



## Social Media Wants YOU

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I hardly go a week without an invitation to the “must see” webinar or “must read” article on social media. With nearly 500 million Facebook accounts, 100+ million MySpace users, 65+ million LinkedIn members, 65 million daily Tweets, 60+million blogs and countless other networks and forums, social media has become a communications tsunami, capturing one out of every four-and-a-half minutes of all time spent on-line.<sup>1</sup> It is force with which most, if not all, corporations must reckon.

Yet for the overburdened, understaffed contact center, a comfortable place on high ground seems preferable to drowning in a sea change that may or may not prove materially beneficial to the organization and its customers. Before you head for the hills, take a moment to learn from others who’ve established beachheads in the new terrain and delivered value for the corporation and its customers.

### ***Social Media Happens***

As happened to the feckless Wizard of Oz, the curtain that hid corporate fallibility and guarded brand image has been pulled aside. With social media, *anyone* with a good story and engaging presentation can reach a global audience. It’s the ultimate power-to-the-people technology. Have a bad experience with baggage claim? Post a catchy tune on YouTube and let millions of viewers hear all about it. Frustrated with your Internet provider’s help desk? Find thousands of others in the same boat and start writing about it. Better yet, pool your collective knowledge to help each other. Shut out from your financial institution’s on-line banking service? Get a Tweet from the guy who found the “back door” to the company’s web server.

Your organization may have the good fortune of flying under the radar of the Internet’s most creative or persistent (or nasty) consumer advocates, but it doesn’t mean that you’ve escaped the long arm of social media law. A Nielson global survey revealed that recommendations from personal acquaintances or opinions posted by consumers on-line represent the most trusted form of advertising.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, a Harris Interactive survey showed that negative comments about a vendor’s products or services impacted purchase decisions by 75% of on-line adults.<sup>3</sup> *Do you know what they’re saying about you?*

### ***Learn from Some Early Adopters***

While most of us experiment with social networks – catching up with friends and family on Facebook, posting resumes on LinkedIn, sharing entertaining YouTube videos, reading the occasional blog – a few intrepid service organizations are trying to re-write the rules of customer engagement.

Software house Intuit – maker of QuickBooks accounting software – has created space for peer-to-peer communication on a hosted forum. Customers from all over the world share hints and tips on tailoring the popular accounting software to their environments while responding to specific inquiries. Intuit staffers provide oversight on quality, giving prominence to the best responses and filtering out inaccurate or

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<sup>1</sup> [http://blog.nielson.com/nielsenwire/online\\_mobile/social-media-accounts-for-22-percent-of-time-online/](http://blog.nielson.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/social-media-accounts-for-22-percent-of-time-online/)

<sup>2</sup> <http://blog.nielson.com/nielsenwire/consumer/global-advertising-consumers-trust-real-friends-and-virtual-strangers-the-most/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tealeaf.com/Harris/survey.php>



harmful discussion. The forum has reduced customer cycle time and delivered a 10% year-over-year reduction in inbound call volume. Agents welcome relief from mundane inquiries and the opportunity to engage in creative problem solving.

Best Buy tapped the spirit of helpfulness among employees by creating a Twitter site for customer inquiries. Dubbed the “Twelforce,” the collective monitors customer tweets and provides expert advice on Best Buy products. Policy guidelines and training videos prepare the 2,400 volunteers to serve customers and the company well. Reports track the number of responses to specific inquiries, average response time, the number of questions answered daily and the frequency with which volunteers participate. Top volunteers get public kudos.

Home Goods enlisted the support of consumer enthusiasts to create a multi-user blog chock full of creative ideas for using its products. Six writers were selected from among 20,000 volunteers. Each creates quality content that enhances sales, customer satisfaction and loyalty *at no direct charge to the company*.

Admittedly, the jury is out on whether social media investments pay tangible dividends above and beyond goodwill. Nonetheless, the social networking pioneers have learned a few things along the way:

- Social media is all about the users – their interests, their voice, their desire to connect. Lots of companies salivate at the thought of transforming social networking into a money-making enterprise. But the readers want information, interaction and (*dare I say?*) entertainment on their terms before they’ll listen to a corporate pitch.
- Users want to contribute. They’re ready, willing and able to “crowd source” answers to tough questions – perhaps better than your staffers’ responses! They can provide constructive feedback and advice. And this labor force is virtually free, willing to work for recognition and the satisfaction of helping others.
- Users expect a *personal* connection. They want to interact with “Bob,” not a nameless, faceless service agent. Check out Rubbermaid’s *Adventures in Organization* blog to see photos and profiles of employee-bloggers.
- Users expect transparency. If you’ve got bad news, better to break the news yourself – with an appropriate action plan – than suffer the wrath of the public forum.
- Likewise... active listening on social media alerts centers to potential problems and provides an avenue for response. Well-placed posts reduce calls to the center, and agents are equipped to handle the ones that come through.
- Users expect immediate response. Make sure your internal communications mechanisms cross organizational lines (as needed) to address customer posts and inquiries quickly.

### ***What YOU Should Do***

Any form of customer engagement should have a clear link to business requirements and goals. Social media is too big to ignore. It’s also too big to enter willy-nilly. You don’t have to be everywhere, and you certainly don’t need a presence in channels for which there is no inherent customer need or interest. [*If a Tweet falls in an empty forest, does it make a sound?*] Moreover, quality trumps quantity if you’re trying to build a successful community.

When you decide to enter the fray, get your house in order first. Think about how your social media strategy fits with your other service channels – your agents, your self-service applications, your corporate web site. Decide whether or not your current technology infrastructure is adequate to the task. [*Do you*



*need a knowledge management system to support your forum?]* Establish usage and empowerment guidelines to meet corporate objectives while giving your employees an appropriately creative outlet for their skills and expertise. Think about how you'll monitor and measure activity to ensure operational success while quantifying business benefits.

Finally, practice what you preach. If you want customers to boost their interactions with you, be prepared to enter the conversation with enthusiasm, useful commentary and a bit of good humor.