

How to Deal with Complaints via Twitter

Enterprises often see Twitter as a mixed blessing—excellent for brand awareness as well as building trust and loyalty amongst their customers, yet potentially a crisis communications situation arising from one negative Tweet.

This is where well-trained and educated customer service departments can set themselves and their brand apart from the competition, as this statistic highlights:

Customers who engage with companies over social media spend an average of 30% more with those companies than other customers.¹

Human nature is such that consumers find it easy to complain, particularly across the one-click social web we inhabit. Before social media, customers had limited—and frustrating—ways to contact a company. They had two choices: send a letter (once they had confirmed the address and to whom it needed to be addressed) or make a phone call. The latter often involved being passed from pillar to post and being placed on hold. Of course, both choices took time and effort, and didn't necessarily resolve the issue.



Social media, on the other hand, has changed the dynamic. By democratising the Internet, social media has given the power back to the people. Twitter does have compelling benefits for businesses as part of their brand marketing activities. However, consumers are now able to voice not only support for a company or brand, but dissatisfaction, and in a public forum. And these negative sentiments are regularly compounded by hashtags, such as the infamous #fail.

The damage to a brand's reputation could happen overnight if not managed well, and there are examples of this happening to even the largest of enterprises with the deepest pockets.

As such, the general public has become increasingly savvy about how to use Twitter—it's often the quickest way to spark a response from a brand, or to build a tide of support to help your cause. And, of course, once a Tweet is sent, it stays sent, remaining visible to anyone and everyone.

Yet only 39% of major companies answer customer service questions asked through Twitter.²

Furthermore, it's much easier and quicker to be able to find, reach, and connect with a company on social media than via traditional routes. Plus, the strength of the digital population and its sheer weight of vocal and public support shouldn't be overlooked.

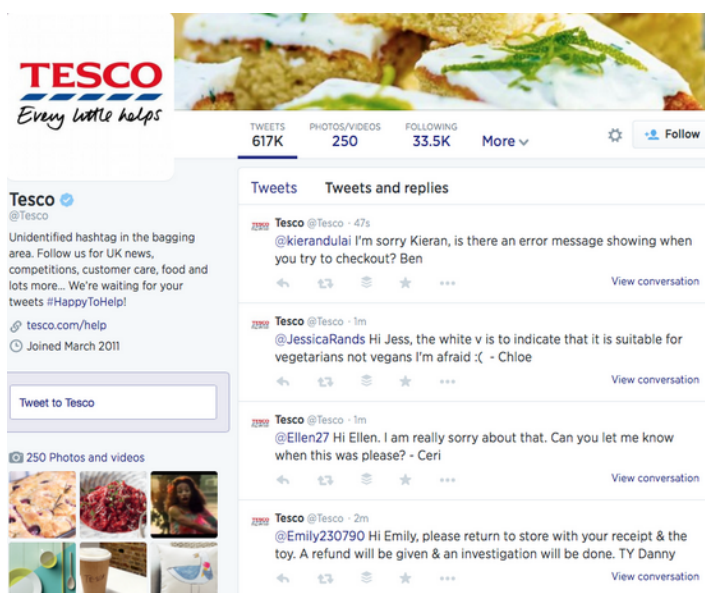
Responding to complaints in a timely fashion is imperative when it comes to handling complaints. Customer service inaction can create a situation that escalates quickly.

So how should brands deal with complaints on Twitter?

Respond quickly

A timely response not only pacifies the situation but also contains it. And customers expect to be heard. According to research published by Jay Bear, 42% of consumers complaining in social media expect a response within 60 minutes. However, the Eptica Multichannel Customer Experience Study referenced earlier found that the average successful response on Twitter was over eight hours.

There are, of course, some brands that are successfully using social customer service. Tesco, for example, ensures that their customer service team is available throughout the day and late into the evening for quick response times.



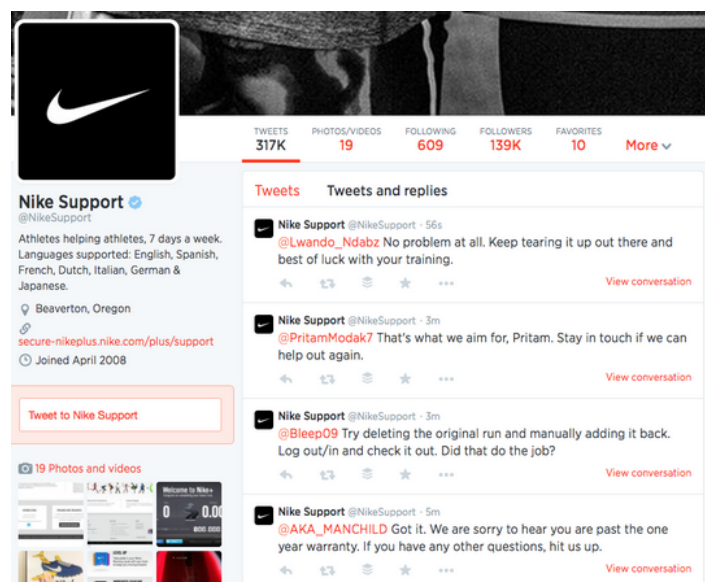
Companies that recognise the importance handling complaints on Twitter will win customers over. A lack of response, even if it's outside office hours, simply escalates the complaint. Don't assume the problem will go away on its own.

Brands should take advantage of available tools to replying to customer service enquiries so that they can streamline the process. Look for a platform that will allow your team to assign Tweets and monitor responses. This will ensure the most appropriate team member is assigned to respond to the complaint, and there are no redundancies between team members overlapping in their outreach.

Be human

When responding to a complaint on Twitter, it pays to be human. Try not to use a blanket corporate response Tweet. Customers would much prefer to receive a personalised response. You need to show compassion and that you genuinely care about their issue.

Nike is an excellent example of how an enterprise is successfully managing customer service online. They have set up a separate Twitter handle @NikeSupport to handle customer questions. Not only do they respond in a speedy manner to individual customers, but they also take the time to personally reply, which humanises the brand and creates relationships.



It goes without saying that you also need to be civil—even if the person tweeting isn't. Entering into a debate or argument in public does not reflect well on a brand. Keep in mind that the public is watching and you don't want to fan the flames.

Apologise

Apologising may sound obvious but companies sometimes find it hard to say they are sorry. A stock apology implies that a company doesn't believe it's at fault. You need to defuse the situation as soon as possible even if you're not entirely sure what the cause is. Stating, "We're looking into the issue and apologise for any inconvenience caused" is a good start, but be sure to tailor it to the individual's specific issue. If you don't, you risk exacerbating the situation and further annoying the customer.

Let the customer know you will deal with it right away. This promise of action will help defuse the situation.

Establish a procedure

It's important to have a set of procedures to follow that highlights clearly who is responsible and therefore takes ownership for responding to queries and complaints. This should also include filtering of what type of Tweets are handled by which person or department, and when to escalate a problem. This will help rectify different scenarios—especially the most common complaints your brand receives—so that you don't have to think on your feet when you're trying to put fires out. Make it easy for your team to respond quickly, efficiently, and professionally.



Learn more about best practices for [Social Customer Service](#)

Identifying and planning for escalation triggers is vital so that each person responsible for your Twitter handle knows at what point the issue should be escalated to higher management.

Ensure you provide appropriate training and carry out audits so you can easily measure whether the procedures are working and that your customer service is being handled well, or what areas could be improved.

Enterprises should consider having a separate customer service assistance programme, too. Set your team up for success by implementing customised training, on-demand education on social media best practices, and simulations so you're ready for any event. This will prevent any customer service mis-steps and identify any gaps in your social customer service process.

Take it offline

It's important to remember that what goes online stays online, and is visible to everyone. Where possible, try to take it offline. It's worthwhile, once the situation has been resolved, to tweet the person to thank them for getting in touch, apologise for the inconvenience, and show that you're pleased the matter has now been fixed. The longer you keep it online, the more attention the issue will receive.

Taking it offline is perhaps the most important thing to do once you've responded to the complaint, particularly if the complaint is significant. Indeed, if you have a loyal and engaged fan base, then quite often your community will stand up for you. Your brand must be professional and responsible—let others do the arguing; your reputation is way too important.

To streamline the process, consider using a platform that integrates existing customer service tools, like Zendesk, to ensure a seamless customer service resolution.

Don't delete!

You need to demonstrate honesty and transparency in your social media marketing. Resist the temptation to remove Twitter accounts or Tweets in the hope that people will forget. If you have responded quickly and politely, and have tried to resolve the situation, it will be clear.

There are some great examples of brands successfully handling complaints on Twitter. TfL is an excellent case study of how, with planning and clear objectives, you can humanise a brand and limit negative Tweets, while improving a company's reputation.

When the Underground's Victoria Line was suspended for eight hours due to flood damage, people flocked to Twitter to complain and air their frustrations. This resulted in TfL receiving an incredible 1,245 mentions in 24 hours.



By handling the situation promptly and delivering regular updates via Twitter, and maintaining honesty and transparency, TfL achieved:

- An additional 2,471 followers (8% increase)
- Sentiment of 87% positive, which given the circumstances is impressive

These two metrics alone highlight how organisations can turn any situation around on Twitter with dignity and efficiency. And the positive responses and praise they received from commuters and the public vindicated their exemplary approach.



Endnotes

1. Bain & Company. ["Putting social media to work"](#). 2011
2. Clark, S. ["The New 2014 Eptica Multichannel Customer Experience Study | Digital & Wise"](#). 2014



See TFL's customer service presentation at [Connect via Hootsuite London](#)

Complaints are a part of doing business. By addressing customer challenges in a timely and respectful manner, companies have the opportunity to engage with their customers. Companies that pre-emptively build active digital communities will find their resources are diverted into conversing with loyal customers rather than dealing with conflict situations.

[Learn more](#) about how Hootsuite helps global organisations succeed in their Social Customer Service efforts, or [request a demo today](#).

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