

COLUMNS

Social customer service on-the-go

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By **Joshua March**

I speak with marketers daily about the pressures that modern social communication puts on businesses to improve their service offerings, but the travel industry is especially affected due to the urgent nature of its customers' issues.

From booking flights to renting a car, a trip to any destination requires efficiency to be successful. Yet often, planning is not the difficult part. It is what happens when plans go awry usually during the trip that can cause the most frustration.

Moving the needle

With more consumers turning to smartphones to handle logistical elements of trips and travel, in the eye of the traveler, social media has become a necessary communications tool to receive efficient, real-time customer service.

Travel companies have a lot to gain from developing social customer service processes. They improve customer satisfaction with a level of service that's just not feasible through traditional communications channels.

Dealing with a multitude of inquiries for immediate information about delays, program changes and other urgent issues just does not make sense via phone and email. It is laborious for the customer to the extent that they just would not bother, and expensive for travel companies.

Twitter can be used as a virtual ticket desk attendant. It is fluid, easy to update in real-time, and it is where customers are already having conversations.

In addition to posting updates that are relevant for large groups of customers, you can also provide one-on-one support quickly and effectively, making Twitter the clear winner as a solution to this problem.

Flocking to Twitter in anticipation of new information is a consumer decision that simply makes sense.

It is fast, convenient and designed for real-time updates on-the-go.

On track

Many travel providers are starting to recognize it as the natural solution for their communications needs.

For instance, Transport for London has set up Twitter accounts for different London Underground lines so that customers can always stay up to date on information regarding those services that affect them, particularly any disruptions. This kind of constant, low-maintenance service is a win-win for both the travel company and its customers.

The entire First Group a transport operator servicing nearly every corner of Britain is developing social customer service and the processes to better manage it.

Twitter is by far their most important social communication channel, and mobilizing a team to deliver fast responses to passengers on the platform is being recognized the best way to deliver one-to-many and one-to-one service in a quick and cost-effective way.

Joanna Coverly, digital community manager at First Great Western, spoke with me about where social has taken the organization as a service provider: "Twitter has become a vital tool for our customers wanting real-time information when they are travelling with us. Many customers now rely on Twitter for service updates, journey information, and support when there is disruption.

"We see Twitter mainly as a customer service tool, so we keep marketing on our feed to a minimum," she said. "It has provided us with a great way to reach out to our customers and be there for them when they need us most."

Other travel companies have also recognized the need for speed when dealing with social customers.

American Airlines aims to surpass the average response time for other industries, committing to corresponding with customers [within 10 minutes](#) .

And leading car rental company Hertz has invested a great deal of [time and effort into developing its social customer service operation](#) opening its page up to customers as a great way to get in touch about any rental issues.

If you are in the business of travel and Twitter is not part of your service repertoire just yet, consider the examples of these industry leaders and ask yourself why not?

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