

10 Ways To Deliver Better Social Media Customer Service

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Customer service has evolved from the telephone to [Twitter TWTR +2.02%](#), from faxing to email to [Facebook FB -0.83%](#), from in-person to the Internet. It has gone **social**, as in [social media](#) customer service.

If your organization hasn't made the transition to **social** customer service, or **social care** as it is conveniently called today, you are going to be left in the dust by your competition. You can't fight it, so why not join it, and be good at it.

First, **social** care is more than responding to complaints that are posted on Twitter. It's more replying to a rant on Facebook. It's about reacting to all comments, good and bad, on all **social** channels. It offers a showcase for you and your **brand** to demonstrate how you handle customer interactions.

I connected with the fine people over at [Sprout Social](#), a company devoted to ensuring smarter, faster and more efficient **social** communications. Andrew Caravella, VP of **marketing**, shared some great tips on how to deliver a better **social** media customer service experience. I've included some of my own ideas to round out a "Top Ten" list along with some relevant commentary.

1. **Prioritize reactive customer service to balance marketing goals.** More and more, **social** media is becoming the first place customers turn when they want to connect with **brands**. Sprout **Social** shared some interesting [stats and facts](#) that make the case. Ninety percent of people surveyed have used **social** media in some way to communicate directly with a **brand**. Even more interesting is that 34.5% of customers turn to **social** media over any other channel. That's followed by website/live chat at 24.7%; email, 19.4%; and the phone (toll-free number) at just 16.1%. Knowing that, do you need to rethink the channels that your company is focusing on? Are they prioritized to match your customers' preferences?
2. **Conduct pre-emptive social customer care.** Using **social** media for **social** care is not just about responding to comments. Use **social** media as a way to let customers know about potential problems before they arise. For example, my insurance company, [PURE Insurance](#), sends out notices and warnings about storms, flooding and other issues I should be aware of as a homeowner. Caravella says, "Engaging in preemptive **social**

customer care will ensure your customers see you as a thoughtful, caring partner instead of a faceless **brand**.”

3. **Find brand-adjacent conversations and join them.** There are many conversations happening on **social** media channels that don't mention your **brand** by name, but tie into your industry. Look for opportunities to interact with followers who might not mention you directly but would welcome your input and benefit from your being part of their conversation. (That's why they call it **social**!)
4. **Look for requests that aren't actual “@” mentions.** It's easy to monitor when someone mentions you by name or includes your Facebook or Twitter @handle, but sometimes people misspell the company name or use a hashtag instead of the official handle. Be sure your monitoring system picks up on those as well.
5. **Answer with video.** A personalized response with a video is powerful. There are plenty of programs, such as BombBomb, Eyejot and others, that make it easy to send a personal email to a customer. Check out this example from [Joybird Furniture](#). The service reps recorded a quick six-second video to wish a customer a Happy New Year.
6. **Outline an expected wait time, and update it continually.** Customers' value their time, so if you are going to make them wait, let them know how long the wait will be. The best companies respond in minutes. That said, Sprout **Social** reports that the average **brand** response time is 10 hours. Ten hours! Are you kidding? If I wanted my question answered in 10 hours, I would have waited 10 hours to ask the question! That said, most people are willing to wait for four hours. Unfortunately, 89% of **social** messages from customers go ignored. And one-third of people who are ignored are willing to take their business to a competitor.
7. **Surprise and delight.** Customer want and expect a **brand** to reply to their **social** rant or complaint, but what they don't expect is for the **brand** to go the extra mile. For example, an airline could respond to a passenger and include a drink coupon. Just a little something extra, even if it's just a follow up, is unexpected and appreciated.
8. **Don't switch channels unless you ask first.** The first interactions between the customer and the **brand** are visible to all. At some point, however, it may be necessary to move to a private conversation, especially if there is personal information being shared. Some channels, like [Twitter](#), can go private through their [Direct](#)Message capability, but there are times you may need to move to a different channel. Typically, that alternative channel will be the phone (but not always). Just ask the customer to move to the new channel and explain why.
9. **Use customer service feedback to inform product innovation.** A complaint on **social** media is more than just an opportunity to show how good you are. It is an opportunity to learn. Customer feedback (both good and bad) is valuable data. You can use that data to improve your product and your customer experience – for all customers.
10. **Be real.** It can become very obvious to the customer – and everyone else watching – if you are using a computer or bot to respond to a customer's question or complaint. The technology is getting better to the point of it being difficult to tell the difference between a human being and a computerized response, but unless you're using that advanced technology, don't try to fake it.

Making the most of **social** media and using it to enhance your customer experience may seem like a challenge, but following these guidelines will help you focus on what's most important. If you haven't already, you'll soon come to realize that it's actually a great opportunity to build better relationships with your customers – and maybe make some new ones along the way!

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