



SPECIAL REPORT

Building customer's trust: the new challenge for companies in social networks

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1. THE NEW CHALLENGE

Recently, in a seminar on the importance of Social Networks in the communication strategy of the companies, an exponent said that **"Users are the message"** referring to the famous phrase by Marshall McLuhan **"The medium is the message"**. Obviously, this could be true.

Nowadays, we are experiencing an accelerated learning of the use of Social Networks. New ones with more, improved or different features are constantly emerging. The use of these platforms increases, so does the possibility of access thanks to the expansion, among others, of mobile devices and the supply increases because the demand increases, and **people are there, talking about us, about our brand.**

A double-edged sword: because there is nothing better than a happy customer but nothing more destructive than one who has had an unpleasant experience. Bad news spread rapidly, and especially on Twitter, instant social platform par excellence where opinion leaders from all areas gather together. **The tweet of a happy customer might be disseminated but the one of an unhappy customer is highly likely to carry retweets reactivating those who experienced something similar (the negative word of mouth).**

Such is the case of a well-known regional operator, with almost 20 million users in Argentina, according to its Twitter bio, and more than 30,000 followers. The service had a relapse and within a few minutes the company's customers made themselves heard positioning the crisis at the first place among the Trending Topics.

The great challenge for companies lies in the creation of a trust bond with their customers. The good service in good time and proper attention, after all, are means to encourage this relationship with the user, tired of getting angry with any kind of public or private organization. In this field, dialogue is a way to gradually gain the credibility from an honest and transparent perspective. In the end, the challenge of companies is to involve their stakeholders with their respective visions and projects.

2. SHARING EXPERIENCES

There are people who only want to share their experiences, good or bad ones, on these social networks. But there are others who address companies because they hope, they expect the company to answer and finally give them a solution.

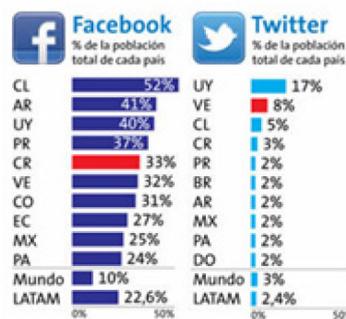
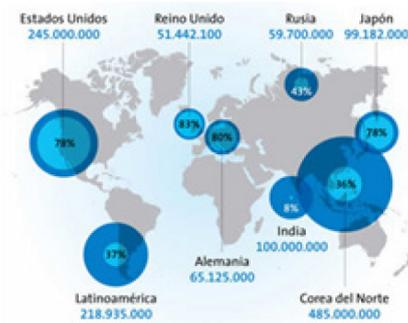
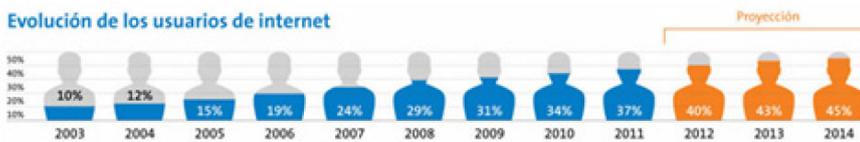
According to a report published at the beginning of 2012 on the site www.tendenciasdigitales.com, Internet penetration in Latin America has been increasing by leaps and bounds, and even more the Facebook and Twitter penetration.

The same happens with mobile phones. Mobile technology has had a huge penetration in recent times. And it is important for the companies to observe this tendency because then, users will be able to express themselves 24/7, every day, 24 hours a day, more easily and among the users there will be customers, journalists, politicians, celebrities, NGOs, who control our company every minute.

If a company is recognized and highly valued by their main stakeholders is an achievement that should by no means be wasted. However, the time it takes for a company to build a good image can disappear from one minute to the next one if it is neglected. Both its construction and its maintenance depend on the whole company, from the employees who talk about us on their social networks with their contacts, to the customer, the authority, the journalist, etc.

The way in which companies communicate with their stakeholders has changed: they have adapted to new technologies. Previously, the communication strategy was unidirectional and, therefore, its management was easier for the company. Nowadays, instead, the way we communicate has changed to a **bidirectional communication**; this means that both sides play an active role in the communication process. Companies are experiencing a great challenge: to talk with stakeholders, ensuring that their communication objectives

Evolución de los usuarios de internet

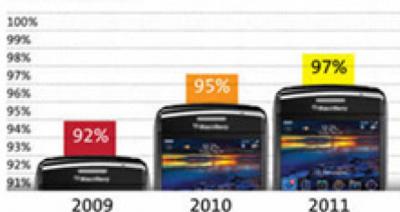


Source: www.tendenciasdigitales.com

2009 2010 2011

Teléfonos móviles

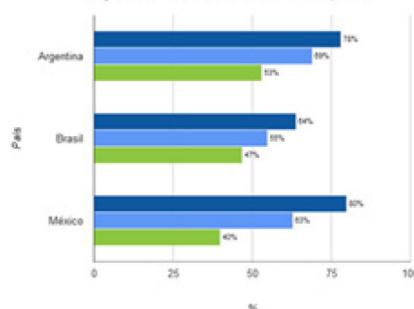
> Penetración



> Usos de móviles



Ingreso diario a redes sociales desde el smartphone



Base: los usuarios de smartphones



Source: www.tendenciasdigitales.com y www.thinkwithgoogle.com/mobileplanet/es

keep their direction and are under control, something that is complicated because each employee becomes a spokesperson, with different messages, which can have a direct impact on the company's reputation.

The Social Networks have enabled the extension of the level of communication between companies and citizens. However, this "game" is **not proportional**: as the companies decide to expand the level of interaction, greater is the attention they have to pay to what and how is said about them. Their mentions impact directly on the company's reputation. A poorly managed online crisis can destroy the good reputation that took so many years to build.

Managing social channels involves a great exposure. The Social Networks have a great power and therefore appearing on them is a very important step for the company, which requires a previous extremely careful, detailed and strategic planning.

A good online communication plan consists of certain key elements:

- An **objective**, essential in order to build a good strategy; nobody should be on social networks because "is fashionable".
- A **proposal of assets** to be developed, this is online spaces or platforms where the strategy will take place.
- A **proposal of interesting contents** which will create engagement among their target audiences.
- A **relationship plan between** the company and their main *stakeholders*.

Once these points have been identified and implemented, companies must keep them updated, monitor the relationships with the followers, be aware of what is being said about the company and constantly measure the results.

Many companies, which have already made progress in their online communication strategy, feel like going one step further: customer service on their main social networks profiles. What happens? Some of them "throw themselves into the unknown" entering a specialty which requires its own action plan.

The "online call center" requires a specific planning, which involves many areas of the company. A big mistake is to restrict this field to only a group of online participants.



“If the service is good, queries will start to increase and the incorporation of advisors is essential in order to avoid any breakdown in the service”

This might be a customer service area but, probably, it will not meet all the requirements, at least the minimum ones, of a good customer service on Social Networks.

3. THE CHALLENGES OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE AREA IN ONLINE CHANNELS

- Identifying the area's **objective**.
- Developing a **relationship plan**, this is: how the brand is going to address its audience (is it going to have a corporate user or is going to present the advisors who manage on behalf of the company); which tone is it going to use (formal, informal, etc.).
- Developing a **plan of attention**: select the platforms where the service will be implemented, determine the number of advisors per shift, select the hours of customer service, choose a professional tool for this kind of actions, select the topics it will deal with immediately and which are the queries that will be passed to other areas of the company. This plan also includes selecting, for example, certain hashtags and key words which we want to link our service to.
- Developing an **implementation plan**: defining the way forward in relation to the online service. At this stage, it is decided how the management process will be, which queries will have a direct answer, immediately, and in which cases we will follow the interaction through Direct Message, which information will be requested from the user, when will the user be redirected to the “phone” call center, etc.
- **Adapting the queries and most frequently asked questions** which are usually found on the phone call center as well as in physical points of sale to the language of the platform where the service will be implemented.
- **Planning**: if the service is good, queries will start to increase and the incorporation of advisors is essential in order to avoid any breakdown in the service. It is estimated that an advisor can deal with a certain number of queries per hour. There are some queries that can be answered right away and others which require a more complex service. The important thing is that whoever makes the query he or she must be contacted immediately although the time for the solution will depend on the complexity of the query. Moreover, within the planning minimum but logical breaks have to be considered as well as the change of shifts.
- **Qualification**: the team selected to provide this service has to be an

appropriate and prepared team. It has to have experience both in customer service and in the use of social networks, since these have their own nature, and in grammar and spelling because the messages published also convey about the company.

- Making a difference:** in this space, the company must look different, create engagement either because it offers a customized service or because it offers exclusive information for the people who follow them. It must create a mutual loyalty relationship: of the user with the company and vice versa. The company must identify who is on the other side: audiences are different and each one requires a particular treatment (neither better nor worse: different). Behind the figure of “customer” there could be an investor, an opinion leader or an authority.
- Corporate commitment:** although a group of advisors is the one in charge of the service the whole company has to be involved. The different areas must have been a part of the initial planning and must choose a reference for any query concerning them. Each area will be responsible for providing support to certain previously established issues. This commitment directly influences the customer’s expectations. An organization’s reputation

depends, ultimately, on the relationship between what its stakeholders expect to receive and what they feel they are receiving. The customer service is, in itself, one of the services that make up the companies’ offer and if the latter do not make clear the terms on which it will work, there may be frustrations that might damage the company’s image.

- Broadcasting:** the customer service area channel must be a part of the comprehensive strategy, must complement the company’s communication plan, it must be an essential support and improve the user’s experience. It is necessary to disseminate the service, the company itself must introduce it on the customers’ minds and offer it as just another service tool. Ideally, it should be announced on the institutional web site and on their main social profiles. Also in all offline communications the company uses to disseminate, even advertising or press releases. This means that the customer service must be integrated in a coordinated communication and content strategy to obtain the best results.

4. TWITTER AND FACEBOOK, THE ALLIES TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON THE CUSTOMER

Both platforms can become great allies when providing users with a solution. Although Facebook is



often used for branding actions, companies can make the most of it by using it to give support to customers. Such is the case of **Eurorail** which carries out a proper monitoring of the publications of their fans and followers, responding to the constant queries.

Twitter is characterized by being fast and immediate but, at the same time, it is ephemeral and whatever a person has twitted on his or her profile tends to disappear within a few minutes given the very nature of the timeline. Therefore, the message of an unhappy user can get lost among tens of tweets. But this is a matter of luck...and time: sooner or later the customer will make himself heard and will be even angrier.

The user of Social Networks expects another kind of attention from the company: quick, direct, specific and customized. But, above all, if users address the company, they expect it to respond to them.

The non-response is badly perceived and might lead to a negative reaction not only in who

has made the query, but also in his followers, causing a chain reaction of complaints of those who had a similar negative experience. Something which is totally preventable if the necessary and proper precautions are taken.

A mention of an unhappy customer should not be seen as a crisis. On the contrary: it is a good opportunity to reverse a bad experience, as seen in the example of **@avianca_com**. In the event that it can be solved, this customer, probably, will be more satisfied than another who received a good service since the beginning. The solved problem can have a better marketing than the latter case and that user may express his or her gratitude publicly. This is very good for the company and its reputation.

Besides, it is important not to be limited to being responsive on the internet. Not all the users will know that we have a user's profile on Twitter or Facebook and they will look for us in order to address their complaint. Someone may complain without putting @ before our brand, but this does not mean that he or she is satisfied. They simply ignore our profile and in that case a proactive answer will probably change the user's perception, who will see that the company is concerned with evolving and improving its service.

5. 7 TIPS FOR A PROPER ONLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE

- **Presence:** to have our own space on the channel, differentiating ourselves



24 jul
Que irresponsabilidad la de **@avianca_com** al entregar mi equipaje absolutamente mojado. No puedo pensar más q fue abandonado a la intemperie.

Abrir

Avianca @avianca_com

25 jul



Queremos mejorar tu experiencia con nosotros. Cuéntanos tu caso y envía tus datos de contacto vía DM para poder ayudarte.

“It is a great online focus group: customers talk and companies listen and act and if they do it properly they are helping to improve their corporate reputation”

- from the branding profile, and respond to the mentions made within a logic time and to give real support.
- **Presentation:** make the brand human: the ones who respond are people.
- **Integration:** although the platform is different, the service's objective must be the same as the one on the offline channel, at least in the functioning logic and in the regulatory and procedural backoffice.
- **Efficiency:** to respond to what the user asked.
- **Customer care:** sensitive data should not be shared on this platform. If we need to go further, we should do it via Direct Message, establishing a first link through this network and looking for continuity using another alternative, for example, by telephone.
- **Monitoring:** if a query requires a longer process and waiting times, we cannot file it. On the contrary, we have to carry out an individualized follow-up.

- **Empathy:** we have to create a link with the followers so that it can determine the degree of confidence inspired by the service that the company offers on this channel.

6. THE ONLINE WORD OF MOUTH INFLUENCES THE BUSINESS

The users' habits have changed and now are the companies the ones that have to adapt to them. A good customer service has an **impact on the business**. Is one of the most relevant assets of the company because it is what is going to determine, to a greater or lesser extent, the customer's satisfaction. Thus, it **could be said that the results obtained from a good customer service are directly related to the company's profitability**.

If we are a service company, we should provide a good service by being where we should be in good time and in an appropriate manner. The success of a good performance in this regard will produce the customers' **loyalty**; a **positive word of mouth** and the possibility to **expand the business** and diversify it (repeating the



purchase of the same product or innovating in another kind of products of the company).

Customers will feel heard and valued. The fact that the customers approach the company and express them their interests must be regarded as a huge opportunity to improve the business. The information

provided has a very high value which can be very useful for the company to improve and strengthen weak aspects and take advantage of the opportunities offered. It is a great online focus group: customers talk and companies listen and act and if they do it properly they are helping to improve their **corporate reputation**.

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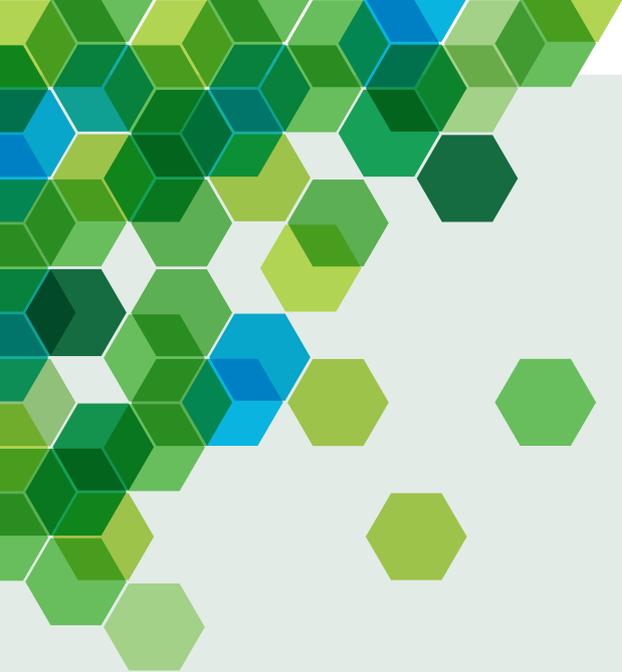
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