

## Of trolls and humans:

# Customer Relationship in the Age of Social Media

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"Hello, dear customer, your request is too stupid for us and you are certainly tattooed - that's why we deleted it. We hope we have helped you." This is how the Facebook profile "Customer Service" recently commented on user enquiries on the pinboards of large and small branded companies, dealers and service providers. Some users fall for it and take the customer service at face value, react disturbed, the discussion is additionally fueled and sometimes escalates.

The satire page, which has also generated great media interest, is representative of two things: the phenomenon of many consumers bringing the most banal "complaints" about social media to companies. And that many companies react too late or not at all when communication on their sites becomes independent. Customer service is holding companies up to the mirror and users increasingly feel that they are not being taken seriously. In addition, studies show that in recent times the assessment of service quality and service cases has had one of the largest shares of conversations in social media; at the same time, the negative tonality of dissatisfied people increases. Social media are the reservoir for those disappointed at other touchpoints - this can, when monitored and evaluated accordingly, also provide valuable insights for improving the company and its reputation as a whole. Social CRM can leverage potential if data and experience are used: Who are my fans really? What moves the community? Where are fundamental improvements necessary? Where can crises arise? In addition to the new negative customer power, there is also a significant positive power.

Shitstorms often arise from outside, for example through thoughtless statements by managers or through reports in the classic media about alleged grievances.

But even on your own pinboard in social networks at least a bush fire can ignite, if not a big wave of protest is started. If a discussion bulges in such a way or has a large number of users the feeling not to be taken seriously, the network effect sets fast in and by sharing, likening and recommending ever more so far uninvolved ones become attentive.

Therefore some tips for good Social Customer Relationship Management:

### **Clear responsibilities and procedures**

Develop guidelines and schedules for "social customer support", with or without external support. Create the necessary awareness for a new dimension of service communication, in which several departments such as support, corporate communication, marketing and sales no longer have to work in the silo, but must work together towards a common goal. It can be helpful to categorize possible inquiries and criticisms. Define workflows, coordination processes and four-eyes principles. Who helps which department and when? Train employees not only in classical customer satisfaction but also in dealing with the "new" media. Use professional interaction tools. And: There can no longer be a clear separation between public relations and customer service these days!

### **Balanced speed, quality and tonality**

Users expect the shortest possible response time, especially on digital channels. But: It's all about satisfied customers and not about the quickest possible standard responses. Tonality and above all helpful quality are even more important. For frequently repeated standard queries, on the other hand, construction kits can be used, as Facebook has recently begun to offer. Damage usually only occurs if critical postings are not responded to at all or only badly. Not by the contribution itself. In extreme cases, you should not only react quickly, but also transparently and authentically. Take the user and his problem seriously, offer solutions or alternatives and discuss data-sensitive or escalating topics on a more private level. platform (e-mail support or similar).

Quick-wittedness and irony are important qualities, but they should be used very prudently - for example against trolls and other persistent pests (the Facebook channel of the newspaper "Die Welt", for example, has become known through funny answers to notorious "lie press" enemies and world conspiracy theorists). But don't exaggerate: The community will remember sovereign answers and the associated quick attitude of discussion with trolls more positively than an extended mud battle.

### **Proactive Community Management**

Anyone who is active as a company in social media today is no longer satisfied with simply reacting to questions - rather, it is better to go beyond pure customer service and bind customers permanently by asking questions, addressing fans without a concrete (problem) background and anticipating possible waves of criticism at an early stage.

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