



Customer Experience and Social Media - a match made in heaven?

The business case for Social Care and Health using Social Media in customer service

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Stimulating Brilliance

Introduction

Customer service in health and social care is changing. Personalisation embodies a new interface between organisation and customer. Organisations are re-designing services to ensure the customer is at the core of what they do. So in this changing world how we communicate is paramount. Is Social Media a crucial channel in this changing world, or is it an untameable beast best left alone?

It's powerful...

The stats about Social Media are staggering. In the time you've taken to read these few sentences...

 **72 hours of video** will have been uploaded to YouTube every minute¹. YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world with **4 billion hours of video watched** monthly.

Facebook now has **over 1.1 billion users**². That means that the Federal Republic of Facebook would be the 3rd largest nation in the world. 50% of the UK population (over 13 years old!!) have a Facebook page.



Twitter has over 500 million users worldwide with the UK being 3rd largest for the number of users. The UK has over 10 million Twitter users, 80% of which tweet from a smart phone. For the Romantics 1 in 5 relationships starts online, and a similar percentage blame social media for divorce. But here's the big one for you, 90% of people believe what your customers say about you online, only 14% what you say about yourself. The stats about social media are endless. But it's power and influence undeniable.

¹ http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics As of 29.01.2013

² <http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts> As of 29.01.2013

We conducted a survey...

In late 2012 we conducted a small online survey with PALS, Complaint and Customer Service professionals in health and social care. We wanted to understand what role they felt social media had in their role and future engagement with customers.

The first question we asked was "Is Social Media something you are considering for talking to your clients?". Only 23% responded that they were considering social media channels. 41% responded maybe and 35% said no.

The majority of respondents understood the benefits of engaging with social media including reaching more people, transmitting positive messages, raising awareness and engagement. But respondents also expressed fears about confidentiality(71%) disclosure of medical information and the ability to monitor and provide timely responses. Respondents expressed concerns about having the correct resources and necessary training to ensure they could engage confidently and competently (50%).

Our customers don't use Social Media ...

The stats suggest they do. Certainly there is historical data that large numbers of social care service users don't have access to the computers and the internet. However the migration to Smartphones is increasingly giving more and more people access to Social Media channels. In fact Social Media is increasingly adding to the social capital of people who would traditionally been isolated or hard to reach.



The successful [#spartacusreport](#) campaign is an example of disabled people and activists harnessing the power of Social Media. The campaign directly contributed to welfare reform defeats for the Government in the House of Lords. Spartacus activist said "None of this would have happened without Social Media . The campaign has been done by people mostly from their beds. We would not have been able to find each other had we not had access to Social Media."

What can Social Media do?

Social Media has many potentials for complaints management and customer service. There are 3 key elements to your online presence:



Listen



Broadcast



Engage

Listening means having channels set up and monitoring what people are saying about you. Broadcasting means communicating your messages to your audience, this being the key function of your Comms team. A lot of organisations understand how to broadcast, much fewer how to effectively engage in dialogue. And dialogue is exactly what Customer Service is about. Dialogue means, discussing, responding and signposting your customers. Social Media provides another channel for compliments, queries, concerns and complaints.

Social Media channels must be used alongside traditional channels. With Social Media channels you can manage compliments and queries online. With concerns and complaints you can acknowledge and then migrate people offline to traditional channels(e.g. telephone). Don't try and do everything online.

How to integrate Social Media channels into your customer service?

A lot of organisations understand the importance, but fail to develop a clear Social Media strategy. So here are some key steps.

Governance

Social Media will challenge your organisational culture. It changes the rules of engagement for customers and organisations - power is now shared. Your modus operandi must be reviewed, for instance, you have to think carefully about how you convey a message in 140 characters. It opens up the possibilities of more people being trusted to speak on your behalf. All this lends itself to looser modes of governance. But there must be governance. The organisation must be clear about what is driving its use of Social Media and how it will conduct itself. Amongst other things, there needs to be clarity about target audiences, appropriateness of channels, lifespan, promotion and monitoring.

Developing a digital case

What often happens is that enthusiasts use their initiative. They set up Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, which are used energetically for a few months and then activity wanes and slowly dies away.

Use of Social Media should be encouraged but with a clear digital case. The case can include:

- Defining which channels are best for dialogue with target audiences.
- Providing an alternative channel for followers to engage with
- An opportunity to listen to what is being said, that allows the organisation to be more proactive in resolving matters early
- Identifying who will speak on behalf of the organisation and the necessary skills
- What resources are required to support the channels.
- Clarity on what will be dealt with online and offline

Ensure you have the resources to do it well

Increasingly we are seeing social business teams forming. Call centres are rethinking the channels they use in their business. You must have the resources to monitor what's being said and ensure the right person is able to respond within the right timescales. We advise clients to "listen" first, build confidence and then move to "broadcasting" and "engaging". The good thing about Social Media is cost. Most of the channels are either free, or the functionality on free versions is adequate.



When working with clients which show them how to create multi channel strategies. The great thing is that there are tools such as Hootsuite and Tweetdeck. These tools allow you to compile all your channels in one easy to use space.

Be clear on tone of voice

A key challenge for the sector is tone of voice. We are used to very professional and formal modes of communication. But these don't always translate well online. 140 characters means a new syntax, shortening hyperlinks to ensure your message is conveyed, for instance. My son was opening a bank account at Metrobank and tweeted about the great service and encouraged his friends to open an account. He received a tweet from Metrobank with the response "Word!" (Translated as cool). We had great debates about whether it was appropriate. The customer, my son, thought it was great!

Social Media is often about authentic, informal communication. People are less likely to believe the polished and rehearsed messages in favour of just plain talking.

You need to translate your tone of voice so that it's appropriate for the Social Media context and is consistent with your brand.

Dialogue mapping

One of the most important things we do when working with clients on their social media strategy is develop a dialogue map. A dialogue map helps to understand the types of things your customers will want to talk about online and help you to structure the dialogue.

For example our clients get compliments. It is important to know how to share the praise. If you receive a complaint online, staff must know what is done online and how to migrate the individual to an offline channel. In addition we ensure our clients are prepared for trolls and have strategies to collect evidence and take action if necessary.



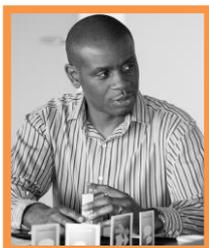
Invest in your staff's development

In our research 41% of respondents said that they would need training on Social Media. Despite the explosion of Social Media for personal use, understandably a fear of Social Media persists within both a professional and indeed customer experience context. We have found that the training needs are two fold- from basic awareness and understanding of Social Media to more specialist training for those entrusted to "converse on behalf of the organisation". Good training is crucial to help staff at all levels to understand how you will engage in Social Media. You must ensure that those who will talk on your behalf are competent and confident.

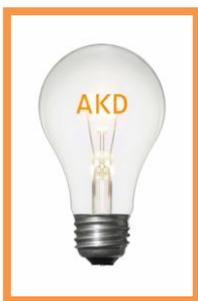
In Summary

Sticking your head in the sand, hoping it will go away is not an option. You must be where your customers are, and they are on Social Media channels. With careful thought and planning, Social Media will enhance your ability to engage with your customers and wider community on a range of issues. So seize the opportunity!

About Akin Thomas and AKD



Akin Thomas is the founder of AKD Training. He's a former Complaints Manager and Head of Registration and Inspection. He's got over 20 years experience of customer experience in both the public and private sector. He's responsible for developing and delivering Social Media training for organisations including Toyota Europe and the Welsh Government.



AKD Solutions provide stimulating training that will help you to talk confidently and competently online using Social Media . AKD Training offer a range of training from, basic introduction and awareness to advance training for those who will speak on behalf of the organisation.

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