17.6: Dealing with opportunities and threats

The use of social media has equipped consumers with a voice and a platform, and the ability to amplify their views and truly inform their decision making. The connected nature of the Internet makes these views easy to share, and the accessibility of social media tools makes it easy for other consumers to find these views, and respond and build on them. All of this contributes to the perception of the brand.

The best way to show that you are listening to customer comments, complaints and questions online is the same as with a normal conversation. Comment when it's appropriate, listen with interest, be polite, be respectful, and add value wherever possible. Brands should become active participants in the conversation.

Brands that are successful in communicating with their audiences are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to propel their brand forward, and are keeping their eyes peeled for risks that may threaten their reputation. In both situations, the power sits in how the brand responds. This response can range from a direct engagement to a full new marketing campaign. Ultimately it depends on how powerful the opportunity or risk is.

An extreme example of successfully grabbing a social media opportunity, is Morton's, an American steak restaurant chain. One weary business traveller jokingly tweeted Morton's asking them to deliver him a porterhouse steak at the airport when he landed. The Morton's social media team were listening and responded by ensuring that the customer was met at the airport with a steak. This social media stunt garnered enormous media attention, a very loyal brand advocate, and a hefty increase in sales for the following weeks (Herrman, 2016).

Figure 17.6.1: Morton's restaurant responding to a customer tweet and earning themselves great media publicity *Adapted From Gizmodo, 2011*

When to talk (and when not to)

When everything being said is nice

A fantastic position to be in is that every possible mention is overwhelmingly positive. Well done. However, that does not mean that there is nothing to do. During this time, the brand must do everything in its power to drive high volumes of conversation.

Stakeholders are being positive about the brand because their expectations are being exceeded. Unfortunately, expectations change. Brands need to stay on their toes and constantly be on the lookout for new and innovative ways to meet and develop their brand promise.

When everything being said is neutral

If this is the case, it sounds as if the company is very boring and is not a good way to get attention. As Seth Godin puts it, "Safe is risky" (Godin, 2010). If a company is playing it so safe that no one can be bothered to send either praise or criticism its way, it's in danger of being forgotten. The next step is no one talking about the company at all.

When negative things are being said

Negative statements can often be understood as broken brand promises. There is underperformance on expectation, and it must be dealt with as a matter of high priority. During this period, brands need to be very careful not to stir up any more conversation than is absolutely necessary. That said, it's certainly not all doom and gloom. If the conversation is broadly negative, it is normally because there is some underlying problem, and this information provides the business with focus to resolve it.

> **Note**
>
> In fact, resolving a serious complaint to the customer's satisfaction can gain you a loyal brand advocate; someone who has first-hand experience that your brand cares and goes the extra mile.

Complaints are from stakeholders who have had dealings with a company that hasn't met their expectations. By complaining, this customer is, often unwittingly, giving the company the opportunity to make things right, and is probably indicating where the company can improve. Usually, the skilled customer service department of a company should deal with these. They should also share resulting insights with the business strategy department so that the underlying problems can be prioritised and resolved.

If a complaint is online, the resolution should be there as well, although you can try to have it taken offline first. Even though the customer service will likely take place either over email or by phone, posting a personalised comment in a blog post, for example, will demonstrate to the community that the company listens, responds, and serves the critical objective of actually resolving the underlying issues. Criticism need not necessarily come from customers, but it is important to be aware of it. If a criticism involves false information, it should be corrected. And if the criticism is true, then it should be dealt with as such.

Responding

Responding involves recognising that consumers hold the upper hand in the relationship. They are better trusted, there are more of them and, in most cases, the barriers to exit from a brand are relatively low. Customers dictate the channels of communication. An organisation needs to go to the consumer, not the other way around. Ignoring this will result in the business losing customers because they not willing to truly engage. This is why it is so important to research your audience and tailor your strategy to them and not vice versa.

Responses to customers on social media should be personalised for each individual. Do not use blanket responses.

> **Note**
>
> Read more about this in the Market research chapter

When responding, be transparent, be honest, and treat the person as you would like to be treated. At all times, remember that you are engaged in conversation, not a dictation.

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