

How brands can leverage community to bolster customer experience

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As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic, efforts to stop the spread have people feeling more isolated than usual. The pandemic has impacted all facets of life and a sense of community is needed now more than ever. Brand marketers are also feeling this pinch, having a harder time connecting with customers. Some brands are exploring new ways to use community to help address customer needs in addition to helping bolster their experiences.



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While brands are being challenged in new ways because of Covid-19, there is good news! People are spending more and more time online (and on their phones), opening additional opportunities to engage with existing and new customers. According to the [Wunderman Thompson Commerce Future Shopper Report 2020](#), 70% of consumers around the world spend more time on smartphones, with nearly half (44%) spending more time on social media specifically; 19% of online shoppers favor social media for inspiration.

There are quite a few underlying opportunities to lean on digital marketing to attract and continue to engage customers. Here are a few ways to leverage community to deliver top-notch, unique customer experiences to use individual voices to help the masses.

Customer reviews can inspire desire

Perhaps the most obvious way brands are empowering their audience communities is through customer reviews of services or products. According to a [consumer survey](#) in late 2019, 40% of consumers welcome ads and messages from brands that are based on their recent online searches or posts. For most consumers, seeing first-hand experiences of others (via pictures/videos) can make the difference between a purchase and an abandoned cart.



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The Wunderman Thompson report also notes 65% of consumers expect to use digital shopping channels more in the future. Customer reviews, word-of-mouth marketing and advocacy are behind nearly every brand growth story, and a key source of driving revenue – so much so that “74% of consumers identify [word-of-mouth](#) as a key influencer in their purchasing decisions.” If a customer buys a product, loves it, and tells everyone about it, chances are it’ll pique the interest of others.

Brands and products that have thrived under word-of-mouth marketing – even resulting in cult-like followings — include Glossier, the cronut, Stitch Fix, and others. It’s very possible to have a successful marketing campaign that’s rooted in customer reactions to what you’re offering. And, in today’s digital age, it may be easier than ever before to create such campaigns.

***Tip:** Smart brands will proactively seek reviews from customers and use their feedback in marketing materials and customer communications. Positive feedback can easily and powerfully ‘inspire desire’ in new customers by promoting specific products or services that align with brand priorities. There’s a lot a brand can do to align their offerings with the positive feedback provided by customers. Merging the two creates very powerful customer-driven campaigns that convey a level of authenticity that’s hard to obtain on your own. Leverage your loyal customer base in a way to build business and reward those customers however you can.*

Keep improving

A brand’s customer community is a powerful pool of individuals who can either make or break a business. Praise and criticisms are equally important, and I would even argue that bad feedback is more immediately useful than good since they can be constructive. Negative reviews and customer service feedback pinpoint the areas that a brand needs to focus on to understand the needs of customers. That could be complaints about how a product works, glitches in the buying process, or how well (or poorly) customer service handled their issue.

The Future Shopper Report notes “52% of people wish brands would be more innovative in how they use digital technology to improve their experience.” Smart brands should [leverage community](#) and its feedback to improve the overall customer experience and approach to customer care.



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***Tip:** Pay attention. Ask questions. Listen. When customers feel compelled to share – the good and the bad – it’s important to have the tools in place to capture feedback and implement it in a way that improves the business so that you can grow, expand and improve.*

Be prepared

Like any business, knowing who your audience is and how they interact with you can spotlight opportunities to make the experience better for everyone – your sales team, customer service reps, and customers themselves. Part of doing this successfully rests in the technology platforms you've adopted to enable this to happen.

There are many marketing technologies that merge different components into a single platform, and it's important that brands select one that is data-centric; one that will work closely with you to capture the data points that are important and activate them in ways that are beneficial to the business. One of the most important things a brand should look for in a marketing platform is the ability to not only automate and manage marketing campaigns but where there are very strong ties to the contact center as that's where a brand interfaces with customers most often.

***Tip:** Merge customer service capabilities into the overall approach to customer experience. If you haven't already, dabble in how AI can help you but don't rely fully on it to capture all the information without some level of personnel oversight. AI can play a significant role in making more intelligent recommendations and surfacing the data to enable agents to make offers quickly – all by leveraging natural language processing and AI-enabled data-crunching.*

Making the most of community and customer feedback is critical to success, and ignoring feedback has the power to ruin a business. Because brands work hard to find and nurture their ideal customer communities, it only makes sense that they put in the effort to find ways to activate their voices to benefit the business. Those voices also have the potential to create unrivaled customer experiences.

Often, great ideas come from the outside, so listen, learn, and improve.

ABOUT MIGUEL DE GRACIA

Based in Miami, Miguel's focus is on managing client relationships and advising clients on their digital technology requirements and multi-channel marketing strategies to drive business performance. Additionally, Miguel oversees our partner relations with companies such as Salesforce, Google, Adobe and Selligent. Miguel has over 15 years' experience in the digital space, covering data warehousing, business intelligence, data analysis, CRM, customer experience marketing, journey development and management, and web analytics.

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