

# Customer service IS marketing

There should be no doubt that a company's customer service plays a huge role in marketing. Put bluntly, if a company has poor customer service, there will be fewer customers at the end of the day. The only exception to this rule is with monopolies like power and telephone companies, which often provide bad service but customers are forced to remain with them as they cannot take their business elsewhere.

Let me give you a personal example. My website is currently hosted at Mediatemple. I have had hosting there since 2004. Off and on during the past seven years, I have had email retrieval issues among other problems. This past Friday, I noticed my Outlook was not able to access my email. It happened again on Monday, at which point I opened a support request with Mediatemple online. I have learned, through negative interactions in the past, that calling the 1-800 number results in long waits and unhelpful personnel.

After a few hours, I had received no response, so I tweeted it out. Mediatemple responds immediately to tweets. I did not get a response from the support request until 24 hours later. It told me I should check my email settings. I did what they suggested, and the problem persisted. Mind you, I had no problem accessing my other email on the same Outlook, using the same ISP. In my mind, the problem was clearly on Mediatemple's side. At Mediatemple, they refused to believe my claims as a customer, or accept that there could be an issue on their end. The couple of emails/tweets that followed told me to call customer service to troubleshoot my settings. Again, my settings had never been changed and the Outlook was working just fine with my other account.

Clearly, to Mediatemple, it is easier to shift the blame to the customer than to check their service. This has happened many times before (once, I was actually told when my website

was down, that I had “broken” it...I wouldn't know how to do that). Well, enough is enough. Since I am going to relaunch my website in the next few days, I am taking my hosting elsewhere. Customer service is the reason.

Customer service can play a tremendous role in keeping customers happy and COMING back for more. Nordstrom's is well known for excellent customer service, and in fact, it is its key differentiating factor. An article in Bloomberg Businessweek claims that:

*For the most part, the Nordstroms have succeeded by making customer service the good they're really selling, say industry observers. Though many retailers embrace “customer centricity,” a fancy term for putting the customer first, few equal Nordstrom, which routinely ranks in the top three on Luxury Institute surveys that measure customer satisfaction.*

Read that again: **customer service is the good that Nordstrom's is selling.** Not the clothes or the jewelry. The SERVICE. And it has made the company GROW.

If companies spends lots of money on marketing materials, advertising and public relations but neglect their customer service, the marketing efforts will be for naught.

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## **How to be a better Twitter user**

Twitter is not for everybody because it takes some time and skill to use it to its full effect. Since there are so many

conversations and so much information being shared, its easy to get lost and not see any usefulness.

**First, define what you want from Twitter.** Do you want to follow like minded people? Are you a news junkie and want the latest breaking news? Do you want to get your name out there?

Once you have defined what you want, you can then choose to be a “lurker” or a participant. Lurkers just listen and gather information without adding anything to the conversation. They generally don’t start conversations nor share ideas. Participants are more active—choosing to share links, engage in conversations, re-tweet content.

Obviously, you will get more in the way of real connection by participating actively.

**Second, understand how Twitter works.** Twitter is real time conversation. People are talking to each other right now. And they are talking to many people. Sometimes, newbies just respond to a question someone has posted hours ago, without any reference to the original question. That is confusing.

**Third, get a Twitter client like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite.** It is far easier to see what is going on using a Twitter client than it is to use the Twitter web interface. You can see your @ responses (responses that mention you) and you can create specialized feeds for different subjects or groups of people.

**Fourth, monitor Twitter for @ responses or for Tweets mentioning your name or product.** There is nothing worse than lack of response or super delayed response. I posted something five months ago and someone is just getting back to me. That is not timely...and it shows a complete lack of understanding on how to use Twitter.

**Fifth, understand and use hashtags wisely.** Hashtags that define a topic are useful when conducting searches or grouping tweets into one heading. Some people love to make up hashtags

and use many of them on a single tweet. I say choose one that encompasses the topic, if you want to have a greater presence around that tweet.

**Sixth, interact!** If you have chosen to participate in Twitter, make sure you are interacting with other people. If you see something that is interesting, re-tweet it. Answer people's questions, comment on their posts.

**Seventh, don't just sell, sell, sell or self-promote.** Nobody wants to see a sales message all the time or your bragging. Twitter allows you to unfollow people quite easily.

This is not the Twitter Bible. I am sure there are other things to keep in mind...what would you add?

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## **Nothing falls out of the clear blue sky**

One would hope anyway...

You know the feeling of having something just fall into your lap? It's pretty sweet to get work/clients/customers "out of the clear blue sky." But, the thing is, they aren't just dropping in from outer space like ET. No, they are there because of your past performance.

If you have done good work in the past, you have past performance to back you up. If, on the other hand, you have done shoddy work in the past, your past performance will be an obstacle. Either way, your past can make stuff fall out of the clear blue sky—or not.

For marketing purposes, nothing is quite as powerful as word-of-mouth or referrals. If a trusted source gives you a name of say, a carpenter, you are very likely to contact that person. That person has been “cleared.” If you call the carpenter to come fix your broken bannister, you are not contacting him out of the clear blue sky. You asked around and found that someone recommended this particular carpenter. For the carpenter, who may have been sitting back that particular day, it felt like he got business fairly easily. He didn’t. He earned it, right?

Your past performance can help you earn new business—and it can help keep business away.

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## **And another thought on social media ROI**

Social media is about connecting with people on a more intimate and individual level than mass media. In the past, companies spoke at their audiences through advertisements and other marketing forms. Now, companies can INTERACT with their audiences, in fact making communications more of a two-way phenomenon.

With that in mind, the closest comparison to social media is in-person networking. I wonder how many companies calculate the ROI of sending a company representative to a networking event. If the person makes ten connections but no sales is that considered bad ROI?

Networking, and social media, is about building connections. There may or may not be a dollar value that can be attached to those connections.

Thoughts?

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## Some thoughts on the ROI/ROE of social media

Increasingly, I am seeing articles out there about measuring the Return on Investment (ROI)/Return on Engagement (ROE) in social media. This morning, I read an article that went so far as to show you how to calculate the dollar figures of investment and the projected value of any customers you may get from your blog.

The thing is this: what are you using social media to accomplish? Without knowing the answer to that, there is no measurement available. If you are indeed using your blog simply to generate sales, it is easy to calculate if you are getting a decent ROI.

However (you knew this was coming), using social media can help you/your business accomplish many goals, such as:

- Thought leadership
- Image/branding
- Name recognition
- Networking (as in actually meeting other people)

These are not so easily measured in numbers and certainly not in dollars, and yet they all have value.

My conclusion is that you should not waste your time trying to

measure your ROI/ROE but instead ask yourself if your social media use is generating value for you. If you are spending hours and hours a day on social networks and haven't made one solitary connection, it is clear that there is no value for you. If you have made connections, improved your image, heightened your name recognition, perhaps that is the value you seek.

What are your thoughts? What makes you use social media for business purposes?

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## A tagline that works

Taglines can help or hamper your marketing efforts. They must be clear and relevant. A few nights ago, I was watching TV and saw the following commercial for Red Lobster:

[youtube  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySl03vqdKNQ&w=560&h=349>]

The last line is: "I see food differently. "The tagline for this campaign is **Sea Food Differently**. I think this is tagline writing at its best: clever, play on words, and RELEVANT. They are saying that Red Lobster does seafood differently (presumably better) than other restaurants. Perfect.

Compare that to Salonpas. Salonpas, which has a completely weird name that makes me think of a hair salon, is a pain relief patch. They are running this spot on TV right now:

[youtube  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX4WVN4YN0Q&w=560&h=349>]

The tagline is: "Nothing's been proven to beat the relief."

What does that mean? It is saying that nothing is proven to provide relief—which, I am pretty sure, is not the message they intended.

Some taglines make you scratch your head, some don't make you think at all, and some, the ones that work, make you think.

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## **Marketing materials don't replace salespeople**

I just came back from a quick trip out to Assateague/Chincoteague Islands. As is the case in any tourist/vacation town, everywhere you went there were rows of brochures about things to do: kayaking, boat tours, bike rentals, etc. Those are all good to have. In fact, I ended up going on a boat trip because I picked up a brochure for it.

On Sunday, I was at the visitor center on Assateague. They have lots of exhibits about the area, its history and its flora and fauna. You could pretty much wander around the building looking at exhibits and picking up brochures. However, you would have probably not really noticed or paid attention to the fact that nature bus tours leave from the center.

While talking to the woman at the information desk about trails and things to do on Assateague, she recommended taking the bus tour. She said that you would see the famous Chincoteague ponies, guaranteed, and also lots of other animals native to the area. You would be sitting in air conditioned bus going where nobody else is allowed to drive. In other words, she sold the tour. (BTW, we did see the ponies and a bald eagle, along with tons of egrets, ibis, osprey, and

other animals, just like she said)

If she hadn't given the pitch for the tour, it would have not been on my agenda or even on my radar. A posting about the tour or a brochure alone would not have been sufficient. A knowledgeable salesperson made the difference.

When you can't have a salesperson, you need marketing materials. But marketing materials should never replace salespeople completely.

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## **Just because its on the computer doesn't mean you can't act human**

Be warned: this is a rant.

Lately, I have been getting followed and unfollowed on Twitter by a guy who has a networking group here in DC. He happens to have many Twitter handles (and a surprising number of followers). He has used at least five different handles to follow me, and then, I take it because I haven't followed back, he unfollows me. Is this a good way to get me to follow him? NO!!!

Say this interaction was taking place on the phone instead of on Twitter. It would go like this: He would call from his cell phone, and hang up once I answered. Then he would call from his office line, and hang up again. And so forth. This would be very annoying, and bordering on perverted behavior (if there were any heavy breathing involved).

If he actually wanted to talk to me, he might call and say

“Hello, I really think you have some great ideas to share, and I would like to talk to you some more.” But apparently, he is either unaware of how to behave like a human, or is just interested in numbers.

There is no great mystery to getting Twitter followers: it is simply about behaving courteously and human. That is, showing interest, re-tweeting content to show support and giving credit, and INTERACTING.

Why do so many people forget they are dealing with other people on the Internet? You would not walk into a store and yell obscenities, for instance. And yet people do this on Twitter as a matter of course.

A computer is just a tool. It need humans to run it.

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## **Are you ready for prime time?**

Here’s something to think about: you can start marketing too early. Sometimes, you aren’t ready for prime time, as they say.

Last week, I attended a networking event. There, I met two self-employed event planners. They were both very pleasant and seemed knowledgeable about the ins and outs of event planning. Both gave me their business cards. As I always do when I get back from this type of event, I went to their websites. At least, I tried to go to their websites. Neither website was up—one was “under construction” and the other was a placeholder from the domain registrar. Although both ladies

had nice (professionally designed and printed) cards, they skipped a step. You should always have your website up before you hand out cards with the URL—even if it is a one page describing your business and providing contact info.

Later on in the evening, I met two women who are planning to open a yoga studio. They did not have cards, and they told me their website was under construction. For the life of me, I can't remember the name of the studio. One of the yogis told me they are considering doing a Groupon...the week they open. I told her that that I would not advise that since she wouldn't even have worked out any kinks.

Here is an article from USA Today about Groupon (Is Groupon a great idea for entrepreneurs?) Among the cons of using Groupon is that if you are not ready for the onslaught of business, you will end up turning away customers. Say the yogis get 40 people signed up, but the studio only holds 30, or their computer system has a bug and can't register new customers? Then those potential customers are going to be disappointed and chances are, won't be coming back (there are plenty of other yoga studios in the area).

The bottom line is that before you start any type of marketing, whether it be in-person networking or a traditional advertising/media campaign, you need to be ready for business. This means having your website up and running and all your business tools in order (e.g. invoicing, computer systems, ordering, etc.) People have limited time and resources and they will often not give you a second chance. Or they will forget about you. Or they will think you are an amateur.

Not only should you be ready for prime time before you start marketing, you should be ready for business.

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# How to judge a business by its website

You may not be able to (entirely) judge a book by its cover (or so they say) but you may be able to judge a business by its website.

Let's start with the very basic question of does the business have a website? If the answer is no, that says a lot. Among other things, not having a website says that a business doesn't get how people search for information nowadays, or that it works strictly off referrals and very traditional advertising or that it is not tech-savvy.

However, most businesses do have a website. Some websites are better than others, and that often has to do with the budget allocated to it and also whether it is being handled by a communications person or a tech person (yeah...the communications person should handle this unless you want the website to speak IT).

A website is a necessary part of any marketing/communications strategy. Keeping that in mind, this is what should you look for:

**Appearance and design:** Does the website look good? Is it easy to read? If so, it shows this business has considered that potential customers' perceptions are important. Also, if it looks like it was designed in the 1990s, it shows that the business has not bothered to keep up with the times.

**Clarity:** What does this business do? It should be crystal clear by looking at the home page what kind of service or product the business offers.

**About us page:** Does this page provide you the information you need to consider doing business with this company? Or is it a

lot of fluff and platitudes, short on substance?

**Services or product listing:** Does the website specifically list what services or products this business provides? How deep do you have to dig for this information?

**Contact page:** Does the business provide several ways to contact it? Businesses that don't provide a physical address and/or phone number and/or email are suspicious. They want to be able to contact you but not for you to contact or find them.

**Freshness:** What is the copyright on the website? When was this content updated and is it really up-to-date? If there is a blog, when was the last blog entry dated? Clearly, if a website lacks freshness, you have no way of knowing if the business still exists or in what form. For instance, if this is a restaurant website, and the menu is date Spring 2008, how do you know if they are still open for business?

**Useful information:** You need certain information to decide whether you want to contact a business or not: Does it work with your industry? Are there fees? What are the opening hours? Does this website give you the necessary information you need? For example, you are looking at a hotel website and you have a list of needs (location, availability of WiFi, restaurant on premises)—does the website provide you with the answers you need? In a hotel's case, does it list of room amenities and hotel services?

**Easy to navigate:** Is the website easy to use? Do you have to dig deep to get crucial information? If a website is not easy to use or navigate, it shows that the business does not understand what information its potential clients and customers need. Sometimes, it is a business decision to bury information on purpose (and this tells you a whole lot!)

You can read [5 Simple Tips for Better Business Websites](#) on [OpenForum.com](#) to see some more technical issues (like making

sure a website is mobile friendly).  
What would you add to the list?