

HOW TO UNITE YOUR BRAND THROUGH SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT



Introduction

We live in a world that moves in mysterious ways. 25 years ago, the only path to a purchase was through a salesperson, and the best way to complain about an unsatisfactory product or service was an angry letter. A letter, as in one of those things you put in an envelope and physically send to an address (yes, people still do that).

Today, most people make purchases without talking to the brand they're buying from (and if they do talk to somebody, it's near the end of the process and on their terms). When we want to complain about a product or service we're unhappy with, we take to social media and make our gripes public, so other consumers can make note of our negative experiences.

The simple fact is consumers hold more power over buyers than ever before. In addition to the big social media channels, other outlets like Yelp and TripAdvisor enable consumers to review restaurants, hotels and destinations. And make no mistake, these reviews matter. If there are too many bad reviews that cite similar problems at a given establishment, people will start to avoid it. Sometimes, if a company is quick to respond and make a genuine offer to fix the situation, they can turn a negative into a positive.

Unfortunately, many companies still don't have a social relationship management process, so they aren't even aware they're receiving negative social attention until it's too late.

While it might seem like getting consumers on your brand's side is the key to social relationship management success, the answer actually lies within your company. Employees - the people behind the brand - are the ones who can foster real change within your organization. Social media success requires complete buy-in from every employee. Whether you're a company of two or 200, you're never going to meet consumer enthusiasm for social media unless you get everybody involved. Once you've created a culture in which employees are proud to socially represent your brand, you can begin creating a social relationship plan that will move the needle in a big way.

It's hard to keep pace with the always-evolving world of digital marketing. But one thing is for sure: the consumer-brand relationship has changed for good, and companies need to realize people can get all the information they need on products and services from neutral sources. What brands say about themselves is much less relevant these days; it's more important to shape and manage what people say about your brand by any means possible. Enter social relationship management.

Deliver Exceptional, Out-of-this-world Customer Service

Social media relationship management begins and ends with great customer service. If consumers are happy with the speed and quality of your responses to their questions, comments and complaints, they will love you forever. Why? Because so few brands have exceptional customer service. It's simple: if you can deliver on something that most other companies aren't doing, you'll achieve higher levels of success.

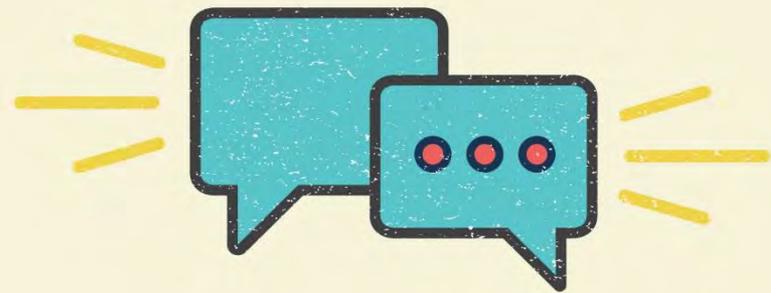
Let's take a look at a real world example that captures all the reasons why a social relationship management plan centered on exceptional customer service can make such a big impact. This is an actual tweet from a consumer to a brand:

GoPro stolen from a @SunwingVacay flight from Toronto to Cuba. Filed a @SunwingVacay report in Cuba, let's see if they actually look into it

Reply Retweet Favorite More HootSuite

7:06 PM - 9 Jun 2013

So here's a customer who is clearly not happy with a brand. These situations can go one of two ways. The first is that the brand ignores (or doesn't see) the complaint and the consumer's frustration grows. This results in the brand losing



at least one customer for life; but since this individual will amplify their negative experience, the brand stands to lose more than just this one customer. While losing a handful of customers isn't a big deal to a large brand, if they have poor customer service, these incidents won't be isolated. Multiply "a handful" of customers by hundreds or even thousands of similar situations and no matter how huge your brand is, the loss of that many customers is going to sting.

The second outcome involves exceptional, out-of-this-world customer service, which, luckily, is what happened in this case. Somewhere around the middle of the process, after the brand had responded and requested all relevant information necessary to remedying the situation, this exchange occurred:

@Sunwingvacay I hanks, the email failed due to large attachment, so I was able to send again with booking #. Thanks!

→ Reply · 22 Retweets · 4 Favorites · 13 Views · 5 Notifications

Sunwing Vacations @SunwingVacay · 14 Jun 2013

@drewch no no, thank you :)

→ Reply · 22 Retweets · 4 Favorites · 13 Views · 5 Notifications

After this, the brand took the conversation private (to email), which is often the best course of action. At this point in the correspondence, the public can clearly infer that a once-disgruntled customer is now saying thank you to the same brand he was frustrated with. This is a win not only for the brand and consumer, but also other potential consumers and the employees of the company. Let's take a look at one of the final interactions between this particular brand and consumer, which happened over email:

(FROM CUSTOMER)

Hi Susan,

Thanks for everything! You guys have great customer care. I've signed and attached the form.

(FROM COMPANY)

We have received your letter regarding your recent Sunwing vacation. Thank you for your kind words and thoughtful comments.

Sunwing always strives to provide only the best service to our customers, and it is always satisfying to know that our efforts are valued.

We sincerely appreciate you taking the time to provide this positive feedback to us and, for this reason, we have taken the liberty of sharing a copy of your letter with our staff.

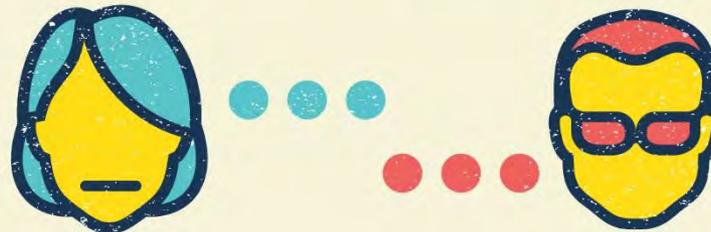
We encourage you to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and to share your positive experience with fans and fellow Sunwing travellers. Your support and encouragement means so much to us!

Thank you once again.

Sincerely,

SUNWING TRAVEL GROUP

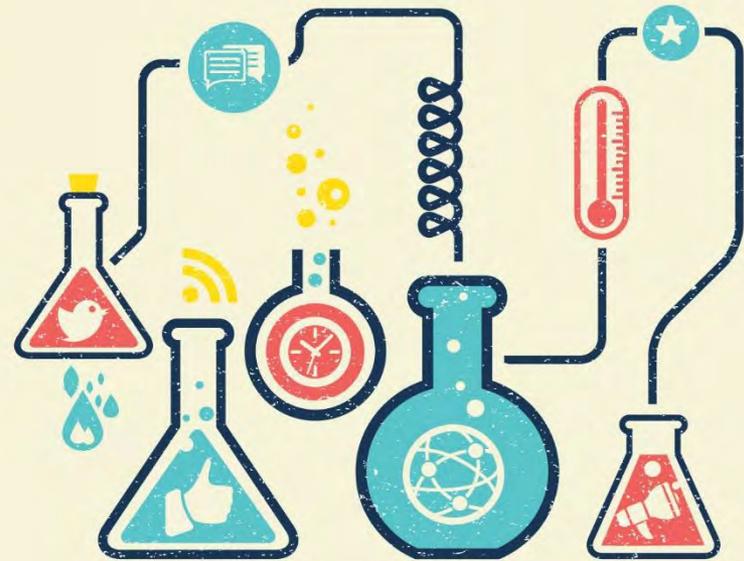
At the end of all this, a consumer who had a bad experience might just become an advocate of the brand because of how responsive and helpful they were. The brand could've ignored this single consumer, but they didn't. Happy customer and happy brand, yes. But there were other subtle things that happened as a result of this exchange (one being that we're writing about their good customer service, totally unbeknownst to them). Great things that brands may not even realize can affect their culture and productivity.



Tap Into the Science of Social Relationship Management

Keeping the negative-turned-positive consumer experience we've been discussing in mind, let's consider a few points made by Simon Sinek in his book *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*. Sinek devotes a whole chapter to E.D.S.O., the initials that represent the chemicals our bodies release to make us feel the way we do in certain situations. The "selfish chemicals" are endorphins (responsible for masking physical pain) and dopamine (which gives us that good feeling when we accomplish something we set out to do). For the purposes of this whitepaper, we want to focus on the "selfless chemicals" (serotonin and oxytocin) and The Big C (cortisol).

Cortisol is responsible for instilling stress and anxiety in our bodies; it is meant as a fleeting warning of danger that is then supposed to leave our system. However, in today's fast-paced business world, cortisol often lingers in our bodies. The unhappy consumer who tweeted his frustrations at the guilty brand was fuelled by a cortisol release brought on by his initial mistreatment. An expensive item, intended to enhance the enjoyment of a vacation, is stolen. In this case, stolen is another way of saying not protected by the people whose job it was to protect the consumer's property. Broken trust = cortisol release.



Here's where things got interesting. The customer received a prompt response to their complaint, and they were treated with respect and dignity. Chalk up some serotonin (the feeling you get when somebody likes or respects you) for our initially disgruntled friend. As the process moved along, multiple people on the brand's side were communicating with the consumer to make things right. In the end, the brand - urged by its employees handling customer service - reimbursed the consumer for his expensive item. Cue the CHEMICAL SUPER SURGE.



We're going to rundown the chemical releases that occurred - you know, for science. There are two different instances - one on Twitter and one on email - where our hero and the brand thank each other. After the initial frustrations are out of the way, it's a very genial conversation the rest of the way. And the whole thing culminates in a huge release of oxytocin - "the love chemical" - for everybody involved. On page 49 of *Leaders Eat Last* Sinek describes an oxytocin release as, "The feeling we get when we hold hands and sing 'Kumbaya' together."

For the consumer, oxytocin represents a renewed trust and even love for an organization. This is interesting because if he had just had a normal interaction instead of the bad experience (and subsequent exceptional customer care), he might have been less of an advocate. Think about that the next time you don't really believe "the customer is always right."

The brand feels the love because they're aware of the generosity of the consumer who feels good enough to thank them, despite a bad experience. On an individual level, employees of the brand will get hits of both serotonin and oxytocin, because they have accomplished something (better customer service) and built trust with not only their customer, but also each other.

Another funny thing will happen: other customers will notice the feel good results of the situation and they will get a shot of oxytocin too. Generosity and empathy are contagious, and even though it didn't involve them, witnesses to good customer service will remember it in the future. And the best thing about oxytocin? In some situations, it inhibits the release of cortisol. Ignore science at your own discretion (but we recommend using it as motivation to take better care of your customers).

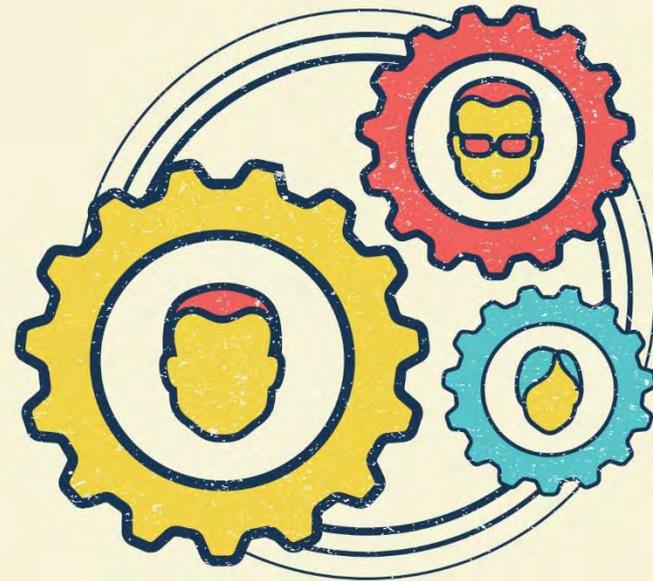
As the Team Pulls Together, the Brand Pulls Together

So far we've talked a lot about social relationship management from the customer's perspective, and with good reason. Companies should take any opportunity they have to surprise and delight their customers, especially if they can do it while fixing a mistake. Unfortunately, many companies believe that helping one in every twenty-five or fifty customers will get the job done. That's the wrong attitude. Every customer deserves the same exceptional, out-of-this-world customer service, and that's why your team is the most important part of the equation.

Proper social relationship management, presumably via a social CRM or platform, gets your whole team involved. This does a number of things, including removing the burden of social media management from that one person who's been juggling it with no real strategy or help.

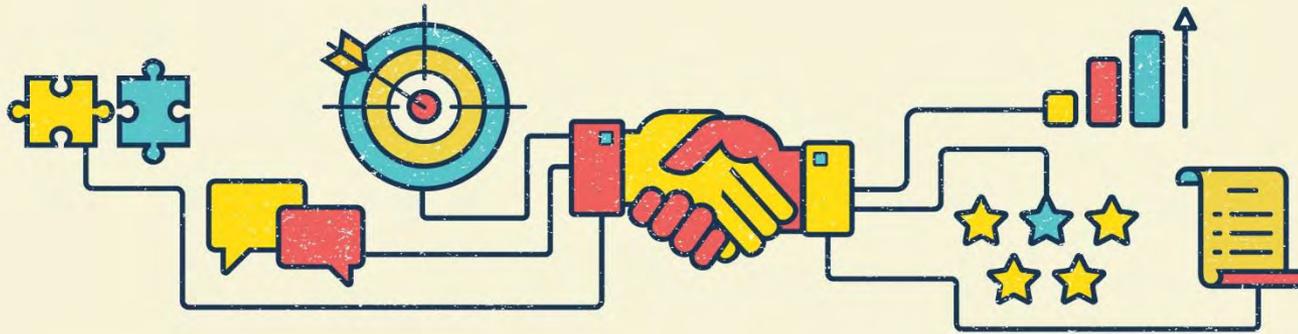
First, it significantly reduces social customer service response time by ensuring the right teams and individuals are already engaged in the conversation and can jump right in when needed.

Second, it empowers your team to cohesively adopt the voice and culture of your brand, which adds an element of humanity to your presence.



Additionally, managing social media as a team encourages a creative environment and will help your team brainstorm new ideas for campaigns and strategies. And finally, working as a team will keep everybody accountable for how the brand is perceived by your audience. Remember when trust, respect and pride are involved - all things fostered when working as a team unit - the positive "selfless chemicals" start flowing and good things start happening!

Conclusion



Embracing social relationship management can be a transformative decision for your brand and its audience. Truly getting involved in the social conversation puts personality, sincerity, and compassion behind your brand. Once you commit to a more engaged social presence, customers will identify with and trust your brand (it's science!), which has the power to boost your sales. Here's a general review of the benefits of social relationship management:

- Social CRM platforms give you a central place to manage your social engagement where you can:
- Coordinate efforts and campaigns
- Assign responsibilities
- Approve content
- Monitor and measure progress
- Gain the trust and respect of both your employees

and your audience

- Create more of an opportunity for humor and empathy marketing
- Observe when, where and why they interact with your brand
- Learn to be proud of your brand's social presence instead of "doing it because you have to"

The most important thing to remember about social relationship management is that good marketing doesn't sound like marketing at all. So while being active and engaged with your audience on social media is technically marketing, it shouldn't feel like it to you or to them. Take good care of your team by fostering an environment in which they can trust each other, be creative and have fun, and they'll take care of your customers.

About WSI

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world.

Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

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