

When internet trolls come knocking - open the door

By  Madelain Roscher

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We live in an age where hashtags group our collective social thoughts, and information no matter how mundane or personal, and can instantaneously and effortlessly be shared across billions of devices around the world.



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With the internet having over 3.8 billion users, it's easy to see how one bad customer service experience can, in a matter of seconds, trend nationally and even globally. The news, YouTube and interwebs at large are full of such examples.

IBM Cloud Marketing says since 2013, the number of Facebook posts shared each minute has increased 22%, from 2.5 million to 3 million posts per minute in 2016.

Since 2013, the number of tweets each minute has increased 58% to more than 455,000 tweets per minute in 2017. Although these figures have become outdated, it is suffice in showing just how enormous the social media realm is.

But businesses need not be afraid when they find themselves in the midst of a lynch mob in the form of disgruntled customers on their socials.

Like any crisis management, if you have set protocols in place, the choppy waters can be navigated and your company or brand's reputation can emerge unscathed.

Firstly, it's a matter of when not if. So be proactive

Have a social media crisis management plan in place, your company is not the exception, disaster looms all around you.

This plan should dictate how the crisis is handled, who handles it (community manager/brand manager), how quickly does the firm respond on social media, what tone is used in the messaging documents (social media, press releases, in etc). Also, make sure all scheduled posts or tweets are paused until the storm blows over. Nothing screams insensitivity more than an unrelated social media post popping up during a crisis.

No two social media disasters are ever identical but having a specific plan in place can minimise how much of a blow the brand takes in the first few moments of the crisis erupting.

Give it a personal human touch

Although convenient, chatbots are for giving your social audience general answers, they should not replace your voice in dealing with conflict. Your customers will appreciate being addressed by a real person with real empathy.

Your community manager should be someone adept at social media and crisis management. Also, avoid using a generic "one-size-fits-all" approach when dealing with various contentions and individuals. Tailor make your replies to each complaint. Don't patronise or antagonise your customers.

The internet never forgets

Deleting negative posts from your customers on the company's social pages will only make a bad situation worse. Engage with negative comments, give context and clarity. Apologise if you have been called out for an error. Find ways of taking the disgruntled customer(s) off social media. An example could be a response that looks like:

"May I have your email/phone number so that a manager from our customer service department can contact you regarding your query."

Stay clear of knee-jerk reactions

The pressure to offer replies immediately during a social media storm may seem logical. But as important as it is to allay your customers' displeasure in your company, it is equally vital to ensure that when the organisation does choose to address the crisis, it does so with a well-thought-out response that is in line with the brand.

It is your brand – stand up for it

Social media is an extremely helpful tool for your business to listen, engage and analyse your company's audience. Your voice is but a whisper in the online sea of 3.8 billion internet users, but on your social media platforms, every person there is willing to listen.

Do not be afraid to respond to an angry customer, this will also quell the useless noise caused by trolls. Don't let a few people with negative comments stop you from your marketing potential. Thank them for the feedback and explain how you will be fixing the issue.

Social media is an amazing platform for engaging with your brand's audience. Do not let trolls, and disgruntled individuals steer you off course. Apply your social media crisis management plan. Ride out the storm, and if handled properly, your company can emerge stronger after the crisis.

ABOUT MADELAIN ROSCHER

Described as a Public Relations (PR) guru by her peers, Madelain Roscher is the CEO of PR Worx, a full-service marketing-communications agency, which she established in 2001. With 22 years' in-depth industry experience based on an impressive consulting and corporate career, the firm has achieved remarkable successes under her leadership.

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