

# How to handle negative feedback on social media

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Negative feedback from customers has been part of the business landscape since time immemorial. What is just different now is the velocity and visibility of complaints as a result of the pervasiveness of social media usage.

Jade Furubayashi of Simply Measured puts it across in a succinct manner. He observed that "as hard as you might try, it's impossible to keep everyone happy and social media is the go-to destination for disgruntled users."

Since social media has democratised communication, customers are finding it much easier to communicate with brands and this includes expressing their dissatisfaction with products or services.



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## Public opinion

Unlike in the bygone era where traditional media dominated, a complaint lodged via social media circulates widely within a large network of friends of friends. Welcome to the new reality of an always on interconnected world where virality is not uncommon. What was previously a private matter between a brand and an unhappy customer is now played out in

the court of public opinion.

Some companies have been unnerved by this perceived vulnerability to "consumer democracy", making them circumspect about investing in social media marketing. Unfortunately, they miss the opportunity of discovering what is being said about their products or services and in the real world, what you don't know can harm you.

I am of the opinion that if negative interactions are creatively managed, they can provide exceptional opportunities to build long term loyalty and trust with customers.

## Handling negative feedback

Instead of turning a blind eye to disgruntlements, brands should rather plan on how they can proactively handle negative feedback and use it to their advantage. There a number of possible ways that can be used to achieve this.

The starting point is to create an online response strategy. "95% of problem solving is planning. The previous statement is unquantifiable, but the metaphor rings true. The more you plan for the shortcomings of your business, the more prepared you are to address issues when they arise" states Robert Patterson, Vice President of Social Media and Influencer Marketing.

Social media users expect instant gratification and are intolerant to delays. If they feel that they are being ignored they tend to become nasty and post embarrassing comments that are only meant for their friends to see and not for the brands to resolve. The motive being to undermine a company's image.

United Airlines, for example, learnt this lesson the hard way. The airline ignored a complaint of a guitar damaged during baggage handling that was made by one their passengers, Dave Carroll. After realising that his complaint was not being taken seriously, the Canadian musician made video song about the matter that went viral and United Airlines' shares dropped 10% within four days of the video's release costing shareholders \$180 million in value.

All this could have been avoided had the airline made a timeous response in real time and offered compensation. A well thought out online response strategy takes care of this.

## Response strategy

The second step is to identify the type of the negative feedback and classify it as either pressing, constructive, disgruntled or spam. This facilitates the delivery of an appropriate and meaningful response.

Pressing feedback requires an urgent solution and can create serious customer dissatisfaction if it is not resolved immediately. Examples include an unfulfilled order, product malfunction, or failure to complete an online banking transaction. The solution must be found quickly and made publicly as this makes the brand look good to its community of interconnected customers.

Constructive negative feedback is welcome from the stand point that it often leads to product or service improvement. For example, a customer complaint about the number of forms that they have to complete before they can access a service can lead to the company creating shorter documents.

Disgruntled customers can get nasty and pose a serious nightmare to brands as they cannot be reasoned with. The best thing is to do is to apologise and move on.

## Online reputation

Thirdly, brands should be proactive in surfacing customer dissatisfaction by leveraging online reputation management tools like Google Alerts, Social Mentions or sophisticated paid services like Brandwatch. These tools help brands to track the sentiments expressed online by their customers or by the market in general. Negative sentiments can then be gleaned and addressed before they burn the company down.

Fourthly, there are functions on many social media platforms that allow page administrators to filter out certain keywords that are deemed as hate speech or spam. For example the Manage Permissions tab in Facebook enables marketers to list the keywords that are damaging to their brand's image and posts which contain these keywords are then blocked.

Finally, marketers and customer service staff should respond to their customers' negative feedback in a genuine and human tone. There is nothing as offending as robotic answers that sound like pre-packaged responses.

A good response strategy reinforces the perception that a brand is caring and responsive and it ultimately leads to increased business.

## ABOUT JOSEPH NEUSU

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