

A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO READING THIS BOOK

If you are a traditional lover of books and just prefer to read cover to cover then please consume the book's ideas in this way. However if you are intent on flicking through to pick out ideas for immediate use, then here are a few tips.

Chapters 1 and 2 are scene setters that provide an overview of how both customers and organizations have found reason to use social media as channels for interaction. Chapter 3 then moves onto the building blocks of a Social Customer Service ecosystem and begins to tease out some of the issues.

Chapter 4 then changes gear and is a little different. For a start it is much longer. It is the centre of the book in terms of using the ideas and comes in the form of a self-assessment. This is an exploration we very much hope you complete and get value from.

It defines 15 competencies that support your ability to deliver a great Social Customer Service experience. If you are a veteran of Customer Service strategy you will no doubt recognize parts of the discussion. Completing the assessment enables you to design version one of your Social Customer Service strategy.

Chapters 5 to 7 then dig deeper into the character and operational best practice for peer-to-peer support, Facebook and Twitter.

After that we tackle two core topics in Chapters 8 and 9 – crisis management and the relationship between social interaction and the law. Finally, we draw things to a close by considering the “big picture” issues that social engagement throws up. How do organizations need to adapt in this new order? A topic for the top table to consider.

Peppered throughout the book are a series of interviews with some of the most interesting people in the field of Social Customer Service today. These are a great source of practical wisdom and if you like to learn through stories then this will also be a fun way of cherry picking.

As we mentioned in the Foreword, one of our motivations was to consolidate existing material spread across the social web. Any search engine ought to find the full original versions for you. However we have also made them available on a website dedicated to readers of this book. Log on and you will have access to all the reference material as well as some extra goodies we could not squeeze into the book.

www.social-customer-service.co.uk

Who knows – it might even evolve into a social discussion amongst us all. We look forward to the chance of getting to know you personally.

Till then,
Happy reading.
Carolyn and Martin

Chapter 1

Where Were You When It
All Changed?

If you are just waking up to Social Customer Service you might well wonder how all this happened. Since the use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube exploded into our lives, organizations initially thought they spotted an opportunity to extend their Sales and promotional activity into new channels.

However, their mindset proved out of synch with the times. For sure they could continue brand messaging as before and even extend their broadcast model to include limited customer response in the forms of “likes” and “follows”. In fact this has become the standard way in which organizations have so far defined their customer engagement strategies.

But organizations also discovered that the communication agenda is no longer exclusively set by the brand team. As publically shared platforms, social networks allow anyone to voice their ideas. So began the birth of Social Customer Service.

Customers began to post tweets when they were unhappy or had a question about the product or service. Some strongly worded Facebook groups were established against brands and organizations that were giving bad Customer Service. YouTube videos went viral (see our interview with Dave Carroll of United Breaks Guitars fame). But they all had one thing in common. Customers had tried to get their problems resolved

through traditional Customer Service channels, but then struggled to get a satisfactory resolution. Social channels provided an outlet.

Frank Eliason, now Director of Global Social Media for Citi, is credited with triggering the first well reported organizational response to this customer trend. As part of the Comcast Customer Service team, he decided to respond to one of the many unresolved customer issues on Twitter. The flood gates were then forever opened.

In the “I Want It Now” world, operating against a backcloth of mainly indifferent but often poor service quality, customers quickly learned to leverage social media and force organizations in step with their needs on their terms. Some organizations have resented this, saying they feel “held to ransom” by customers that use social channels to air gripes. If untrue, then yes, this is frustrating but also the price of operating in today’s socially transparent business world. However, many of them proved real. The balance of power has shifted and we as organizations are learning to deal with it.

Other organizations have seen this as opportunity and welcomed the ability to dialogue with customers in this new way. John Lewis, British Gas, LOVEFiLM and other brands swiftly established dedicated Twitter accounts for Customer Service interactions and created skilled teams within the contact centre to respond to and manage these interactions. They used social media to reduce AHT (Average Handling Time), gaining significant financial benefit plus an improved Customer Service reputation.

Organizations such as giffgaff, BT and BSkyB have enjoyed even broader benefits using peer-to-peer support communities as part of their social outreach. While retailers such as ASOS, Next and Tesco host busy Facebook pages with plenty of Customer Service issues being discussed in between the latest engagement campaigns.

As we know from mainstream Customer Service, adding new channels might reduce cost. Self service has slowly but surely chipped away at the non-complex end of customer interactions. But more often the real benefit of multi-channel is about giving customers a *choice* about the way in which they want to interact with you.

Some commentators express great confidence that social channels will rapidly make old school Customer Service redundant. We are not so convinced. The demand for one-to-one private communication via voice, email and web chat will continue. In fact they are frequently integral to Social Customer Service delivery as a way of dealing with confidential matters.

The important point about “choice” is that if you make it easy for your customers to do business with you then they will keep doing business with you.

The politics of social transparency

No-one enjoys being criticized in public. Even thick skinned politicians admit that it can hurt. So it is no surprise that organizations react defensively. When things turn from bad to worse and become whipped up into a social media crisis, the fear factor creeps even higher. Rightly so, since it often costs more than reputation when things go wrong, as some of the stories we tell prove.

Yet there is another more hard boiled perspective that says surely if everyone starts to raise their voice, don't they just cancel each other out? After a while no-one notices yet another public bashing. It's noisy and maybe nasty in this new public marketplace, but that's just the way it is. We will not be noticed so let's carry on with business as usual.

Are these folk right or are they unconsciously playing chicken and walking up a motorway the wrong way with their eyes closed? That is

one of the great questions posed throughout this book. Ultimately it is for you and your organization to decide where the real level of risk lies. But we return to it in different ways to keep the topic turning over in your mind.

Here is an initial opportunity to reflect on the issue of how dangerous the transparency of social interaction might be and how you can preemptively mitigate that risk. This is one way of looking at it.

One of the most powerful reasons to run a tight ship on social media is just how much it tells competitors where you are going wrong. Take supermarkets. Anywhere in the world there are those in the ascendancy and those in need of a transformation. Yet within 15 minutes of sifting through a supermarket's Facebook timeline, supply chain issues are revealed in great detail by customers. In many cases they are willing to write paragraphs. We are no experts in retail supply chain but we can imagine what that competitive intelligence could be used for in the hands of a direct competitor.

Thus Social Customer Service has to go hand in hand with rapid continuous improvement. That is to say execs need to immerse themselves in the detail and get fixing before getting skinned by a competitor.

If you want to test this right now before reading anything else, please try. Go and have a detailed look at what customers are saying about your organization or your competitors. Come back in 15 minutes and re-read this paragraph.

What do you think?

The Only Way Is Onwards & Upwards

Jamie McDonald is Customer Experience Director for Carillion plc.

Jamie has led Carillion through the uncharted waters of Social Customer Service since 2010 and his passion for serving customers this way is clear. Jamie advocates that for brands to have success delivering Customer Service online they have to believe in it. Talking from an honest and open perspective,



Jamie shares some lessons learned from the journey to date. Carillion plc, as part of a wide ranging portfolio of services and construction contracts, provide housing maintenance solutions under multiple contracts in the UK public and private sector. They receive and respond to approximately 200 Facebook posts and tweets from customers every day.

What would be your advice to organizations thinking of embarking on Social Customer Service?

If you have millions of people engaging with you it might be different, but for most SMEs the far biggest cost will be the emotional one, and I totally understand why people are uneasy about it, but it is the right thing to do. If you don't, then your customers will anyway. There were some awful Facebook pages that were set up by customers against us in the early days before we had an official presence that have now dwindled as people have flocked to our page where they know they will get a response. If your customers haven't got a place where they can say what they want to say then they will create it.

It's far better to have them doing it on our page where we can see it, solve it and learn from it than not. But as soon as you begin to try and control it and moderate it, they will defect in droves and go somewhere else. Standard responses, deleting posts, inauthentic language and any sense that things aren't improving will send your customers over the edge. Customers sometimes send out random messages assuming there is a company Facebook site, and are surprised when there isn't. There is a realistic demand that companies have a Facebook site and increasingly a Twitter obligation too. If you don't have a Social Customer Service presence you will increasingly fall behind.

What has been one of the hardest things to deal with in your world of Social Customer Service?

We had a "mugging" on Facebook recently where a customer we'd let down managed to mobilize every person she knew on Facebook and within a few hours we had hundreds and hundreds of posts on our page, many more than normal. It was like a collective mugging, a really powerful, co-ordinated "attack". She'd persuaded all her family and friends and friends of friends to join the site, "like us", and then bombard us with posts about her issue. Our first viral activity and it was really painful to be on the receiving end. This was a co-ordinated campaign to get this lady's problem sorted and it worked.

There are some genuine examples of people trying to get the attention of brands and organizations by using Social to their advantage, trying to jump the queue or get what they want.

At Carillion one of our golden rules is you don't get a better level of service just because you use social media. If you escalate your issue to us through a non-standard channel, whether it is a letter to the MD, a complaint to Watchdog or a Facebook post we will capture it differently and acknowledge it differently, since it came through a different channel. But to provide a differentiated resolution to something just because the customer is savvy enough to use Facebook is wrong to us. That is really hard though, as your own human

common sense begins to prioritize the channel because it is visible and global.

And surely there are some people who lie, throw tantrums to get their own way are there not? Does Social simply put power into the hands of people who will use it against you?

You will always get some people that clearly have a lot of time to devote to escalating their issue to us. Like a letter to Watchdog, some people will embellish the story, but unless you are a complete fantasist you are unlikely to make it all up. If they do, you soon find out. We've only ever had one or two. There is some work to do investigating things people say but then wouldn't we be doing that anyway, whether the information is coming via letter or telephone? Perhaps people would have to be more motivated to complain in writing over small issues that they might not have complained about before.

To complain in writing or by telephone when you aren't confident can be difficult. I'm quite proud of the fact that we've given a voice to people who perhaps didn't have it before but because they can use Facebook and find it easier to send a short, informal message. We get more complaints than we might have done otherwise, but I'm ok with that. I think one of the big wins is that a group of customers that might not have had a voice now do.

Do people use the ability to escalate issues through social?

We have had customers send InMail to senior executives via LinkedIn and I personally pick up and respond to tweets from @JamieCarillion so that customers know they can access us through Social. I think it is good for customers but it is also good for the teams to see the senior managers monitoring and engaging the customers. I learn so much from the feedback we get from customers via Social.

How do you manage multi-channel Customer Service? What are the biggest challenges in the execution of this approach?

A key learning point has been when people contact us via Facebook and Twitter about the same issue and they compare our

responses across both and if there are any inconsistencies they will highlight that to us too. We have had to think much more about how we co-ordinate the channels and the responses. Matching up different channel contacts for the person at the front line is still quite difficult. If there is a way of a CRM platform being able to work in real-time around different channels and across regulated and non-regulated contacts we haven't found it yet, bearing in mind people can change their Twitter names and mobile phone numbers!

The theoretical efficient model of a "Single Universal queue" doesn't always work well to move between different channels. Social media is a tool you haven't bought, that isn't maintained by you, but customers see that you have gone in to this model so you need to be equipped to handle it; even though there is no easy way to predict volumes! We have found that activity matches our call centre patterns, which was interesting. We had expected it to be the other way around, that people would use Social more in the evenings and at weekends but it hasn't been the case for us. People post and tweet at us in their normal working day when they would have made the phone calls.

Universal skilling is also really hard. The breadth of knowledge you need and the ability to move alternately between writing a letter, writing an email and writing a Facebook post is really challenging. The model we use is Customer Service and Customer Care. Customer Service is high volume, inbound channels, mostly telephony, and the more simplistic transactional stuff. Customer Care manage social media, complaints and customer satisfaction. This latter is lower volume but greater complexity and much more visible. Both need good written English skills but the latter needs the maturity to use the right phraseology in the right channels. Dickensian English doesn't translate well to social media responses! This model works for us and it also provides a career development route for advisors through the contact centre.

There is an argument that providing Social Customer Service could make you look bad and damage your brand. What do you feel about that?

When customers are in distress they will post rants which might make some companies defensive, but you have to move past that and recognize that the customers are simply saying "help me". If there are unofficial sites on Facebook against your brand then it's a warning that you are not doing something right.

Social is only used regularly by about 5% of our customers but it provides us with a real-time snapshot of what the majority might be experiencing, albeit slanted towards the negative. It might be low volume, but it is definitely high impact. It has as much impact on our customer perception, media perception and our contract renewals as the 95%. It also gives me lots of insight into themes and what the hot topics are for our customers. I don't understand how you can be a Customer Services director and not be interested in that.

It's important to remember that social media will primarily be a place for people to post negative comments. If you have an exciting business offering you will probably get more "thank-you" and posts of delight, but when we deal with double glazing, radiators and boilers, a lot of it will be complaints. Some people read our page and use enforced logic that because it is a lot of negative postings we must be terrible. Sometimes we remind them that 12 have complained this week, but we serve 100,000 people.

How has using Social Customer Service been received by your employees?

3 years ago staff were clamouring to be on the "Facebook team" as it was the new exciting bit, now it's just another thing to do at work, I think the novelty has gone already! An unexpected output we've had from the process has been that our front line guys go home and keep an eye on our Facebook and Twitter pages and read all the posts and our responses. They then come in the next day and give us

feedback on our responses which has been really helpful in shaping the tonality and authenticity of them.

In the early days there was a bit of defensiveness from our employees, they would see something on the page and think “that’s not true!” and start typing a response. This led to terrible situations of online fights between our customers and employees and we learned a lot of painful lessons around the ground rules. We try not to enforce things but we now show people what the rules and guidelines are using examples.

Are you training people specifically in Social Customer Service?

Social media training is not like Data Protection training where there are some legal sanctions. For DP there is training you can do and you can sign to say you’ve had it and then you can enforce it. Social media training needs to explain why Social Customer Service is a key part of our proposition but there are some key things to do and avoid doing. It’s great if employees want to get involved, “like” the site and look at things, that’s fine, but we say here are some examples of where people have tried to do things, with very good intentions, but it’s been awful so please don’t!

What happened?

One of the biggest problems we had was where two customers started debating about us on our page, one attacking us, the other defending us. One of our employees was at home and saw this debate, and “liked” the pro-Carillion response. The angry customer saw the post had been “liked”, clicked through, saw that the person worked for us and went bananas. They then claimed they had been bullied online by one of our employees and caused a huge ruckus over that. But there is no enforcement we can do of someone who in their own time, in their home, on their own machine clicks “like” on a post. It is completely untenable, so our reaction is to use this as an example in training now as to why this sort of thing is not a good idea. I think the way we manage our people to use Social and the way we wrap

HR and Legal around Social Customer Service is still very unclear and some more work is needed here.

What specific training can organizations do to maximize their chances of success?

We've trained in "Facebook English" to ensure our responses have an authentic and consistent voice. When our team are responding to a complaint letter they have an agreed code of language for writing responses and the same again for email, but the phraseology, language and style in Social needs to be different. With social responses you need to write as if you are talking to the person. The customer needs to think "this person gets it and I'm not being spun a line here". With complaints it is important to acknowledge the issue and signpost them offline to the formal channels if possible, but if the customer wants to have the full and frank discussion globally then, providing there is no breach of the Data Protection Act and they are not undermining their own security (as some customers are very honest and open with their details a little unwisely), then we get on with it.

An example of the tonality Jamie is referring to:

Customer post: "I am sick of this: I've reported my broken radiator three times now and still nobody has come out, despite several promises. It's freezing cold and I'm thinking of going to stay with my in-laws so you can imagine how desperate I'm getting!"

Carillion response: "Hi Julie. Really sorry that we've let you down here: it must be a nightmare for you and the kids. Send me a PM with your details and I'll get this sorted today. Don't call your mother in law just yet!"

As well as "Facebook English", what other rules do you apply to Social Customer Service?

Another rule is to avoid censorship and moderation of customer messages that could be perceived for our own advantage. If we have to

delete a post (due to swearing, data protection, etc) we always re-post, explaining why and re-post as much of the original post as possible, or explain that we notice that they have a problem with xyz but we had to delete the post as it contained a lot of swearing and that's not good for people.

What are your views on the One Agenda idea? Is there a halfway house needed between Sales & Marketing and Customer Services?

"If you try and use social channels for Sales and Marketing only then good luck."

There is not a chance that social channels can be a good news channel only; customers will use it for what they want to. The internal discussion about Marketing owning the tool and Customer Service went on but Customer Services was agreed because we have a more 24/7 presence and most of the posts are about Customer Service issues. My Marketing Team agree the branding and description of the Facebook page and then my Customer Care team own the day-to-day management. It is mostly a complaint channel but that's what customers need to express. You can put your messages out through Social, all carefully worded and brand aligned, but customers will just tear you apart. It's not authentic. In the same way that writing formal responses, copied and pasted many times, will make customers even angrier and your social strategy will fall apart very quickly. Having a credible message and the tone in which you respond to things is incredibly important.

How else are you using social media?

All of our job vacancies are tweeted out on a dedicated Twitter handle. Gone are the days of advertisements in The Times and Telegraph. We are increasingly using separate Twitter handles for different contracts and for different purposes (Recruitment, Customer Service).

Has Social Customer Service affected your employees outside of the contact centre?

The power of Social has really hit home with our guys out in the field. Recently we picked up on a photo tweet about one of our vans which had been posted by a lady who said the van had cut her up on the road. The van was filthy, with some funny but rude words written in the mud and a broken brake light. It was retweeted countless times. Of all our Marketing activity and other good news that week, the story of this van with the Carillion logo covered in mud got far more coverage. How we respond and apologize and move forward is key. Twitter is a powerful tool and very uncontrolled. In this world of social media, the acts of one of our lads in a van can outweigh everything that is done at a corporate level.

Any final thoughts?

You have to believe that what your customers are saying matters. If you go into it because you think you have to, you will get your fingers burned. You can't play with it. As soon as the channel is there, customers take it over. Start small and let it grow naturally, there is no need to advertise it. Have a clear plan about what your engagement model is. Have clear processes. We found that letting it grow through word of mouth meant that the team could find their feet. Their competence and ability has grown alongside the volumes.