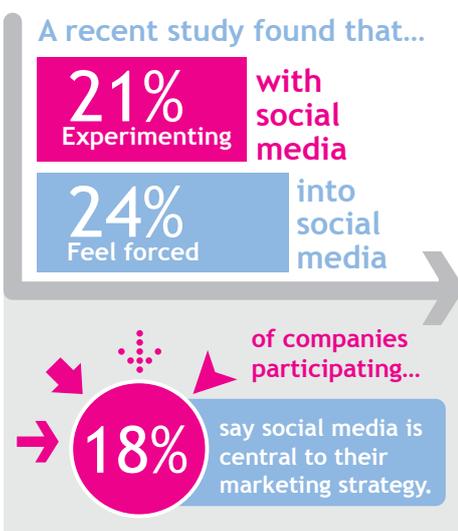


Making the most of your customer journey

2. Control your channels

How well do you cope with less controllable channels like social media? And how do you interact with customers who are unhappy with the customer experience you provide? In the second part of our series of insights into the customer journey, we'll look at how responding in the right way could have big benefits for your brand.



49% of companies using social media **X** don't collect data!

Half-hearted attempt

The Social Media Benchmark study reports that 21% of businesses are still experimenting with social media, while 24% are 'being forced into it', using it because their customers do.

The trouble with social media is that you can't dip in and out. Once you're in, you're in. If your customers decide this is part of their customer journey with you, you have to engage and keep up the momentum.

For (only) 18% of companies participating in the study, social media is central to their marketing strategy. However, for many - and considering it's an extension of PR, customer service and complaints departments - it's still an under-resourced, under-skilled and under-prioritised customer touch point.

Interestingly, the Social Media Benchmark study says that only 4% of companies have a dedicated social media person. Thirty six percent said they were either ill-equipped or average in leveraging and managing social media effectively. Only 2% said they were optimal. Of companies using social media, 49% don't collect data.

(Anti)-social media?

As a business, you can't prevent customers from spreading negative messages about you. Social media, just like PR, is less controllable and unpredictable than say, paid-for search. It represents an amalgamation of touch points and it's becoming more and more important in consumers' and customers' eyes. Complaining on social media is quick and very effective - look at Trip Advisor, a forum just for airing views, good and bad.

The best way to retain some control is to have a proactive, social media plan in place, supported by the right level of management with the right knowledge and influence. If social media is managed inconsistently, is unfocused in its messaging by people without the right company knowledge, tone of voice (ToV) and empowerment, it can become a brand's worst nightmare. It will create a monster that seriously harms your brand, and one that you're incapable of stopping.

A quick, considered response

When complaints come in, it's best to act speedily and in a considered way (note: don't delete comments, it just infuriates the complainer).

The first thing to do is respond via direct or private messaging. However, you still need to be careful about what you say, it could get out into the public domain. This is your opportunity to turn a negative into a positive, something done successfully by many businesses every day.

One example is a large UK delivery service that's used by many online retailers. They have quite a bad reputation for not making deliveries on time and delivering items in poor shape. Although constantly attacked via social media, they deal with their customers quickly, handling part of the conversation by direct message and not a public chat.

They then tweet about the positive solution and copy in the complainer. They manipulate the channel for a positive outcome, showing other customers they are working hard to resolve issues effectively.

Some brands even have more than one Twitter or Facebook page, one general and one dealing with customer service. The former is used for positive outbound messaging and the other is used to contain upset customers. For this approach you need two very differently trained teams.

Pressures of the digital age

While many companies use social media, it's often in a half-hearted way. Looking at these stats on the left, it's hardly surprising that many companies are still struggling. Why? Obviously, while the digital age has created many opportunities, it's also created difficulties:

- The speed of digital development means companies suffer from threshold anxiety in immersing themselves in digital channels



Case study: **A personalised approach**

One of our clients wanted to increase their presence in the UK retail market. They were attending an international fair (ISM) and needed to make an impact with specific large food retailers, renowned for being difficult to get into.

As this is a tough audience to engage, we decided on a very targeted and personalised campaign. We created a personalised piece of direct mail featuring the client's products and proposition. In addition, we wrote a feature that included the client's financial successes. The personalised mechanic was sent directly to each individual buyer before the conference, inviting them to the client's stand. Once at the stand our client engaged them in their unique heritage, brand and products.

As a result, our client received interest and meetings with retailers they hadn't been able to gain access to previously. In fact, some contacted our client directly to request a meeting. In short, a new journey was created to develop interest at the point at which potential clients would be most engaged.

- Catching up is becoming harder in view of the rapid changes in the digital world
- A lack of skilled / experienced marketing staff in small and medium-sized business-to-business companies
- Digital on the go has allowed for interaction with customers 24/7, wherever and whenever

In addition to the skills gap, the pressures of the financial crisis has led to a squeeze of marketing budgets and recruitment.

According to research by Hiscox in 2011, just 6% of small businesses (10-49 employees) use social media to generate sales. This increased to 21% of medium-sized businesses (50-249 employees). With regard to customer service, only 11% of participants use social media to enhance it, and only 12% use social media 'all the time'.

One point to note here is that the uptake of social media varies by industry and type of business.

Not every company requires three full-time social media staff to manage their brand. However, a strategy is necessary, even if the strategy is to not engage in social media.

Don't feel you have to have a voice on every platform either, pick what suits your audience best and focus on managing those well. Not every business needs Facebook. Maybe LinkedIn or Twitter are better options.

Other channel challenges

Don't think that social media is the only channel that can cause customer journey problems if you don't control it from the outset. The below examples emphasise the importance of thinking about the whole of the customer journey and the domino effect that one wrong move can create.

Think about email, for example. If you insist on working with an old list (i.e. data that's five-plus years old and not cleaned) and use a sender's IP address that has not been bedded in (i.e. test it with small broadcasts to increase familiarity with the email clients), you could end up being blacklisted. That means you can't send any emails at all. From a customer journey perspective, the campaign will annoy the recipients and attract a poor response. Financially, it won't bring in a positive ROI.

Another example is direct mail. A UK bank once sent out a large credit card mailshot that only allowed users to respond by post. The mail pack didn't provide a telephone number so as not to overload the sales team. This approach backfired spectacularly, as many customers found the customer service number (instead of the sales number) in the terms and conditions, flooding the wrong part of the call centre. Not a positive customer journey experience.

Our case study on the left shows the positive impact of a customer journey that's thought through properly.

In the next Wonderthought, we'll discuss the importance of knowing your customers and look at the power of personalising your customer journey.
