

## Consumers are demanding customer service on social media

*Businesses without a customer service social media strategy put reputation and customer loyalty at risk*

WATFORD, UK - 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012 - Sitel, a leading customer care outsourcing provider, has announced the results of the Social Media Customer Service Report conducted by TNS.

The study, which surveyed more than 1000 consumers in Great Britain between the ages of 16 - 64, found that social media is rapidly changing the customer service industry. Led by consumers under 25, this shift sees more and more Britons turning to social media sites - from Facebook and Twitter to blogs and forums - to solve problems, search for information and voice complaints.

"Social media is dramatically altering the customer service landscape. With easy access to real-time information, a new generation of 'always-on' consumers is more empowered and demanding than ever. This trend is on the rise as social media proliferates, both online and on mobile, across all age groups and demographics," said Lawrence Fenley, Sitel managing director for UK and Ireland. "To build trust and brand loyalty in this rapidly changing environment, companies must develop a social media customer service strategy that is responsive, proactive and engaging in order to address customers' needs."

### Young consumers expect customer support on social media

Younger consumers are turning to social media for customer service and expect businesses to stay in step. Fifteen percent of 16-24 year olds prefer to interact with customer service on social media over any other method, compared to 8% of 25-34 year olds and 3% of 35-44 year olds. Furthermore, the first thing that 7% of 16-24 year-olds do when they have a problem with a product is complain about it on social media. This research indicates that not only is implementing a social media customer care strategy an important part of capturing the brand loyalty of young consumers, not having a strategy it can put a company's reputation at risk.

### Consumers searching for solutions online before calling customer service

It is increasingly imperative that businesses anticipate customers' needs and proactively address them via social media. The first thing 57% of consumers, including 71% of 16-24 year olds, 65% of 25-34 year olds and 64% of 65-44 year olds, will do when they have a problem with a product is search for a solution online. Consumers use a variety of social media platforms to get help with a product they've purchased. Across all demographics, 33% of consumers have used online forums or chat rooms, 25% have used video tutorials, either on YouTube or a company's website, 19% have posted a query on a question website, such as Quora, Facebook Questions or Yahoo Answers, and 11% have used a tutorial or demonstration on a blog.

By creating digital content that solves customers' common problems and making it widely available online, businesses can significantly reduce customer frustration and be seen as a user-friendly brand while lowering the costs associated with live agent support. When asked what companies could do to improve the customer service experience, 35% of all respondents, including nearly half (48%) of 16-24 year olds, said "post video demonstrations, tutorials and instructions."

### Demographics play an important role in the customer support mix

As important as it is to include social media and online support in the customer service mix, maintaining strong phone support is still important, the survey found. Less than 1 in 3 (32%) of consumers aged 55-64 go online as a first step if they have a problem with a product. The majority (64%) of consumers in this age bracket first contact the manufacturer or retailer where they purchased the product directly when they

encounter a problem. When asked what companies could do to improve the customer service experience, 81% of consumers aged 55-64 said "make contact numbers easier to find" compared with 52% of consumers aged 16-24.

The survey also revealed differences between how men and women behave when they encounter issues with a product. When they have a problem with a product, 61% of men and 53% of women will head to the internet first to search for a solution, while 39% of women and 30% of men will contact the retailer or manufacturer directly before doing anything else. The key to effective customer service is to understand the demographics of your audience and be prepared with the right level of support at every potential touch-point.

### Establishing a social media customer service strategy

No customer care channel is effective in isolation and a social media strategy should be viewed as part of the whole. As a communications hub, a contact centre is well-placed to advise and deliver customer care on social media that is specific to your audience and business objectives and in line with the entire customer service strategy.

Sitel, a leading social media customer care provider, offered the following best practices:

- **Listen:** Monitoring social media will give you a feel for what your customers are saying about you and where you may have issues with the product or customer service. Determine how frequently customers are raising issues or trying to communicate with your company so you can assess how important the channel is for your brand.
- **Engage:** Social media is about participation. For businesses, it's also about giving customers a direct route to your company. Set rules of engagement and establish a tone of voice that aligns with your specific business objectives whilst extending your brand's personality.
- **Analyse:** You could be seeing thousands of comments every day so you need to establish a process to track these communications, determine the appropriate response and prioritise.
- **Adapt:** Social media is changing every day, from the launch of Google+ to the increased adoption of mobile social apps, so there is a need to be flexible and scalable. Review your programme frequently to keep pace with your customers.

To download the complete survey, please visit: <http://www.sitel.com/media/tns>

### About Sitel

Sitel is a world leader in outsourced customer care services. With over 26 years of industry experience, Sitel has twice been ranked as the top overall call centre outsourcing provider in Datamonitor's annual Black Book of Outsourcing survey. Sitel's 57,000 employees provide clients with predictable and measurable Return on their Customer Investment by building customer loyalty, increasing sales and improving efficiency. Sitel's solutions span 135+ domestic, nearshore, and offshore centres in 26 countries across North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia Pacific. The company is privately held and majority owned by Canadian diversified company, Onex Corporation. For more information, please visit [www.sitel.com](http://www.sitel.com).

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