HOW SHOULD CONTACT CENTRES INTEGRATE SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE?

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

SENTIMENT

OURSOCIALTIMES
INTRODUCTION

On 15th January 2014 Our Social Times teamed up with Sentiment, the customer service engagement platform, to host a webinar called, ‘How should contact centres integrate social media?’ The webinar, which is still available to listen to online, featured a panel of industry experts:

**Martin Hill-Wilson**

**Luke Porter**
Head of Social Customer Service at Sentiment, one of the UK’s most innovative monitoring and engagement platforms, whose clients include Barclays and npower.

**Dominic Sparkes**
Co-founder and CEO of Tempero, the world’s largest full service social media management agency, which provides services for Sainsbury’s, Sony and Manchester United, to name but a few of their clients.

**Luke Brynley-Jones**
Founder of Our Social Times and author of ‘Monitoring for Social Customer Service’ (White Paper, 2013) and editor of this report.

This White Paper offers a detailed analysis of our expert-led webinar discussion with added insights, quotes and statistics taken from relevant online sources. While it is not designed to represent the “last word” on social customer service, it does provide a useful introduction to the topic, through the words of several industry insiders. We hope you find it valuable reading.

Note: Most of the diagrams and statistics used in this report are taken from an infographic published by Sentiment in 2013 entitled, 7 Critical social media challenges for contact centres. The data sources are listed on that infographic.
PARTNER

SENTIMENT

SENTIMENT IS A FARNBOROUGH (UK) BASED CLOUD PLATFORM PROVIDER. Our technology enables companies to effectively incorporate social as a business channel, giving them insight into customers’ social activity and a highly effective way of engaging with them directly. The platform can be used across the whole customer life cycle, from acquisition to retention as well as providing intelligence on customer sentiment on products and services. Sentiment clients have seen a tangible ROI from our technology helping with new revenue generation, increased customer retention rates and higher levels of customer satisfaction. Sentiment has over 200 customers including Alitalia, Deutsche Bank, The Environment Agency, PR Newswire and Peer 1 Hosting.

Sentiment is constantly enhancing its offering to give customers the ability to manage the social channel as effectively as possible. Some recent enhancements include:

- Facebook moderation – ability to moderate all Facebook activity within the platform
- Publishing – ability to publish tweets and Facebook comments within the platform
- Auto Prioritisation - the ability to define rules on how your content is prioritised and assigned
- Engagement Filters - customer support can filter tweets and posts within their engagement console by priority
- Automations – automatically route the right mentions to the right people at the right time
- Supervisor dashboard - contact centre and team managers have a single view of how agents and team members are handling all social queries

For more information visit www.sentimentmetrics.com
THE SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE OPPORTUNITY

41% of companies say they have lost customers or had their reputation ‘tarnished’ by negative social media posts

50% of brands don’t have a strategy for responding to customer complaints on social media

SOURCE: MEDIA BISTRO

“Although the volumes on social are relatively small, the impact they have is huge”

MARTIN HILL-WILSON
Author and Consultant, Brainfood Consulting

Let’s start with the facts: demand for social customer service is increasing year on year. According to a recent study, in 2012 brands were only answering about 30% of questions posed via social media, yet by the end of 2013, this figure had more than doubled to 62%, marking a startling 143% year-over-year increase in social customer care.

An earlier study cites that one third of consumers who interact online with brands online now do so to complain, while one in three social media users now prefer social care to contacting a brand over the phone.

Consumers are increasingly expecting instant responsiveness from brands. According to a report from American Express, 42% of consumers expect a response on Twitter within 1 hour, while only 9% of brands succeed in delivering this. The remaining 91% are effectively fuelling customer dissatisfaction, which in a public environment can quite quickly get ugly.

To date, social media has often been managed separately from Customer Service, by Marketing or Communications teams, but there is growing pressure for contact centres to integrate social into their systems and workflow. A recent survey from Deloitte of over 560 contact centres found that 38% of customer service contact centres anticipate growth in their use of social media during 2014 and yet, when asked, most contact centres still don’t use social media monitoring as a tool for capturing customer feedback.

42% of consumers expect a response on Twitter within 1 hour

But only

9% of brands succeed in delivering this
One of the side effects of social media still being a comparatively small element of customer service – estimates vary from 5% to 10% of total service queries - is that many organisations simply don’t know what their needs are yet. This might explain why some large brands have been noticeably slow to invest in social customer care. As Martin Hill-Wilson highlights, though, the volume of traffic isn’t the real issue here. “We are all living in a multi-channel world of which social is a core component. Although the volumes on social are relatively small, the impact they can have is huge”.

Beyond the risks for brand reputation, failing to properly integrate social media with customer service also brings direct risks to customer satisfaction and issue resolution. Without an integrated system there can be issues in terms of responsiveness and keeping track of customers. This is particularly acute for organisations working in a B2C (business to consumer) environment with potentially high volumes of social media queries.

As customers expect support via social media, not only do organisations have to incorporate a range of diverse new support channels, they are also under pressure to deliver **customer satisfaction, at volume, in near real-time.** As Martin Hill-Wilson explains: “For customer service teams, they are going to have to consider social from resourcing, traffic management, follow-through, connection to knowledge systems, service information and a CRM point of view.” This is likely to pose significant challenges in the near future.

Some of the most pressing issues that contact centres need to address include:

- **How will you track and listen to the mentions of your brand(s) across multiple social media channels?**
- **Will you stick with your legacy customer service platform, upgrade it, or get a new, specialist social media platform?**
- **How will you integrate queries from multiple social media channels into your existing processes?**
- **How will you maximise the benefits of social media for the organisation beyond the contact centre (e.g. in marketing)?**
- **Which social media channels will you engage on, and how?**
- **Should you train up your existing customer service agents, or hire new, differently skilled ones?**
- **How will you deal with customer expectations of a real-time response?**
- **How will you measure the outcomes of your efforts?**

We will explore each of these questions in some depth below.
“Monitoring really depends on the client. We have a gaming client where the majority of interactions are on forums, but also a cosmetic company that is more interested in blogs and online influencers.”

LUKE PORTER
Head of Social Customer Service, Sentiment

Raising your game to meet growing demand and staying one step ahead of the customer requires organisations to consider monitoring beyond Facebook and Twitter, such as conversations on blogs, niche forums, YouTube and news sites. This multitude of social media channels makes it difficult to monitor across all relevant channels in real-time on a continuous basis. Many monitoring tools only track an organisation’s ‘owned’ channels, while those designed for reputation management – which might be great for sending alerts about spikes in ‘brand mentions’ - won’t offer the team working or engagement features needed. Others don’t provide the detailed reporting and analytics that contact centres require to meet efficiency and service quality targets.

An organisation's monitoring focus can, to an extent, be predicted from the industry sector, as each industry has it's own focus. Luke Porter explains: “Monitoring really depends on the client. We have a gaming client where the majority of interactions are on forums, but also a cosmetic company that is more interested in blogs and online influencers.”

Another consideration is that customers seeking redress on social media have high expectations in terms of response times and follow-up. Forward-thinking contact centres are therefore increasingly seeking to meet their monitoring requirements within a single interface. According to Luke Porter, who works with brands such as Barclays and npower: “Having a single platform to monitor, analyse and engage across all of these social channels provides both a central hub for analysis and a common engagement platform for delivering effective social customer service”.

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LUKE PORTER
“Legacy systems are going to take a while to upgrade and it’s unlikely that they’ll ever keep up with cloud solutions that can be more nimble and agile”.

DOMINIC SPARKES
Founder & CEO, Tempero

For organisations that are heavily invested in legacy software for the management of customer services across the more traditional channels, such as voice, email and web-chat, switching to a socially enabled platform is a major decision. Looking at growth rates in social customer service, though, and thinking two to three years ahead, an early decision could pay dividends. In the first quarter of 2013 alone the volume of questions asked on brands’ Facebook Pages increased by 30%. Unless scalable response platforms are put in place now, many organisations risk creating a social customer service time-bomb.

Even if you’ve completely bought into the need to integrate social, there are still difficult choices ahead. As a contact centre manager you have two options: you could stick with your existing system and wait for social features to be integrated, or alternatively, invest in a ‘new’ cloud-based solution.

Often, your choice will depend on how your contact centre is set up – i.e. do you have a dedicated team to deal with the social channel or does your contact centre have ‘blended’ agents that work across all channels including social? The former makes implementing a cloud solution much easier, while the latter requires a more tightly integrated approach.

Martin Hill-Wilson says that most of the leading contact centre software vendors have already taken small steps to provide their customers with a version of their multi-channel structure, which includes social. The resulting platforms, though, often struggle to match their cloud-based counterparts in terms of social media features, pricing and usability.

When customers or employees struggle to get on board with this kind of ‘make-do’ solution, problems arise. Customer issues may not be resolved as quickly and efficiently as on other channels and this imbalance can lead to greater pressure on resources, rather than relief. Martin Hill-Wilson blames this on a lack of investment in the correct infrastructure.

Dominic Sparkes from Tempero, who has tried out many engagement platforms but is proudly ‘vendor agnostic’, believes new systems are worth trialing: “Legacy systems are going to take a while to upgrade and it’s unlikely that they’ll ever keep up with cloud solutions that can be more nimble and agile. Using new tools is worth trying, no matter how your team is structured”.

This may be the best approach. While traditional customer service platforms have often been relatively expensive to implement and maintain, cloud-based tools can often be trialed for free or at very low cost and with minimal risk. Taking out a free trial or paying for a month’s usage provides an opportunity to try-before-you-buy and gives an insight into the different features available.
ADOPTING AN INTEGRATED MULTI-CHANNEL APPROACH TO SOCIAL

71% of consumers who’ve had a good social-media service experience with a brand are likely to recommend it to others.

**SOURCE:** 2012 STATE OF SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE REPORT

70% of companies are trying out social customer care in some form.

**SOURCE:** SOCIALNEWSDAILY.COM

“Everything you do should make it easier to work across multiple channels.”

**LUKE PORTER**
Head of Social Customer Service, Sentiment

Contact centres that have adopted a fully blended multi-channel approach are often in a far better position to build relationships with a wider range of customers, as they are able respond using the preferred communication channel of every customer. This is an essential aspect of meeting the expectations of the modern consumer: we can’t expect customers to find us; we need to be where the consumer is.

One way to ease the integration of social media into your contact centre is to ensure you have clear processes for your staff in terms of managing workflow, along with intelligent routing and rules to help manage the channel effectively. As Luke Porter says: “What we’ve seen this year is social vendors starting to put in place routing rules in terms of workflow, features that mean when you have a team working across channels then you can start to duplicate the delivery plans across those channels.” He is passionate about the results this approach can achieve, saying: “Everything you do should make it easier to work across multiple channels.”

Unfortunately, the fact remains that 25% of organisations still handle all different channels in silos, which means they may not be aware if the same customer is using multiple channels to reach out to them. They will, for example, be unable to switch channels seamlessly with the customer when an issue needs to be taken offline, or jumped into live-chat.

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**LUKE PORTER**
MANAGING SERVICE IMPACT BEYOND THE CONTACT CENTRE

“The writing on the wall. Social will force organisations to take an enterprise-level approach, as opposed to just a functional approach, to social media engagement.”

MARTIN HILL-WILSON
Author and Consultant, Brainfood Consulting

One of the key differences between social and traditional customer service channels is that consumers rarely call help-lines to buy products or make media enquiries. This isn’t the case on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. As Martin Hill-Wilson explains: “We are seeing customer behaviour on social channels which could be placed equally well into a marketing bucket, sales bucket, service bucket, occasionally a PR bucket and possibly an R&D bucket. That’s one of the most interesting things about social.”

Perhaps this highlights the risk being taken by companies that have, to date, failed to invest properly in the management of their social customer services. On average, companies spend the equivalent of just 2% of their marketing budget on actively maintaining relationships with existing customers, but when customer service starts occurring in a public environment, the line between support and sales becomes increasingly blurred.

How you manage the customer query is obviously very important when it comes to social media supporting other functions in the business. The solution usually involves a combination of teamwork and tools; it’s about being responsive and getting the right mention to the right agent – or another member of staff - as soon as possible, so a response can be sent as quickly as possible.

As Luke Porter explains: “Traditionally, this has been managed through a ‘manual’ triage – i.e. all brand mentions have been dropped into a single pot and subsequently directed and assigned across marketing, PR, customer service, technical support, billing teams, etc. It was a pretty cumbersome task and obviously has an impact on response time.”

Among those seeking a solution to this is Luke’s team at Sentiment, which has developed a set of ‘automations’ that identify specific types of mention - through related keywords and phrases - and automatically assigns them to a specific team, or even an individual agent. This allows Marketing and Corporate Communications teams to relax a little, knowing that they can still be responsible for following up on customer leads, or managing brand reputation. At the same time, by reducing the volume of queries pushed through to them, customer service teams can be more responsive to customer complaints and queries.

Given the complexities of language, there will always be a need for a human triage process, but automation is certainly a useful weapon in the social contact centre’s armoury. On this point Martin Hill-Wilson suggests that in the future, marketing, sales and service skills will continue to blur and could eventually be brought together into a single operation: “The writing’s on the wall. Social will force organisations to take an enterprise-level approach, as opposed to just a functional approach, to social media engagement.”

At the heart of this Martin sees a ‘Customer Engagement Hub’ in which organisations will have dedicated Community Managers, Marketeers and Service Agents all feeding off the same information, but using it for different purposes.
HOW TO SELECT YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

62% of organisations view customer experience provided through contact centers as a ‘competitive differentiator’

92% of organisations that view customer experience as a differentiator offer multiple contact channels

SOURCE: DELOITTE

It will come as no surprise to any experienced customer service agent that consumers use different social media channels depending on their motives. Contact centres therefore need to focus on integrating the ones that matter most to their customers.

Given the wide range of social channels available, it pays to be careful where you invest your attention. “We don’t necessarily advocate going on every platform possible, it’s not cost-effective,” says Dominic Sparkes. “We work with our clients to look at where their users are, where they are interacting, then picking the top two or three of those and doing them really well”. As logic would dictate, it’s far better to manage fewer platforms properly than to stretch your resources over ten or fifteen platforms, many of which will attract minimal engagement.

This challenge of resource management is especially pertinent for contact centres. What people expect of brands on social media is changing at such a rate that it can be both difficult and expensive to keep up. If you’re running a multi-lingual, multi-channel marketing campaign, customers expect you to be able to respond on all those channels, and in all those languages, very quickly. This requires skill, planning, highly competent management and, most likely, an expensive support team.

Channel choice can also come into play when you are thinking about the types of support you want to offer. Video can play a key role in providing self-help and support content, while peer-to-peer communities allow for answers to more detailed and specific queries to be crowd-sourced. Twitter and related ‘influencer grader’ tools such as Klout and PeerIndex can be used to identify more influential customers while Facebook allows for the addition of Tabs that provide opportunities for sign-posting, web-chat or email forms.

While there are many choices to make, Luke Porter offers some straight advice: “Make sure you are covering all five or six of the major social channels and, ideally, pushing them into one [engagement] platform where agents can work across them”.

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CREATING YOUR TEAM: TRAIN OR HIRE?

“There is a lot of copywriting involved in customer service messaging. If it’s not written well one message could go viral, spread like wildfire and cause a lot of grief.”

DOMINIC SPARKES
Founder & CEO, Tempero

Merging new and old methods to create a consistent service for customers is one of the primary challenges for contact centre employees and managers. The question is: how do you marry the two up with the same person in the same place, or the same team? Martin Hill-Wilson explains how service teams have been set up to date: “The typical behavior is, you find a channel, you get a bespoke point solution, find a dedicated team, train them up for that channel and then you put that in place”, before asking one of the key questions: “from a technical point of view you might see similarities between all of your agents that do text-based communication, for example. So is it possible to migrate them between channels?”

Social represents another career path opportunity within service that may be attractive to younger staff, so-called ‘digital natives’, but it may also offer a fulfilling career path for longer-serving and highly skilled staff. Social media can empower customer service staff in new ways, such as when they are involved in crisis management and brand protection situations. For all the stress involved, it can be exciting and even fun.

However, as Dominic Sparkes points out, training existing staff to become ‘blended agents’ can be tricky: “It’s obviously utopia to have one agent to do all things. When we started moving from pure moderation into insight and engagement my hope was that all of our moderation team could instantly become analysts and fantastic copywriters. It just didn’t happen.”

Dominic’s experience at Tempero is not uncommon. Katy Howell, CEO at social media agency Immediate Future echoes his sentiments, saying: “Service teams have always conducted conversations on a one-to-one or private manner, yet suddenly their conversations can be happening in public. This is a whole new challenge. It requires a whole new skill-set and often, re-training”.

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KATY HOWELL
CEO, Immediate Future
But, of course, some contact centre agents just won’t be comfortable engaging with customers on public channels. Others simply won’t have the written communication skills to respond effectively - especially within 140 characters - or the confidence to deliver, say, video support.

Dominic Sparkes is quick to point out the risks of empowering unskilled writers on the front line of social customer care: “There is a lot of copywriting involved in customer service messaging. If it’s not written well or spelt wrong, one message could go viral, spread like wildfire and cause a lot of grief.” After a decade of recruitment within the sector, he’s developed a rule for hiring the right people for the right role: “It’s easier to train a good writer on social than the other way round”.

As might be expected, the contact centre’s broadening role within organisations and it’s increasing diversification – in terms of skills, channels and outputs - is also making contact centre staff see themselves differently. Social customer service staff don’t tend to refer to themselves as ‘Agents’, preferring to be known as ‘Community Managers’ or perhaps a role more suited to their day-to-day activities. “For our more child-focused projects like CBBC or ChildLine”, explains Dominic Sparkes, “the moderators are very much ‘protectors of the realm’. Child safety is the most important thing they are doing and they wouldn’t be thought of as a contact centre at all. This is not to belittle contact centre people, they’d just rather be thought of as child protection services people.”

This trend towards multi-skilled service agents ties in with the increasing integration between Customer Service and Marketing, which is especially prevalent in social media. A growing number of Community Managers create content and manage campaigns, as well as respond to queries from customers. They might even see themselves as ‘creative’, rather than copywriters. Government Digital Services, for example, reflects this trend on the Gov.uk platform by calling their social media editors and copywriters Content Designers.

Social customer service agent – RECRUITMENT CHECKLIST

- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- Comfortable with public speaking
- Excellent spelling, punctuation and grammar
- Graduate
- Active Twitter account
- Keen blogger
- Good sense of humour

“Scalable intimacy”

FRANK ELIASON
Social customer service pioneer and SVP Social Media at Citi describes the challenge for brands as they scale up their social customer service teams while maintaining the human touch.
IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE PROCESSES

“Now it can go viral much faster. To that extent, it's very different today. It is no longer a matter of if, rather than when, things go wrong.”

MARTIN HILL-WILSON
Author and Consultant, Brainfood Consulting

The rise of social customer service will, without a doubt, drive new demands for agility, responsiveness and responsibility within the contact centre. The need to remain in control while managing, often, volatile fluctuations in traffic is also likely to cause the organisational culture of contact centres to evolve. This is most evident in three trends:

1: REAL-TIME SUPPORT

While contact centres have always had to deal with spikes in demand, queuing incoming calls or bringing in temporary staff to increase capacity, the public nature of social media means it's no longer an option to leave customers hanging on for a response or resolution. This is being driven, to some extent, by the ability of senior executives and board members to view customer complaints ‘live’ and unedited on their smart-phones and tablets before they've even got to work in the morning.

In a 2014 Econsultancy Report, 80% of people surveyed considered real-time to mean “within two minutes”. This highlights need for new tools and processes that can deliver support at speed, scale and quality. Tools designed to enable contact centre staff to manage queues of Tweets, comments or posts and, crucially, to provide visibility into the performance of agents and systems. “In the contact centre we need a real-time view of the social channel as mentions come in and spikes emerge,” says Luke Porter. “We need insight right down to agent level – i.e. identifying which agents are maxed out, giving the supervisor the opportunity to reposition resource and manage the spike most effectively.”

To meet this need, Luke’s team at Sentiment has implemented a real-time Supervisor Dashboard. This tracks how many mentions are in each agent’s queue, how many open/closed cases they are dealing with, their average handling time and their individual performance against Service Level Agreements (SLAs). This enables supervisors to maximise the resource available and optimise response times.

Dominic Sparkes explains that at Tempero they plan ahead for peaks and troughs by training 30-40% more people than are needed, to give them room for manoeuvre. “These people can be used in crisis communications. All being well, it's a happy day so we can use that time for engagement – but building flexibility is really important.”
2: A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD RISK

To date, the risk associated with customer service has been carefully managed. Agents have been trained to deal with the majority of issues, while contact centre performance has been closely monitored to ensure that avoidable crises are often averted.

Martin Hill-Wilson, a veteran of traditional contact centres, explains how customers used to react if they didn't get a satisfactory outcome from their phone-call or email: “Write a letter and keep writing until, one year later, you're eventually exhausted. The war of attrition has been the typical approach to customer service”. He also marvels at how quickly things have changed: “Now it can go viral much faster. To that extent, it’s very different today. It is no longer a matter of if, rather than when, things go wrong.”

Martin believes that in order to control the risk you need social media playbooks - which set out how the organisation will respond in various situations, staff empowerment - to give staff the confidence to react quickly, without seeking reassurance, clear policies – to ensure both staff and customers know the ‘rules of engagement’, and a coordinated approach – so that you don’t have different departments working against each other.

So what should you do when crisis strikes? “The honest answer is: you should have prepared for it”, says Martin Hill-Wilson. “The people who sit on the frontline carry an enormous responsibility to do as well for the brand as they can but you still need a command centre which has senior people sitting there, in real-time, ready to respond if the tidal wave happens.”

3: BOTH REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE

Preparation offers one way of dealing with the unexpected, but there are always issues that catch you unaware. A 2013 study of social customer service in the Netherlands found that 30% of consumers post online purely to vent negative feelings while 23% post purely out of vengeance. Negative sentiment can arise at any time on a multitude of channels.

Social media monitoring, especially monitoring that provides real-time insights and alerts, can be used to quickly identify issues on social and help organisations to nip widespread problems in the bud. Being in the position to anticipate queries that might occur means that you can for example, put a pre-call message on your voice channel, which helps callers with their problem before they switch to a social channel.

Thanks to this some companies, like Tempero, are able to see certain patterns of conversation and prepare their response in advance. “We often know what’s going to happen and that’s where we can use a more proactive approach,” Dominic Sparkes explains, “but mainly what we do is still reactive. With Manchester United for example, after games we are reacting to what people say at the end of the match.”
HOW TO MEASURE SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE SUCCESS

“In many respects the Gratutude Index is the purest form of customer experience evaluation, because it’s completely unprompted.”

MARTIN HILL-WILSON
Author and Consultant, Brainfood Consulting

In a real-time environment like social media, response times are obviously important, but the quality and friendliness of your response can also play a major role. As Ronan Gillen, EU Social Customer Service Manager at eBay, said in a webinar we hosted during 2013: “Expectations are high. Customers want a response within the hour, or immediately. Sometimes you just need to let them know you’re working on it. Even if you don’t have the answer to hand right away, the customer appreciates it.”

So, which are the most effective metrics when it comes to monitoring responsiveness and customer satisfaction? Our experts offered an overview of the top five:

1. RESPONSE TIMES

This is effectively how long you have to wait until an organisation acknowledges that you’ve asked for help or advice. As Martin Hill-Wilson explains: “It’s sensible to let people know as early as you can that you’ve heard what they’ve said. So get good at that by measuring it, taking control and understanding if you’re not doing a good job on your major social channels."

2. POST-INTERACTION SURVEYS

Consumers are frequently asked to complete post-interaction surveys across all private channels, so there’s no reason why organisations shouldn’t take the same approach on social media. As Martin Hill-Wilson explains: “Given the volatility of social I think there’s a good argument for that. You can also compare your customer experience capability across channels and I think that’s very important.”

3. GRATITUDE INDEX

The Gratitude Index was highlighted in our recent measurement webinar by Jerome Pineau, one of the early pioneers of social customer service. The idea is that you measure the percentage of customers who express their gratitude after you’ve engaged with them via social media as a proportion of the total volume of your interactions. Martin Hill-Wilson loves the simplicity of this metric, saying: “In many respects the Gratitude Index is the purest form of customer experience evaluation, because it’s completely unprompted.”

4. NPS SCORES

Luke Porter of Sentiment is a keen advocate of taking best practice from other channels and learning from them. “We should be looking to embrace a more tangible and comparable social customer satisfaction metric, such as net promoter score (NPS). This could involve asking a customer to rate a social customer service interaction from 0 to 10. The technology to capture these social NPS scores from the public domain and from private messaging is already there, as we have witnessed with initiatives such as Tweet2Rate.”

“We use a Gratitude Index, based on the percentage of social media engagements from which customers go on to express some form of gratitude.”

JEROME PINEAU
5. QUALITY

While ‘quality’ is a notoriously subjective metric, aside from response times and customer satisfaction Tempero also monitors the quality of their responses against certain agreed KPIs. As Dominic explains: “Often we will judge ourselves against our own guidelines, but this is obviously much easier with moderation than it is with engagement or customer service”.

Some forms of measurement may actually be counter-productive. Positive and negative sentiment, for example, can be a very grey area. Out-of-the-box positive, negative or neutral sentiment analysis is simply wrong much of the time, making human intervention essential. Dominic says, “It’s never that black and white, especially when you are monitoring a reaction to marketing.”

There is also a suggestion that organisations can over-measure their customer service teams, to the extent that the metrics start to conflict. If you are under pressure to achieve a certain response time, for example, the quality of your responses may start to drop. Similarly, if you are fixed on gratitude as a metric, you may end up spending time making friends rather than solving problems.

“Expectations are high. Customers want a response within the hour, or immediately. Sometimes you just need to let them know you’re working on it. Even if you don’t have the answer to hand right away, the customer appreciates it.”

RONAN GILLEN
EU Social Customer Service Manager at eBay
CONCLUSION

Social media probably represents the major challenge for contact centres this decade. Presented with an entirely new, highly volatile, medium in which the customer is in firm control, it’s no surprise that most organisations have been slow to dive in, often leaving support in the hands of other, perhaps less capable, departments. And yet the rapid increase in customer enquiries on social channels means that ignoring this challenge or deflecting it to another team is no longer an option. Contact centres need to step up to the plate.

The emergence of a new breed of social media monitoring, engagement and analytics tools designed specifically around streamlining the social customer service process should make this task easier. Innovative approaches to identifying and channeling categories of query to different agents, as well as detailed analytics, management oversight dashboards and integration with traditional CRM systems means there is now little excuse for unresponsive social customer care.

Doubtless we will continue to see examples of botched, clumsy social care exposed on blogs and popular news sites, but given the professionalism of the contact centre industry, we should also expect a growing stream of success stories. We have highlighted, above, several of the key forms of measurement that contact centres are using to benchmark their progress, but of course, ultimately, it is the customer who will decide on the success of their endeavours - in public, for all to judge.
AUTHOR

LUKE BRYNLEY-JONES is the Founder & CEO of Our Social Times, one of the UK’s best known social media agencies, whose clients include The Telegraph Media Group, Orange Business Services and Mecca Bingo. A social media specialist with over 13 years’ experience developing online communities for global brands, Luke is a popular speaker at international conferences, a frequent contributor to industry publications and a regular social media commentator for BBC radio.

Since 2010 Luke has hosted an annual series of social CRM, social media monitoring and social customer service conferences across Europe and the US. He also chairs monthly webinars on niche social media topics, including social customer service.

For more information visit
www.oursocialtimes.com