Ten types of social media complaints

By John Beale

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Social media offers a variety of incredible opportunities for companies, but there are some aspects that are daunting for many brands. The king of all fears manifests itself as the customer complaint and, to make matters worse, there are more than a few types.

The good news is that, through our many years of experience, we have successfully dealt with just about every type of customer complaint you can think of - and many more.

Before preparing to tackle the wide array of topics, questions and issues that your customers will pose, it's important for the social media team to understand the different types of complaints and work out how to respond to each.

I've highlighted 10 tough posts you might encounter and suggestions on how you can best handle them:

1. The simple query/complaint

"Hey brand X, I can't find where to upgrade my membership?"

These can usually be answered using an FAQ or general knowledge of the company at hand. These are generally simple enough to solve on the spot; just be sure to follow up with the customer to make sure everything was sorted out to prevent an escalation.

2. The rant

"I'm sick of Brand X's excuse for customer service. If they don't fix it today I'm moving to Brand Y"

Making the person aware that you are aware of the rant and are willing to help is the first step. From there, try and find out the root cause of the rant and, if it's something you can fix, do so quickly. If it isn't an easy fix, explain the process and keep in contact.

Social sphere of influence and the nature of the query are obviously your first and most important factors to look at. It's best to be as sincere and genuine as possibly; even though the person may be terribly aggravated or frustrated in their posts, it's best for you to remain as calm as possible in return/reply.

3. The Hello Peter tweet

Complaints-resolution websites such as HelloPeter have built in "tweet this" functionality into the complaint submission process. Generally, when these come up in your brand stream, it's best to handle it on the platform it originated from. Your brand should probably have someone handling these complaints on HelloPeter and deal with it accordingly.

Taking the engagement onto Twitter leaves the complaint unanswered on the site, which generally isn't advisable as it leaves you with a bad brand (brand does not answer) score on the complaint sites. So it's best you tend to it there, first.

4. The last resort

"I've emailed and been in store twice and nobody can help; all I want is for you to e-mail my statements and nobody can seem to help with this. Please can you sort this out?"

For many people, tweeting about the brand or posting on their Facebook page is due to a general service failure on any number of other channels the brand has put in place (in-store/dealer, call centre, email contact centre). They are fairly enraged at this point, and generally they will tell you about where else they've failed to get their problem solved.

Empathy is key here. Your feet, their shoes. However, the most important aspect here is to make sure that the issue can and is now resolved. Prioritising these service failure complaints is a good idea.

5. The blog post

When you pick up on a blog post written about your brand, it's always best to get these to the correct department/person as quickly as possible. The nature of the post may necessitate a reply in the comments section of the post; alternatively, it's best to get in touch directly with said person (in person or via phone) to try resolve the situation.

Generally, a personal interaction will be highly appreciated and the person might comment/edit their own post once the query situation has been resolved. Be warned: you never want to insist on a retraction or update - it's their blog, not yours. This is why brands often post comments on the blog to ensure that everyone sees you have acknowledged the issue and post again once it's resolved.

6. The complicated complaint

"The dealership I took my car into charged me for the last repair to my DSG control unit after the car has been with the technician and head office for 2 weeks, and now it's going in for a second time under warrantee and they want to charge me again? Please explain why this is so?"

Sometimes the person may not understand the brevity or complexity of the complaint they are asking to be resolved. It's best to communicate as quickly as possibly that this might take some time to investigate - and give a timeframe. You may also want to take the issue onto a platform (email, phone) where you have the time to go into detail and ensure the issue is resolved correctly. Follow up, and make sure that they get the necessary feedback.

7. The hashtag maker

#BrandXFail you guys suck. I've never experienced such terrible service from your Sandton store in my life #sitdown

Some socially savvy complainers might make their own hashtag accompanying their complaint via Twitter, basically to

gain attention and traction within Twitter. Quickly understand their social influence and propensity to go "viral". If this is something you can see going south, it's best this query is fast-tracked and escalated.

Get in touch quickly, but don't make it known that their query is being fast-tracked in the public forum. This show of "preferential" treatment can be seen in a negative light by other users on Twitter, and can also set the precedent to how users should behave to get better service.

8. RT this if you agree

"BrandX is the [insert expletive] worst service provider in the country. RT if you agree"

These can be scary when you first see them, especially if it entails a complaint about your brand. Again, understand their social sphere of influence and propensity for this to turn ugly quickly. It's best to attend to the person who originated the tweet and monitor who else retweets. Usually the retweeters don't also warrant a response (depending on the size or the capacity of the team) but again it's important to keep an eye on who else jumps on the bandwagon.

9. I won't stop posting/tweeting till you solve my query

Here's one that scares you a little. A community manager nightmare when someone goes postal on your Facebook page. It's best to attend to their first comment, first. Ensure that you make contact and continue to comment under all other posts that you have made touch on his/her first post.

This shows the rest of the community that you have responded. More times than most, he/she will stop posting soon enough. If they don't stop after you've done everything to resolve, you may want to consider blocking or banning them. Some people can't be reasoned with and your other customers will understand.

10. Complaints about a slow response via social media

"I don't get it, I tweeted to @BrandX 5 minutes ago and still no response? Don't you care about your customers?"

It's best to always be upfront and highlight what your response times are, or during what times the community moderator is there to help (you can list this in the profile). Depending on the environment, type of brand and community, you might need to highlight this often to make sure people are aware of how long they will have to wait. As always, stay in contact and keep the person updated.

These 10 aren't cast in stone and there are a number of varieties of each. If I've missed any, feel free to add them in the comments.

As you venture deeper into the social space you'll be able to unlock more of the goodness for your company, but definitely be prepared to engage with your customers on both the positive and negative experiences they have.

ABOUT JOHN BEALE

Having spent several years developing marketing strategies across digital and traditional media, John Beale found his passion on the social side of digital and is now a digital strategist at Cerebra Communications (www.cerebra.co.za). His days are spent developing social media strategy and campaigns for clients and nurturing an unhealthy passion for cars. He blogs at jtbeale.com, talks everything motoring on the ZACarShow podcast (www.zacarshow.co.za) and tweets as @jtbeale on Twitter.

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