

Managing social media to build trust, conversations

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21 May 2014

Social media has become the fastest way organisations can communicate with consumers and using experienced individuals that are guided by tight social media policies and trained in crisis communication strategies is important for any organisation's social media identity.



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Social media blunders strike fear into the heart of any marketing manager and effective social media management has again been placed under the spotlight. In the [case of FNB](#), a distasteful response to a harmless query caused outrage on social media and left an unsightly blemish on the company's otherwise polished social media reputation. Farther from home, a [campaign to boost the New York police force's image](#) among citizens, by asking them to submit pictures taken with police officers, backfired horribly when images depicting alleged police brutality were submitted instead.

Not a job for interns

Companies are waking up to the fact that social media management is not a job for interns or junior staff members, but for competent, experienced individuals. In an age where we have access to a huge amount of information, relevant content certainly is king, but empowering the wrong people with the wrong content can result in embarrassment and a tarnished reputation.

The old saying "there is no such thing as bad publicity" might be more true today than before - take what the SABC did for the DA in its social media campaign. The trick is not to pull back the reins but rather use the opportunity to focus on the relevance of automation, ie the use of accurate knowledge management tools and the internal routing of social media based queries so that the person or system with the best information on the topic can timeously respond with relevant content.

Social media forms an important part of running a successful business in the 21st century - much as email, phone and contact centres have been. Companies often outsource social media management without considering that online platforms must form part of an integrated, multi-channel infrastructure that meets customer expectations in a fast-moving world.

I experienced this disconnect myself not too long ago when an ATM swallowed my bankcard at 2am one morning. Furious, I tweeted about my frustration only to get a very friendly response, "Sorry about your situation, please contact our customer service centre and we will resolve your problem."

This calmed me down and I continued to contact the customer service centre, only to find out that they knew nothing about my tweet nor the response they sent me; I had to explain who I was, what happened and why I was upset. This situation would have been far better catered for if I got a call because of my tweet.

Conversation centres needed

These days, we speak of a conversation centre rather than a contact centre - one that improves all customer touch points, including customer care, brand marketing, public and community relations, merchandising and more. This in turn builds trust, strengthens customer relationships and, ultimately, puts out sparks before they become fires.

In conversation centres, we see customer exchanges as information assets that must be handled with the same strategic and process-focused approach as any other company asset. Businesses must never lose sight of the fact that the conversations customers have about their brands and products - virtual focus groups - have real effects on certain aspects of their operations.

Social media analytics provides critical link

In the past, the level of detail collected from online conversations was not enough to guide important decisions. It was also difficult to determine accurately topics that were important to consumers or perceptions that were associated with a particular brand or product. Unable to link conversations to products, companies could not quantify the impact of online content on overall business performance. Now, social media analytics provides that critical link.

The Internet has put enormous power into the hands of consumers. Businesses that ignore the conversations taking place on these platforms do so at their peril. It is worth investing in the best training, policies, processes and systems to ensure the most effective management of customer relationships through open, integrated communication channels.

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