



## DEMYSTIFYING SOCIAL AND MOBILE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Social media and mobile technologies have radically changed how consumers communicate, interact with, share and spread information. But, while the public adores new technology, it can give customer experience executives heartburn.

Customers can voice their opinions on Facebook, Twitter and other social channels, anytime, anywhere using their phones. These outlets give customers more power and leverage than they've ever had before — especially when problems arise. One moment of anger or frustration can turn into a hasty, 140-character rant that could potentially reach millions of people.

### Bad Breaks

One of the first — and perhaps most famous — examples of this was the “[United Breaks Guitars](#)” fiasco in 2008, in which a musician saw United Airlines baggage handlers throwing — and as he later discovered, breaking — his favorite guitar. After United refused to pay for a replacement, he wrote a song called “United Breaks Guitars” and [posted it to YouTube](#). The song turned into a viral hit, racking up 5 million views in one month (12 million to date) and became a hit on iTunes. No doubt, the incident was a disaster for United — the managing director of customer solutions ended up personally calling the musician to apologize.

While most companies now realize the potential impact — both negative and positive — of social media and mobile technology, very few tend to think about them in the context of holistic customer service. Most still tend to view social channels as marketing or communications platforms, and frequently turn to them as Band-Aid solutions to bigger problems — responding selectively to vocal customers, for instance, or offering temporary fixes like coupons to solve more complex internal problems with service.

Similarly, many companies today miss the boat in plotting smart mobile strategies. For many, their mobile presence (often in the form of an app) serves as an ineffective branding opportunity, instead of a potentially powerful service opportunity. And they do this increasingly at their own peril: Mobile users are ever more present and active — and increasingly immune to corporate branding and messaging. Simply redirecting app users who need customer support to a 1-800 number overlooks an opportunity to better serve a customer.

### Don't Waste a Perfect Opportunity

These new channels are the ultimate opportunity to reach customers at the precise moment they are in need. That opportunity is wasted when social and mobile service become siloed without a unifying purpose. Social media interactions become strictly reactive when they could be used to address larger or ongoing customer service issues, and mobile apps mostly tend to be the domain of the marketing department, and ignore service.

Think about it: When was the last time you saw a section, button or tab on a mobile app that was dedicated to customer service? That aspect is largely ignored, even though mobile interactions are instant, highly personal, and build brand loyalty.

Customer service is an incredibly personal and important interaction that requires context and background, and each channel should be tightly integrated to reflect this. No interaction with a customer should be done blindly. If a customer Tweets something at a company's customer service handle, the company should have a solution that can identify who the customer is; if they have had any previous interactions over the phone, by email, by chat or social media; and then provide the agent with the tools and personal information needed to best and quickly resolve the problem.

Companies need to embrace new ways of communicating with their customers, rather than simply reacting to them. Applying a series of quick fixes to problems will only result in more problems down the road. Customers are a company's most important asset, and they should know that they will get top level service no matter the channel in which they interact with a company.

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