

Social Media Rings in a New Era for Contact Centres



Social media is here to stay and businesses are taking note. They're exploring new social media investments to improve the customer experience and the effectiveness of contact centre employees.

This very minute, thousands of organisations are scanning the social media landscape to ascertain who their customers are and what they're saying about them. By monitoring and actively participating in social networking sites, online forums and blogs, organisations are gaining rich insights and strategising about how to use these networks to improve customer experience and loyalty.

This reality is confirmed by the results of Dimension Data's 2011 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report*. Social media interactions are high on the agenda of contact centre businesses, with just over 18% of research participants reporting they're already managing these interactions, with 32% planning to do so over the next two years.

This is not altogether surprising given the pervasiveness and popularity of these channels. Social media giant Facebook has around 750 million users. Popular microblogging site Twitter counts 175 million users to date. Twenty-four hours of video are uploaded every minute to YouTube.

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Social media holds promise to deliver impressive benefits to an organisation's bottom line. By enabling customers to quickly and effectively communicate with the organisation and one other, businesses can actually lower support costs. In marketing and sales environments, businesses can use social media to trial new products to targeted followers, promoters and even known detractors. Putting a new spin on marketing research, organisations can test how these products will be accepted in the marketplace, thus placing less demand on development budgets. Sales prospects can even be identified by tracking responses to social media conversations.

Changing the game

Martin Dove, Managing Director for Customer Interactive Solutions at Dimension Data, believes that three key trends – mobility, consumerisation of IT and the rise of social media – are blending to create an environment of elevated customer expectations and the assumption that providers will be willing and able to interact with them through their particular channel and device of choice.

"For most of us, the days of penning a letter to, or physically visiting, a service organisation are gone forever – and that's the way we'd prefer it to stay.

For organisations, this translates into the need to put formal processes in place to manage how contact centres manage their social media presence and participation. The end-goal is for social media to become another stream into the contact centre, being routed seamlessly to the right agent based on content, customer segment and other technical considerations,"

he says.

A tall order. CIOs are feeling immense pressure from the business to provide the tools to facilitate social media interactions as a matter of urgency and many find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to re-prioritise other projects to meet these expectations. Other potential barriers include the cost of purchasing and integrating such solutions and the requirement for the processes and platforms ultimately deployed to be flexible to adapt to change without needing to be re-engineered from the ground up. The social media landscape is constantly shape-shifting. As more new media channels are introduced, businesses need to adjust quickly to stay ahead of the curve.

In their haste, organisations may elect to pursue a social media presence without properly strategising how best to leverage this new channel. While no business should be comfortable to be lagging behind the 'social media curve', the implications of an unstructured and unformed deployment can be grave.

Dove believes that the richest benefits of social media come to fruition when organisations are able to offer customers a consistently high level of service across a variety of channels within the contact centre. He cautions, however, that organisations need to be mindful that customers are not interested in what's going on in the technological back-end.

"If you're prepared to engage with customers via web chat or a live video agent, best you be sure that the technology works – every time. Customers have a low tolerance for poor performance on the part of such tools and expect them to perform at an acceptable standard. Also important is ensuring that interactions via social media channels are not handled any less swiftly or appropriately than those originating through more traditional channels."

The importance of thorough agent training should not be underestimated. It's essential that agents have the right skills and proficiencies to manage social media conversations. As social media is a near real-time channel, organisations need to establish how to provide easy access to subject matter experts in the business. Delays or inaccurate advice can damage the brand, product or service and can be harder to counter. Essentially, social media has to be seen as another channel with its own requirements that adds value to the existing media offering, while leveraging the skills that are accustomed to handling customer interactions.

Strategising for social media

Robert Allman, Dimension Data's General Manager for Customer Interactive Solutions in Australia believes that one of the fundamental first steps for organisations setting off down the social media path is establishing which sites are critical listening posts and in which ones to actively participate. The intelligence harnessed through these sites and services should be a feeder into the overall CRM strategy.

"It's worth choosing a qualified business partner to help develop an organisational strategy that incorporates social media into core business processes. This is especially important in the areas of service improvement and brand development," he notes.

High level social media roadmaps should include:

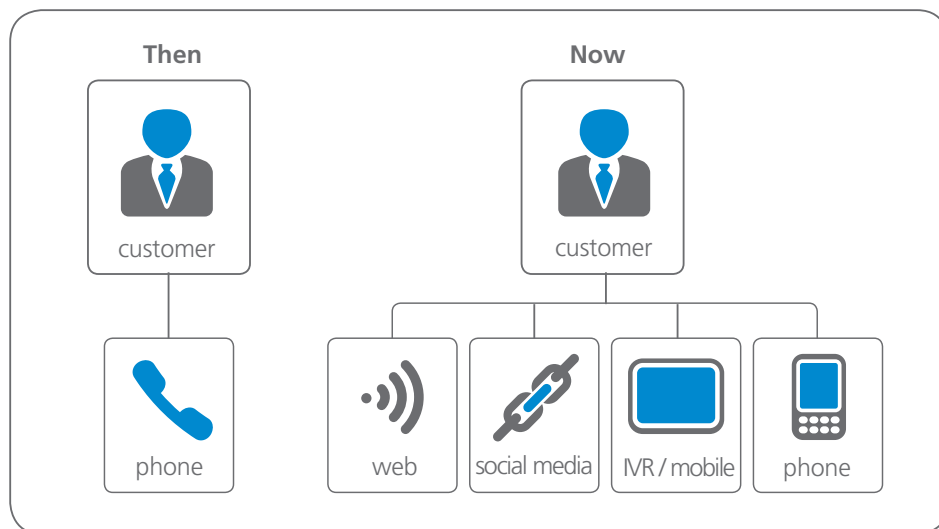
- An analysis of stakeholder requirements in the business – service, marketing and brand development;
- The development of a strategy to identify sites, demographics, categories of discussions, event handling, response processes, change management and business intelligence, reporting and measurement, subject matter experts;
- Identification of personnel profiles best suited to handle these interactions and including this within job classification, training and career development structures;
- An in-house test capability;
- The most suitable deployment architectures and engines to listen, analyse, categorise, distribute and measure; and
- An organisational feedback loop to use intelligence gathered to correct problems and promote success.

"In Dimension Data's experience, thorough upfront planning and focus will pay dividends. Coherently planned and managed social media initiatives will swiftly gather momentum and deliver impressive returns,"

says Allman.

(To hear more about Allman's views on this topic, watch our video on www.dimensiondata.com/precis.)

Figure 1: Social media renders customer interactions more complex and integrated



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Expanding reach and performance

With their long history of adapting to new channels, contact centres are well-placed to integrate social media into their processes and give organisations the opportunity to proactively manage what's being said about them. With social networks and blogs ranking as the fourth most popular online activity (ahead of personal e-mail), two-thirds of the world's internet population can't be wrong. Today, organisations need to embrace social media to build rapport with their customer and keep an ear to the ground regarding what's being said about them – or risk being left out in the cold.

So Long Contact Centre – Hello Customer Management Centre

We all have a story to tell about interacting with a contact centre. Here's one that may change your preconceptions. 'Accelerate Your Business through Social Media', a six minute video created by Dimension Data, showcases the contact centre of the future and demonstrates how the contact centre has evolved to become a customer service centre. In the clip, a customer interacts with his insurance company via multiple channels – including social media – all the way from requesting a car insurance quote to obtaining assistance when his car breaks down. It demonstrates how the contact centre is evolving to seamlessly enable marketing through social media, direct sales and differentiated service.

(To view the video please visit www.dimensiondata.com/precis.)

Case study

Telecommunications Provider Ramps Up Customer Care via Social Media

Dimension Data recently developed a pioneering social media solution for a South African telecommunications service provider, whose customer base in South Africa exceeds 27 million.

The client became aware of the degree to which its customers were using social media – and posting comments regarding the organisation on Facebook, Twitter and via online blogs. It has more than 20,000 followers on its two main Twitter channels and is rapidly approaching 100,000 Facebook fans, giving the customer care team a significant volume of queries to handle.

At the time, the organisation was manually monitoring over 80 sites and feeds. This labour-intensive approach to tracking conversations and responding

to issues was clearly not sustainable. In addition, the client lacked the ability to consistently support service level agreements and lacked any means to report on its social media activities.

Dimension Data developed an innovative solution that focuses on 'negative tone' mentions of the organisation's products and services. In addition, it's capable of gathering intelligence regarding specific individuals' social media 'clout' and the frequency of their posts.

The 'business rules engine' within the solution ensures that interactions are routed to agents that have appropriate skills and are available. Today, the client is able to draw reports on all social media feeds including response times and adherence to service level agreements. Plans are in place to extend the solution to an additional 80 'e-service' sites, such as LinkedIn.

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