5 Ways Social Media and Messaging Can Help in Times of Crisis

As people are impacted by major events like coronavirus, many turn to social media and messaging apps to learn news and stay in touch with family, friends, organizations, and brands they love and rely upon.

In these times, it is important to ramp up customer communications strategies with a strong focus on being empathetic to customers' information needs, that are proactive and transparent as situations evolve.

Here are five things to consider as you and your marketing and customer service teams move ahead in these uncertain times.

1 Re-evaluate social media and messaging plans, particularly if service response is falling behind

In major outages when service experiences fail to live up to expectations, customers can become frustrated seeing "business as usual" social media content and text messages that are out of touch and unrelated to their immediate needs. Reactions can be particularly severe when existing inquiries, trouble tickets, or complaints are seemingly being ignored.

If your organization or brand is experiencing or anticipating an increased backlog, addressing service and support concerns head-on with transparency on the social and messaging channels your customers most use can show that your brand is listening and taking action on what is most important to them.

Planned social media posts and text messaging activities, particularly if unrelated to the crisis at hand, should be postponed unless customer expectations are being met across all channels.

2 Prioritize digital channels and high visibility of social media to get important alerts and messages out fast

When emails go unanswered and call queues run long, social media is often a go-to escalation channel when all other options have failed. Whether through public posts or direct text messaging, prioritizing responsiveness and leveraging available social media and messaging platforms is essential.

An "all hands on deck" attitude that clearly prioritizes putting immediate social media and messaging response to critical customer needs first can go a long way to addressing customer concerns quickly, while helping avoid further escalation and contact volume.

One way to do this is to update or "pin" key communications or critical messages on your organization home pages and social media profiles to increase the likelihood they will not be missed, and more customers will be able to self-serve with the information they need.

Proactive notifications via SMS and text messaging is another fast, convenient way to alert customers of fast changing conditions, closures, outages, or changes in service availability.

3 Evaluate how bots and automation can help effectively handle routine customer inquiries

Social media and messaging bots can have a positive impact in crisis situations, helping to quickly and efficiently communicate with customers, keeping them informed and safe in times of crisis.

Simple informational bots are fast to deploy, creating a single, in-channel point of contact for customers to get relevant, accurate information 24/7, and enabling your brand to engage affected customers immediately as conditions change. Bots can be quickly created to provide access to:

- Latest company status and actions, office closures, hours of operation, service outage, or event status

- Basic diagnostic screening, triage procedures, product setup, or troubleshooting help

- Latest relevant federal, state, or local government guidelines and procedures

- General instructions and links to images, videos, or other content and applications

When messaging and social media are your customers' preferred touch points, promoting messaging options in your IVR or pairing proactive notifications and alerts with bots are other methods to help promote the best ways for customers to get the help they need.

The benefits of one or more bots can quickly add up, helping you provide more convenient alternatives to calling and mitigating the impact to customer-facing operations in times when they are being overwhelmed.

4 Analyze social media mentions to establish the evolving situation around your brand

In fast-changing situations, establishing or scaling up your social listening activity can make a major difference.

Keeping in touch with and understanding how crisis situations are affecting your customers and how they are evolving by market, country, and at a global level can help your company stay ahead and anticipate potential areas to prioritize and take action.

Map this work to the regions and countries where your brand is active. Use social listening to monitor government and other relevant authority messages in real time (they are often broadcasted on social media first) to help ensure you and your customer service teams are not caught off guard.

5

Set up social monitoring for early alerts to critical content and potential impact to your brand

Often, individuals on the ground will give the "true picture" of an emerging situation sooner than official communications, which may be delayed by hours or days.

Social media monitoring can help ensure you are alerted in near real time of any emerging critical situations that relate to your brand. These "listening posts" help you monitor, analyze, and understand public expectations of your company and brand during fast moving, critical times, enabling you to be better prepared and reacting proactively.

Social media and text messaging aren't just for customers

These same considerations apply to your internal staff, teams, and even suppliers. Many companies have enacted large-scale work from home and virtual work initiatives, leaving employees, contractors, and supplier staff increasingly isolated from regular formal and informal office communications and relationships, further increasing anxiety and uncertainty.

These same strategies can be employed to keep your staff and extended teams better informed and up-to-date on relevant updates and priorities as the crisis situation continues to develop in increasingly unpredictable ways.

Proactive, empathetic communication is key

Managing communication in a crisis can make all the difference to your customers and your business. Showing empathy by focusing on what matters most to your customers now and optimizing use of social media and messaging communications can go a long way to retaining customer (and employee) trust and loyalty to your company and brand in the days ahead.

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