Social Media and Customer Service
Fix the Process Before You Run out of Socks

by Steve Kraus

A lot of attention, and rightfully so, is being paid to the ability for customers to directly influence other customers and prospects through the use of social media. Social media serves as the "bullhorn" that amplifies the underlying flaws in customer service that many of us have experienced for years. A lot of attention is also being paid to a company's ability to hear, acknowledge and respond to a social media post concerning bad service.

Essentially, companies are looking for a way to stick a "sock" in each customer's bullhorn one customer at a time. While it is critically important to have a drawer full of socks at the ready, the real challenge is how to create effective customer service processes so that customers don't pick up the bullhorn in the first place. And when customer service challenges do arise (as they always will with new customers, products and services), how are the underlying service processes rapidly adapted to correct those challenges for all of the customers who are potentially impacted?

I have a coworker who financed home furniture through a major retail bank. After he was charged a number of incorrect fees on his financing promotion, he tried several times, unsuccessfully, to call customer service to resolve the issue. He is highly skilled in the ways of social media, and when he could not get an adequate response from the bank, he picked up his bullhorn, took to the airwaves and tweeted about his bad experience. The bank, post-tweet, made several attempts to reach out to him, acknowledging his tweet, telling him they were working hard to address his finance charges and showing empathy for his service issues (i.e., they pulled out their finest sock). While this is a great step in the right direction, it does not provide the average customer with confidence that this issue won't happen again—and when it does, that they could expect to have a better service experience. To Tweet or not to Tweet is not the right question to answer. The right question is, why did the customer have to pick up his bullhorn and shout at the top of his lungs via the Internet (no doubt in all capital letters) to get the attention he should have received in the first place?

What if that company had the ability to not only hear, understand and respond to a service issue, but also had the underlying ability to rapidly create a new service process or change the existing process to eliminate the issue? What if, when an incident occurred, the company proactively reached directly out to the customer,

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acknowledged the incident, and communicated the key steps that they were taking to correct the process? What if, when the customer service team reached out, they had the exact right words in front of them (or in a text or email) to say to make the customer feel confident that the company was working in their best interest and was competent enough to get results? And most importantly, what if the business owner had the insight into, and control of, the process that resulted in the incident (i.e., incorrect finance charges) and could adjust that process to ensure that a similar event did not happen in the future?

Deploying agile customer processes enables the customer service business owner to not only hear, acknowledge and respond to each individual customer's voice, but also to create and immediately modify the process to correct the root cause for all the potentially impacted customers.

Every day more customers are picking up new and bigger bullhorns. It is time for organizations to fix their customer service process before they run out of socks.

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