



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Customer satisfaction and social media

Sometimes customer complaints are deserved, and at other times not. Regardless, it is important to address all types of complaints in a way that mitigates relational damage, says Fergus Ferguson



The adage that there is no second chance to make a good first impression is quite true in business. Dealing with customers with honesty and integrity is an essential business principle. It is imperative that customers have a sense of trust when interacting with a business.

Ensuring that customers are treated with kindness and respect and that they are satisfied with their product or service is what cultivates their sense of trust.

A good customer base is a company's most valuable asset. Knowing who customers are and staying in touch with them is important. It's best to view every customer transaction from a relationship point of view and not from a transaction perspective.

Studies show that it costs less to keep and maintain a current customer base than to get a new customer – in most cases up to six times less. The key to sustained profits is repeat customers, and happy customers become repeat customers – who also refer others to the company.

But when customers do complain, they no longer do so through traditional routes. A multitude of websites inviting people to post their negative experiences with a business are easily

accessible. While the internet has opened up a new frontier of business opportunities for the enterprising professional, it has also given everybody a voice.

Sometimes complaints are deserved, and at other times not. Regardless, it is important to address all types of complaints in a way that mitigates relational damage.

The key to responding well to online complaints is to try and have a conversation with communities, and respond to complaints or concerns, in an area where you have some control.

While it may be tempting to post a reply in defence of your business on every site that has something negative to say, remember that, if you post to a site that is run by the person who is upset, you are putting your voice in their control.

What they post becomes their choice and they control the (very public) conversation. An alternative way to address their concerns may be to send a private e-mail asking if the person can be contacted by phone to address their concerns.

It's important to know when to respond and when to stay silent. It is fruitless to engage people who are obviously venting or have a proverbial

axe to grind, or who are logging illegitimate complaints, because logical responses have little effect on purely emotional public outbursts.

A business' voice is powerful and, because of that, can be subject to interpretation. Those who are emotional may have other motives for posting beyond simply hoping for a resolution. Learning when to protect your business's voice is just as important as knowing when and what to say.

Minimise the amount of online complaints by having a good customer service department that responds quickly and transparently. People are becoming increasingly intolerant of excuses and a swift apology and quick resolution of their complaint is often the best way to preserve customer relations.

If you're in business long enough people will complain about you. Knowing when and how to respond can be the difference between deepening the wound and bringing about resolution, and diplomatic handling of a complaint will keep your customer relationships healthy.



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