



By [Myleen Sagrado Sjodin](https://myleen-sjodin.com/)
Director of Marketing & Communications, [Nordic Languages Initiative](https://myleen-sjodin.com/)
<https://myleen-sjodin.com/>
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“We are listening. And here’s our response”

Why smart companies should respond to social media engagement to their advantage.

Once there was a time, not long ago, when corporations were giants and consumers were at their will. Customers had no other way to lodge complaints other than to call a 1-800 number and speak to low-paid agents who were scripted “to care” about their issues. It was always a David vs. Goliath scenario. But thankfully, we’ve broken the mold with 21st century customer engagement using social media.

This time, David *can* be more powerful than Goliath. Social media has given David the megaphone, and that’s a positive for the little guy who can now wield much more influence than ever before. Companies are now expected to respond to their customers on a one-on-one basis using social media channels to repair or endorse their image. The consequences of not doing this can be monumental if ignored, but greatly rewarding if done correctly.

Businesses no longer ride down a one-way street

To continue the analogy, David could certainly hear Goliath, but Goliath could not easily hear David. Today, we see evidence of two-way communication that happens between A-list celebrities and their fan base, and huge corporations and their customers, both loyal or disgruntled. This has greatly impacted the way products and services are promoted, as well as how we handle our customers.

Orphan Black and 13 others follow



Natalie Abrams @NatalieAbrams · 1h

.@AmericanExpress **customer service** rep was so nice, told me to keep smiling. Was taken back, then remembered there are nice people out there

1 15

Consumers have the social influence to coax companies to correct course or dissuade others from purchasing certain products or services. Customer empowerment has never been so prominent as it is right now. After all, customers vote, protest and endorse with their wallets. Sentiment is fickle and fragile, yet highly impactful.



How we as businesses react and how we respond speaks volumes about our company values and culture. Furthermore, customers seek trust and honesty before jumping in to make a purchase commitment, whether that be booking a hotel room or buying a shiny new tech gadget. Gone are the days when a known name brand was enough to judge if something was of good quality or high ethical standard.

We are all spokesmen in the digital world

Remember not too long ago when someone asked why don't you write a letter to the President of the United States about a controversial issue you care about? Receiving a response back from him seemed nearly futile. Why even bother?

Now the landscape has undoubtedly changed. Customers have a voice that can be amplified using social media or creating blogs as de facto journalists. No longer are we closed off from huge corporations or famous people. We don't have to be force-fed TV commercials or hear radio ads between our favorite songs. Obviously, the traditional model of marketing is not enough.



Once you realize that customers are your unofficial spokesmen and brand ambassadors, social media engagement must be part of your marketing strategy in order to tap into a wealth of free promotional effort. You can then utilize this newfound customer empowerment to your advantage.

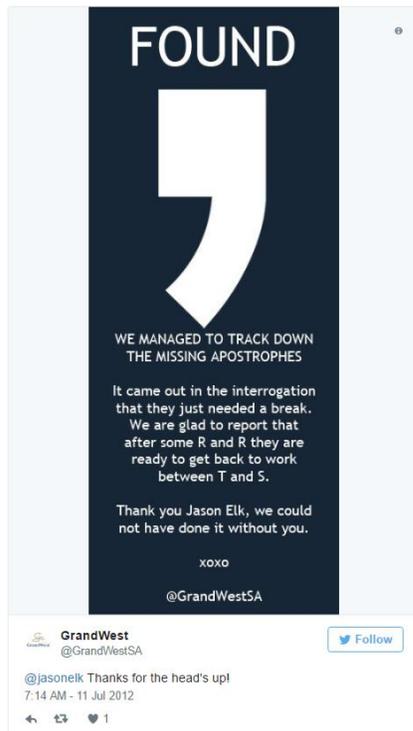
Being responsive either shows your dignity or your indecency

Consider the response to the United Airlines debacle where an indignant man was unceremoniously dragged off an overbooked flight. Horrid viral videos went on millions of people's Facebook feeds in a matter of hours. Not only was it upsetting, but the CEO's response was appalling. Munoz publically defended his employees' abhorrent actions and caused a negative social media frenzy. As a result, United Airlines [lost revenue to the tune of \\$1.2 billion in market share](#) and got a very bad reputation to boot - not good at all.

On the other hand, responding with compassion and humor turns regular folks into loyal fans and brand ambassadors without spending a dollar. People enjoy a good laugh and it easily appeases even the most frustrated consumer. Here's a tweet about a guy's observation at the Grand West's hotel lobby:



The hotel's response? Epic! They handled it with humor and grace, and in return they received great PR and a happy customer!



How you respond to negative reviews does a world of good for you and your product

On a much lesser scale, I'm reminded of my own customer experience when searching for my next vacation rental in Hawaii on VRBO. I spent hours looking at pictures and reading fancy descriptions. But more importantly, I read dozens of reviews to inspire me to reach out to the owners. It takes more than a few pretty pictures to convince me and my economically-savvy husband to shell out the hundreds of dollars per night on a temporary abode.

Of course, even the most perfect looking home can have negative opinions. But what's remarkable is that the owner's response really mattered to me. In fact, it mattered a whole lot! Why? Because in an imperfect world, I realize that there are uptight people and attention-seeking trolls out there who might have been over-the-top in their review. I wanted to give the benefit of the doubt, so I carefully read the Owner Response with avid interest.

Those owners who responded poorly or negatively gave me great pause. I thought to myself, do I really want to be in a vacation home for 1 week with that attitude? The response is the only indicator of the owner's personality and reactions if unforeseen problems arise.

Responding also lets potential customers know that the company or owner cares about the issues and how those problems can be resolved. Not responding is akin to being unfeeling or worse, cheap. But responding with respect, an offer of apology or a way to remedy the situation shows great dignity and empathy to future and returning customers.

No longer faceless

Customer engagement works well with all company sizes, but especially with large, faceless corporations. It also hasn't really been possible before the rise of Facebook and Twitter barely 10 years ago. People want to know if your brand has a heart. But the rewards are clear. Win over your customers by talking to them on Twitter and you can be rewarded with a loyal following, free brand ambassadors, and non-celebrity endorsements that bring on rapid sales to your organization.





James Babich ▶ Overhead Door Company of Santa Fe
March 18 at 12:13pm · 🌐

A recent garage door problem gave us the opportunity to meet one of the best technicians ever. His name is Fernando we highly recommend this technician and Overhead Door Company. If you don't use it you are going to lose\$. I'm telling you they're good! Ask for Fernando!
— 😊 feeling blessed.



Cosme Fulanito
@alcesr

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What a pleasant experience I just had with @Netflix customer service... felt like they rubbed my feet on the phone

Reply Retweet Favorite Buffer More

5:01 PM · 29 Jun 2014

At the end of the day

Hyper-aware customers have a deep desire to form a strong relationship and bond with the brands, products or services they love in order to feel justified and good about their purchases. Cultivating your brand image by engaging directly with your customers is even more crucial in today's online retail environment.

Besides content marketing, digital advertising efforts and traditional methods of marketing, make sure you incorporate social media engagement in your marketing plan. It is only part of your grand digital marketing scheme, but it is a vitally important part of your brand strategy. The payoff comes fast and furious, however, your company impression will last way longer.



Michele Buonaiuto ▶ KLM

2 hrs · Mexico City, Mexico · 🌐

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