

“STOP TYPING AT ME IN ALL CAPS!”

Seven tips for handling irate clients via omnichannel customer service



By Mike Aoki

Omnichannel customer care is like “doing customer service onstage” says Nygel Weishar, director - channel management, digital & contact management at CIBC. That is because social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook allow anyone to view your interactions with customers.

What are the implications of that? Omnichannel agents need to be more diplomatic. They need to think not only of their immediate customer but also how their responses impact other people viewing their conversation online. As Weishar points out “social customer service sets the standard” as far as how current and potential customers view your organization. At its best, omnichannel customer care is about fixing a customer’s problem. At a minimum, it is about damage control and trying not to let negative messages damage your brand. That becomes even more important when dealing with irate customers online.

The following are seven tips for handling irate customers in an omnichannel environment.

1) Know when to take it offline.

One of the greatest challenges of providing omnichannel care is the need to protect customer privacy. Imagine you are a customer calling your credit card company. What is the first thing an agent does on that call? They ask for an account number and password to authenticate your identity. However, you cannot ask for that on a Facebook post because the whole world will see the customer’s answer, including their password. So if confidential data is involved, redirect the customer to a phone conversation with one of your agents.

2) Be aware that customers may have already tried traditional telephone customer service. That is why they are venting on social media.

This is the opposite of point number one. “Though social is growing as a service platform, in my experience most irate customers aren’t repeating the question/concern but rather using it to highlight their anger around their customer experience,” says Russel Lolacher, professional speaker, consultant and customer relationship advocate at www.russellolacher.com. So, be prepared for customers to say “but, I already talked to someone over the phone and they couldn’t help me!” Let your customer know you want to help them, but need a private conversation to authenticate their identity so you can help them with their confidential issue.

3) Frequently ask for clarification and confirmation during social media interactions.

You can use social media to help customers with non-confidential issues. However, even if your omnichannel agents are excellent written communicators, there can still be challenges. Remember how telephone agents face challenges such as language barriers and accents? Well, omnichannel agents face challenges such as customer

spelling, grammar and vague word choices. To ensure you are getting the right information from customers, ask clarifying questions.

4) Emotional intelligence matters even more on social media than on phone calls. Help your agents “read between the lines” of a customer’s writing.

Lolacher notes: “With a traditional phone call, you get all the other communication cues: tone, inflection, volume. Each of these allows the service agent to better prepare the next thing they should say, or not say. Being able to listen beyond the words being used is extremely helpful in addressing concerns and relieving anger.”

Weishar adds: “Understand what you are writing as an agent and how that can be misunderstood.” For example, other people reading your customer service tweet may not know what was said in previous tweets. So, be careful not to type things that can be misconstrued out of context.

5) Multitasking is wonderful for simple transactions and awful for complex ones.

Agents need to know when to focus on just one customer at a time. While one of the biggest selling points about social is the ability to handle three interactions at once (versus phone agents that only handle one phone call at a time) omnichannel agents may need to put their sole focus on an irate customer during that interaction. When someone is angry, clumsy word choices or misreading of the customer’s message can cause them to become even more irate. You would never put an angry phone caller on hold to take another call simultaneously. Do not do that with an irate social media interaction either.

6) Know the rules. Every platform is different.

“Many agents treat each platform the same way” rather than understanding each platform is unique, says Russel. “The language can be similar but structure and engagement can be very different.”

He adds that “different channels should be treated differently. This can be done through creating scenarios unique to each channel to understand best practices.” He stresses the importance of having agents use each channel in their own life since, “practitioners understand better how to engage and connect with customers, much like they do with friends online.” Weishar points out that “each social channel has its own acronyms and style.” So, coach your agents to switch their social style and writing style to suit each channel. That could mean being more personable on Facebook and more concise on Twitter.

7) Omnichannel customer service and traditional telephone customer service are both about helping people.

Excellent communication skills, emotional intelligence and a positive attitude apply to ALL customer service channels. Treat your customers well, no matter which channel they choose to use.

As a final thought, Russel Lolacher suggests looking at any irate customer as an “opportunity to build a relationship. If we have a fight or misunderstanding with a friend, it is rarely the end of the relationship.” He recommends viewing an interaction with an irate customer as “just a stumble in a long relationship” no matter what channel they use. ✓

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