



Tweet Me Right:

Controlling Your Marketing Message in an Online World



By Randi Busse

IF YOU'RE A REGULAR USER OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS, you're probably familiar with people using social media channels to make complaints, praise companies, start a discussion, or indulge in a mudslinging match. It puts the power into the hands of the customer and forces companies to actually do good, not just tell us they do good.

Online social media communications have changed the way people seek out services and products and make buying decisions. Customer interactions used to be one-on-one; now it's one on many. Today people turn to friends and online networks for advice and help making buying decisions both big and small—and more and more they trust the advice of strangers over the marketing message of the company. The Internet has turned into a research center. There are more review sites than you can count, with more being added every day.

Research shows that 14 percent of consumers have recently read about a bad customer experience through social media, with 62 percent of them intentionally stopping or avoiding doing business with the offending company as a result. Many people have access to smartphones that can take videos and pictures in a moment's notice. Those same phones can access the Internet immediately so that tweets and Facebook updates are instantaneous and within minutes of the bad interaction when feelings are still fresh. Social media provides an ideal place for the irate consumer to let off steam.










Providing poor customer service has always been a dangerous proposition for companies and brands. Failing to meet consumer expectations damages brands, but before social media began to explode, the risks were relatively small. A single bad service experience could have destroyed brand loyalty for a single customer and perhaps may have caused a stir with a few people that customer knows, but really damaging a brand's reputation before the age of social media required significant, consistent, and long-lasting service failures. Enter social media and the rules of the game have changed.

Getting in front of the bad stories

How do you get the stories your customers are telling to be good ones? You might be surprised to know that it starts with the basics of good, old-fashioned customer service, from the first phone call to the very last "thank you." Without it, there will be no sale but there might be a story. Make sure your staff know how to treat customers or they will be someone else's customer. As always, it is vital to hire, train, and monitor customer service employees.

Here are some common mistakes limousine companies make when dealing with a customer complaint.

DON'T:

-  **Make the Customer Wait**—It's bad enough already that something made them upset; don't add to the problem by exposing them to a slow resolution.
-  **Make the Customer Repeat the Story**—If they have to talk to more than one person, make sure each employee informs the next of the situation so the customer doesn't have to repeat himself.
-  **Have the Customer Take on Responsibilities**—Create a resolution process that requires little or no actions for the customer.
-  **Lack Empathy**—Be understanding of their emotions with what you say and how you say it.
-  **Avoid Apologies**—Before fixing the problem, acknowledge the problem. Then apologize for the problem. Even if it's not your fault personally, accept responsibility on behalf of the organization and reassure the customer that you are taking it seriously.
-  **Say "No Problem"**—If they thank you at the end for your help with the issue, don't respond "no problem," because it actually IS a problem ... to the customer.
-  **Let Them Assume What Will Happen Next**—Tell the customer specifically what will happen next, so they don't make an assumption that somebody will call or the resolution will happen in an hour if those expectations are unrealistic.
-  **Forget to Follow-through**—Do what you say you'll do.
-  **Place More Value on the Nickel than the Dollar**—Don't argue with the customer over a minor one-time transaction if that argument causes them to leave your company permanently.

Keeping up on the tweets

One of the top trends this year has been customers sending tweets (via Twitter, in case you aren't familiar with the term) about your business and the service they receive from you and your employees. Here are some of the things they've tweeted about limousine companies, perhaps even yours:



- “This company rips you off and they quote you different prices and try to sneak in other fees when you get the limo.”
- “The driver was rude and either did not know how to turn off the heat in the limo or did not care.”
- “Never book a limo with them, point blank, period.”

- “The driver was very hard to understand and had a very unpersonal/unfriendly tone like he did not want to be there.”
- “I have made several phone calls trying to contact the company, but it goes to voicemail and they do not return your call.”
- “HORRIBLE! Do not rent from this company; they are very unorganized and very rude.”

Is that what you want your customers to be saying about your business? Of course not. It's amazing what can be said about a company in 140 characters or less. It's important for companies large and small to get on board with listening and responding to what is being said about them online. Twitter is fast becoming the easiest, most visible way for companies



Check out services like:

 **TweetAlarm**
&
TweetBeep

to get alerted when someone tweets about your company.



to address concerns and show customers that they are on top of customer service. Make sure you know what they are saying about you. Check out services like TweetAlarm and TweetBeep to get alerted when someone tweets about your company. More than anything, stay engaged with your customer and try to make it right.

Online reviews are good for companies

Your reputation is always on the line, and in this case, it's also online, so if you commit any type of customer service faux pas, even if it's a small one, don't expect to be off the hook. Since it's so easy for people to vent their frustrations, you could very well discover that you are the subject of their complaints.

Whether you know it or not, those reviews are a big gift for companies. From the comments and reactions, you can get a snapshot of what your employees



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do well or not so well. For example, did you know that your chauffeur blasts the heat or mumbles to customers? Did you know that accounting messed up that person’s invoice or was rude to him when he called to have the error corrected? Sure, other customers are reading the bad reviews, but it’s a chance for you to correct things. Sooner or later, other customers will start posting their own positive reactions to your company, counteracting the negative ones. That’s what you need to strive toward. If you take no corrective action, then you’re doomed to repeat the mistakes.

It’s evident that if you want to maintain your customers, you need to really make the effort to keep them. If you value your company’s survival, it is imperative that you educate those who respond on your company’s behalf to bear in mind that people are publicizing their interactions on social media sites. If someone isn’t happy with the way you’re treating them, they won’t just go somewhere else, they’ll likely write about it as well. You can’t be all things to all people, but you should look at those reviews with a critical eye and an open mind for improvement.

Your customers are on social media sites and they’re talking about you. What kind of stories are they telling? People love to talk about experiences. People are talking about you and your limousine company right now. Do you know what they are say-

ing? Treat your customers well and they will encourage others to buy from you. Treat them poorly and they can ruin your business. The choice is yours. **LD**



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