



## **And She Told Two Friends...**

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I had a most interesting interaction as a customer recently. It made me think the holy grail of transforming the contact center from a cost center to a profit center may actually be achievable if social media takes hold. But this transformation won't take place by the centers working on their own. The relevance and future of the contact center may depend on how well we work with marketing and other areas of the enterprise that hold the keys to the social media kingdom.

### ***Something to post on my Facebook!***

This customer interaction experience started by good old fashioned "word of mouth" – a friend telling us about something and then sharing a discount code for purchase. In spite of the fact that I had seen many ads previously (some with famous spokespersons), I wasn't inspired to purchase until my conversation with my friend. I proceeded to purchase – on the web, although I could have called to order or ask questions. As a thanks for my order, I received an email that included a "coupon" with these lines (along with some clever and flattering filler):

Feel free to send this coupon via email, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace...

To make your life even easier, we wrote a sample email that you can forward to your buddies. You can find the sample email (and a sample Tweet) below.

Thanks again for spreading the word...

This company isn't passively hoping I'll interact via social media – they are encouraging and even facilitating it for those less certain about what new thing to tell their friends and family. The "a-ha" I had with this email was that social media is not just a thing I am going to read about (or write about) – it is for real, and could truly redefine the world of commerce. While I've been thinking about, reading about, and writing about Web 2.0 for many months, this stark reality hit me and made me wonder what the implications are – *right now* – for the contact centers we know so well.

### ***If you have an outlet (and some friends), you can be a seller too***

It used to be the company's responsibility to do the selling through marketing, advertising, and sales people. They might hope for old-fashioned word of mouth, but they had to work hard to get our attention, interest, and commitment. As social media enters the stage, the "seller" becomes a friend or family member. There is a fundamental shift from the impersonal company telling us we want or need something to very personal connections telling us.

Am I more likely to trust someone I know to encourage me to purchase a product or service? Absolutely. Does a "discount" or "coupon" mean more if a friend has forwarded it to me than if it arrives in my mailbox, email, or front door, or from an upsell offer from a call center rep? Absolutely.

If it's all about "eyeballs," think how much more likely companies are to get eyeballs on something if they use a personal network to give it attention. Other characteristics make the promotion I received effective as well. They offer channel choice, provide ready made text to cut-and-paste into the referral



email or tweet, and they use humor effectively, flattering both me and themselves. It is, if I dare say, “hip.”

### ***Be proactively engaged, not blindsided***

We have a long history in the contact center of being blindsided by promotions sent out by marketing of which we have no advanced notice. We’ve all experienced that painful moment when the agent says, “I’m sorry, I’m not familiar with that promotion...” In the world of Web 2.0, those promotions could increase, spread, and grow fast and furiously.

So perhaps it’s time to accept that this transition to social media is not just a threat but a reality. The center could move up in importance – or disappear into the shadows – depending on the role we play in a company’s customer interactions, including selling (to current or future contacts). The center may or may not be a lead player in social media, but in the centers that want to remain relevant, they will be an active player or risk becoming a bit player forever relegated to a cost, not revenue, center.

Centers have unique insights on customer interactions, and need to ensure marketing, eCommerce, product management, or others who have a key role in social media get that. It wouldn’t be difficult to start experimenting with these types of campaigns, whether you have fancy CRM, analytics, and other tools, or not. If you’re not already actively engaged, when you finish reading this article, make a lunch date with those people and start figuring out how you can participate.

And if you’re wondering, yes, I did forward the offer to some friends. Now, excuse me, but I need to go “tweet” about it.