

Importance of Integrating Online Conversations with Internal CRM

Minimal censorship, a huge amount of liberty, and free membership for users make online conversations, especially those on social media, irresistible but chaotic. Brands may shudder but they have no option but to deal with both the brick bats and bouquets thrown at them. Thankfully there are tools and technologies available that help them aggregate, assimilate and act upon what's being said online about them.

Why Should Brands Do It?

Facts as they stand: Indians are among the most active social media users in the world. Facebook has 100 million plus active users in India, its second largest market worldwide. India is pegged to have the third largest number of Twitter users at 33 million, 76% of which access it via their mobile phone. Google+ enabled accounts are about 85 million in India. What this tells us as brands or any other institution, government included, is, that it does not matter who our constituency is, the bottom line is that they are definitely on social media.

For Brands in fact it has become extremely difficult to monitor all the information that is generated about them on social media. CRM companies and even young start-ups have been quick to see and seize the opportunity, offering social media integration with CRM systems, thereby coining a new industry term on the block – Social CRM or SCRM. Its function is to link and manage social media accounts with CRM software. In a nutshell, SCRM alerts Brands of the hundreds of thousands of comments being made online about the company, product, and reputation and gives a chance for them to absorb, reflect, respond, act on customer displeasure with a given product, service or brand itself.

In addition to enhancing the overall customer experience and impression, additional benefits for the brand include gaining market insights, promotion opportunities, and at an advanced level potential to increase revenue, expand market share, and improve overall corporate image.

Where SCRM fills the gap of traditional CRM is that the latter does not focus enough on the customer and the interaction and dialogue between customer and brand that plays a big part in creating the experience or lack thereof. It focuses on efficiencies and effectiveness and processes

and optimization to ensure smooth operations, equally necessary but lacking in making the personalized connect with the customer.

What it Takes: Technology, Top Management and Internal Adoption

CIOs need to be as convinced as marketers and service delivery executives of the need to incorporate social media into their CRM strategies. Brands stand to gain a better response and management of online customer experience with the data available; a better understanding of the urgency levels and moods of customers, their needs, their objectives, what they like and what they don't. Top management needs to set the tone by listening, engaging, adding value to conversations that customers are having. The integration of these online conversations with CRM will help them get answers for customers and resolve a lot of the issues they are facing. When internal adoption is spearheaded by top management, the trickle down effect, including educating and empowering team members to do the same, becomes that much easier.

Next the systems part: open architecture, open APIs means that brands can go for best-in-breed SCRM components/tools that can be integrated with existing pieces of CRM technology and as a result enable CRM through mobile or social platforms. Asking questions like the following will help: Does the SCRM tool integrate with legacy systems? Does it speak effectively and inexpensively with existing infrastructure? What's the cost going to be in the long term for additional integrations or changes needed in the platform?

A lot of SaaS providers are becoming the preferred vendors for providing Social CRM platforms in the cloud. Young start-ups allowing enterprise customers to build on top of their traditional CRM network and pay-as-they-go are the ones getting maximum traction. According to Gartner, the CRM market has witnessed a significant shift where about 45% of this USD 40 billion market is moving to the SaaS model from the traditional CRM network.

Outcome Brands Can Expect:

In my opinion, reducing customer anxiety is the single largest (and can't be emphasized enough) benefit of creating a framework that integrates online conversations with internal CRM.

Consider a straightforward scenario of a customer getting in touch regarding the status of his broken phone on the brand's Twitter handle. Is the brand equipped to reach the customer where

they are and not on the channel defined by the brand? or imagine you're a customer who has handed his handset with a service center because the touchscreen was giving issues. What if you were left in the dark thereafter, about the repair process and delivery date of your phone. What are the thoughts that would cross your mind? "How long is it going to take to get my phone back?" "Should I get a substitute or replacement phone while the handset is undergoing repairs?" As a customer your line of attack may entail lambasting the Brand through your twitter handle. At this point, as a brand if your CRM is absorbing these attacks on social media you can immediately respond with information that will put the customer at ease, thereby protecting the brand from any negative domino effect online.

Specific. Outcome oriented. Stress reducing. It starts with that but will go a long way towards developing a trusting and respectful relationship with customers. Visual depiction of why companies need to evolve CRM and embrace and execute on SCRM appeared in an article What is Social CRM? back in 2010 on Social Media Examiner. The reasons cited then hold more true now, four years later. Customers want brands they engage with to have a presence on social media sites. More and more customers are using social media as their go-to place to interact with brands.