate preparation.”<sup>6</sup>

**Jeremiah Owyang**  
Altimeter Group



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**Response Time vs. Time-to-Resolution.**

A growing number of consumers have grown tired of receiving patented responses from companies that are responding to a negative comment or inquiry on social media. Sure, the responses are fast, but do they help the consumers?

It's better to communicate that you're working on the proper response, set a realistic expectation of time, and then deliver a real resolution. After all, customers want resolutions, not spin.

## integrate and alert/

Many companies lack the resources to have a large, dedicated staff stay logged into a social media monitoring tool awaiting mentions that require their attention. To address this, advanced social media monitoring tools offer email-alert systems to accompany their main user dashboards. This enables a relatively small social media team to optimize customer service without sacrificing quality-of-response. They simply integrate their email alerts into the workflows of the rest of the organization.

For example, telecoms providers usually have a specific department that manages customers who are experiencing service disruptions. Social media teams can stay on top of these most critical issues by customizing alerts so that brand mentions that include certain keywords, such as “service problems” or “no connection”, automatically get routed to that department.

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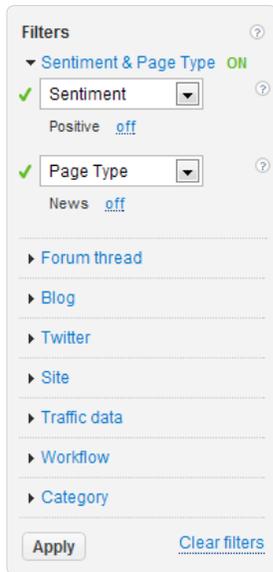
The screenshot displays a social media monitoring dashboard titled "Edit alert: Ben & Jerry". The main area shows a list of mentions for "Ben & Jerry" with details like date, user, and engagement. An "Edit Alert" modal window is open, allowing configuration of the alert. The modal includes fields for "Name" (Ben & Jerry), "Frequency" (Daily), "Time of day" (8am), and "Recipients" (user@SocialMediaMonitoring.com and user@agency.com). A "Save alert" button is at the bottom of the modal. On the right side of the dashboard, there are "Controls" (search for "Ben & Jerry", time range "Last 7 days", "Test alert" button), "Search" (input field, "Go" button), and "Filters" (Sentiment & Page Type ON, Forum thread, Blog, Twitter, Site, Site Visitors, Workflow, Category, "Test alert" button, "Clear filters" link, "Save Email Alert" link).

As you can see from the dashboard graphic above, enterprise-level monitoring tools provide actionable alerts that can be tracked and amended throughout the customer service lifecycle.

# analyze sentiment to streamline operations/

Advanced social media monitoring tools enable you to automate the segmentation of social media comments and inquiries by sentiment (e.g. positive, negative, or neutral). Doing so, you can save time by quickly identifying and responding to the negative mentions of your brand. This type of filtering proves invaluable when teams are stretched for time, allowing them to focus first on the most urgent customer issues.

Advanced tools also provide workflow features to ensure that important issues get resolved in a timely and appropriate manner by the right person. Let's look at an example, leveraging both sentiment filtering and workflow:



Sorting Mentions by Sentiment

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The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of a web application's filter interface. Both screenshots show a 'Filters' panel with a 'Sentiment & Page Type' section containing 'Sentiment' and 'Page Type' dropdowns. Below this are expandable sections for 'Forum thread', 'Blog', 'Twitter', 'Site', and 'Traffic data'. The 'Workflow' section is expanded in both, showing four dropdown menus. In the left screenshot, all dropdowns are set to 'all'. In the right screenshot, the dropdowns are set to 'guest', 'yes', 'high', and 'open', each preceded by a checkmark. The 'Apply' button at the bottom of the right screenshot is highlighted with a green border.

**Workflow Ensures the Issue Gets Resolved**

*Brand X receives 50 mentions per hour on Twitter, with half qualifying as customer service issues requiring action. At this level of activity, the team must organize and manage 25 customer service issues per hour. By cycling through the mentions in a tool with comprehensive work-flow features, each mention can flow to a specific staff member, tagged for follow-up, and checked off once appropriate action is taken. Notes-features record the status of the issue and/or how it was resolved.*

# manage the three most common complaint categories/

How you respond to customers online depends greatly on your company's culture and guidelines for external communications and customer support through other channels. Still, commonalities have emerged among leading brands in the ways they handle different types of complaints.

## **Specific complaints.**

These relate to a particular experience and usually give some detail and context. For example, "My Brand X internet connection has gone dead. Is anyone else experiencing issues in Hawthorne, New Jersey?"

Such straight-forward complaints have a high probability of resolution, so they often take priority. You can resolve them fast, check them off your list, and prevent them from morphing into bigger problems.

## **General complaints/negativity.**

An expression of general negativity towards a company – e.g. "Brand X is terrible, don't bother" – can be tricky to manage. You must gauge how recoverable the situation is. At the very least, this type of complainer usually appreciates the courtesy of a response. Depending on the complainer's counter-response, you may steer the conversation to a private session to minimize negative publicity.

# comment

## **Complaints can be a good thing!**

Complaints can notify you of problems that need fixing in your product/ service line. They also provide you with opportunities to "go the extra mile" for customers and turn them into long-term, loyal fans of your brand.



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**Trolling or spamming.**

Such mentions of a brand exist to attract attention or disrupt conversations. Rather than representing genuine complaints, they often take the form of a mocking response, such as, “What a pointless competition, who really wants to win a voucher for Brand X anyway?”

We like the advice that Carla Saavedra of Samsung gave regarding trolls at the October 2011 *Social Media for Customer Care Summit* in New York. She says that not everyone is worth engaging online. “Some people are looking to pick a fight, get free stuff, or just get some attention on Twitter. Ignore those trolls and have a real strategic or customer-centric reason for responding to content online.” <sup>7</sup>

In the end, it’s your brand, so you still must defend it from those aiming to weaken or destroy it.

# leads and requests/ customer service can become a revenue generator

## Requests.

While social media is a popular channel for customers to rant about poor experiences, it has also become a key portal for customer service requests. People are turning to social media en masse, particularly to Twitter, in order to contact customer service teams with their queries. Brands have taken notice, and well over half of the Fortune 500 has highly active customer service teams on Twitter and Facebook.

A nice characteristic of requests is that they usually offer lots of details for you to mine the opportunity to win over customers. It's imperative to not leave them hanging. After all, if they made the request over social media, they will likely express their frustration very publicly over social media.

## quote

“Brands need to know how to touch every part of the user experience, and the difference between flourishing or being left behind is about extending your digital footprint far and wide in a big picture marketplace.”<sup>8</sup>

**Lauren Proctor**

L2



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### **Leads.**

While you don't yet enjoy business from prospective buyers, the way you deal with leads can strongly impact your overall customer service reputation. Too often, customer service people try to push leads off to the sales force without even the courtesy of a reply to a simple question. This leads consumers to think, "Wow, I can only imagine how they'd treat me if I already committed to them."

Leads can occur directly or indirectly over social media. Receiving an inquiry via a message or @ reply on Twitter would be direct, usually aimed straight at you or at least mentioning your brand name. This makes them easy to pick up.

However, finding indirect leads requires monitoring of broader terms that relate to your product or industry. Indirect leads could include such instances as somebody asking for product suggestions or recommendations related to your offerings, a user discussing problems which your offering solves, or even a happy customer praising a product that integrates well with your own products.

# **customer service/** a killer application for brands on social media

By now you've recognized that social media is far more than a marketing channel. It is also the new customer service channel that can't be ignored. Yet surprisingly, customer service by brands on social media is inconsistent, leaving tremendous opportunity for your brand to make its mark and treat customers the way they crave to be treated.

Doing so will not only elevate your brand's reputation; it will begin to impact customer retention and revenue, as your customer service team turns complainers into loyal customers. And getting started in social media customer service is easy. You just need the right tools to integrate key team members across your organization.

Enterprise-class social media monitoring tools enable you to never miss an important online comment or complaint. Once you've gleaned the social media content that's important to your organization, advanced tools make it simple to gather, organize, prioritize, and respond to all kinds of online customer service inquiries – with team members from across your company.

Don't leave customer satisfaction to chance. Isn't it time for you to take a systematic approach to pleasing your social customers?

# end/

We hope you've picked up some interesting insights into ways you can improve customer relationships through engaging with social media.

Remember too that advanced social media monitoring tools can help you simplify the process across your enterprise and make it an official, reportable and measurable part of your operations.

## about brandwatch/

Brandwatch is one of the world's leading social media monitoring tools, with offices in the UK, US, Germany and Brazil.

Innovative brands and agencies all over the world use Brandwatch for:

**Research** – Understanding the market

**Sales** – Identifying leads

**Customer Service** – Responding and engaging quickly

**Marketing** – Targeting new networks

**Reputation Management** – Limiting negativity and building on positivity

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prepare to respond/ end

# thank you

to see how brandwatch can help give your business the edge in social media, visit the website and book a live demo with our team.

**[brandwatch.com/demo](http://brandwatch.com/demo)**

[www.brandwatch.com](http://www.brandwatch.com)

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