10 Tips for Managing Customer Service on Social Media

Social media is becoming the primary way customers communicate with companies. Since these platforms are in public view and messages are easily shared, a minor issue can become a full-blown viral conversation if not handled appropriately. Here are 10 tips for your business or brand to successfully managing customer service in an always-on, always-connected world.

Enable Facebook's private messaging function
Turn on Facebook's private messaging function to receive private messages (not visible to the public) as well as to privately respond to public comments within the newsfeed. Unlike comment replies, messages start a private conversation between you and the customer. Facebook will autogenerate a message within the comment thread visible to all other fans letting them know you have privately addressed the customer's comment.

Enable Twitter's direct messaging function
Enable direct messaging on Twitter so you can privately receive messages regarding customer service issues. There are no character limits on direct messages (or on replies to direct messages). You can respond to a direct message even if you do not follow one another. As with Facebook, encourage customers posting publicly to either direct message you or to take the conversation into a private message.

Increase social media customer service staffing
If it is a busy time for your customer service team based on sales cycles or an unfortunate product issue, then it will be a busy time on social media. Increase the number of team members monitoring your social media channels to ensure issues are addressed as soon as possible. People have very little patience on social media — since content is easily shared, a non-response can trigger a major social media conversation in which you do not have a voice.

Use apps and alerts
Set up alerts on mobile devices, whether from the platform itself (such as Facebook Pages Manager) or through another social media management platform (such as Hootsuite) to be notified of comments or mentions in real time.

Post customer service hours
Just as you likely do online, share customer service hours on each social media page to manage expectations for a response. Provide alternate contact information for emergencies. Take note of global time zones.

Respond ASAP
Ideally you should respond to every customer within the hour, even if you can't completely answer the question. Notify the sender that the message has been received and you're working to provide an answer.

Personalize each response
Your customer service team is human — and should communicate as such. Avoid automated responses. Start each reply with the customer's name and personalize the message.

Follow response guidelines
Personalization aside, it is wise to have messaging protocols in place for responding to common customer service issues. This ensures consistency and reduces hand wringing when a quick response is needed. Keep approved responses at the ready. As an additional measure, consider having your legal team review and approve as well.

Know when NOT to respond
Not every question or comment deserves a response, including those with profanity, obscene content, racial or gender slurs or defamatory employee accusations. As a page manager, you have a right to publicly respond that the customer's language violates your page's content standards and you will only continue the conversation privately. You also have the right to choose not to engage (you'll find many times, loyal fans will step in on your behalf) or to delete the post. Please note, take careful consideration when deleting a post as this action could trigger a flurry of additional comments.

Use social media as an improvement tool
Use your social media channels as a continuous improvement tool. Keep a record of all questions or complaints and make sure they are forwarded to company leaders who can implement change.