

CALL OUT CULTURE

HOW TO
RESPOND WHEN
TRAVELERS CALL OUT
YOUR HOTEL ONLINE

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MORE THAN EVER, PEOPLE ARE
MAKING THEIR VOICES
HEARD ONLINE. HOW WILL
YOU ANSWER?

Before, social media for business was a way to send out information that people interested in your brand may want to see. For businesses today, social media is a tool for one-to-one communication, customer service, brand awareness, and reputation management.

For brands online, a public call-out is a very real possibility they may have to face. It's important to make a plan before a complaint becomes a crisis. Here are the key steps to take when building your brand communication plan and an example of how this can play out.

ALWAYS BE LISTENING

70% OF PEOPLE WHO CALL OUT BRANDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA WANT TO RAISE AWARENESS AMONG OTHER CONSUMERS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE.

According to Sprout Social, almost 50% of consumers have called out a brand on social media. Compare this to 55% of people who will say something in-person, and you see that for every face-to-face complaint you get, there's a good chance there's also one online. Millennials are more likely than any other generation to speak up online, so the number of people talking about brands on social media will likely continue to rise.

The most important thing a brand can do is listen so you can respond as quickly as possible. Use a program that notifies you when someone posts to your Facebook, tags you in a Tweet, or posts a review. 70% of people who call out brands on social media want to raise awareness among other consumers about their experience. If you aren't there for the first call-out, you could miss the chance to contain the issue. A lack of response can lead to other people sharing the original complain and amplifying the message to more people.

BE APOLOGETIC

72% OF CONSUMERS THAT
COMPLAIN ABOUT A BRAND
ONLINE EXPECT A RESPONSE
WITHIN ONE HOUR.

Some companies will never escape call-outs. Airlines will always delay flights, and people will always complain about how it was handled. However, over half of people complaining online aren't just yelling into an abyss – they expect the brands to respond to them and make it right. They want to hear an apology.

Many businesses subscribe to the idea that apologizing is admitting liability, which could lead to more issues later. However, this goes against all research in managing and mitigating crises. People want to see that the people behind a company are sincerely concerned about their customers and empathetic to their experience.

Speak to any legal counsel you have today, before a crisis occurs. Find out specifically what you are and are not allowed to say to someone who feels wronged. Come up with a plan of how you would respond to negative comments on social media with a human voice that is consistent with your other brand communication.

TAKE IT OFFLINE

It is best to keep any issue from escalating and getting in front of more eyes online. The more interactions a social media post has, the more people will see it. Many brands on Twitter will respond to customer complaints with a Tweet following the formula: “We’re sorry to hear your frustration. Could you send us a DM [direct message] with your [relevant information] and we can look into this for you?”

The downside of this method is it can sound robotic and unfeeling. People are aware that you want it taken offline, and if they’re really angry about a situation, they may want to work even harder to boost their side of what happened. Further, if the person has had repeated issues with a company and continue to receive this same response, they’ll just feel more frustrated and unheard.

72% of consumers that complain about a brand online expect a response within one hour. Brands can no longer take the time to craft a communication plan before handling complaints. It’s ok to respond saying that you’re concerned about their experience, but you need to look into more details – and would they mind sending you a DM with any details that would help you investigate faster? If you’re moving to a private communication channel, it is important to also publicly state you are doing this, so that others reading the interaction won’t think you’re just ignoring the problem.

CASE STUDY!

WHEN CALL-OUTS
GO VIRAL



WHEN CALL-OUTS GO VIRAL

The best way to prevent a public call-out is to be more cognizant of a customer's experience as it is happening and proactively working to give great service. This can be as simple as training your staff to take complaints seriously and have the power to react promptly. However, all the careful planning in the world can't prevent an unseen viral phenomenon. When these crises hit, it's important to get in touch with your legal team as soon as possible, but still follow the steps outlined above: listen, apologize, and take it offline.

As an example, let's look at an issue that Cracker Barrel has been facing for a whole year. In February of 2017, a man named Brad wrote on the Facebook page of Cracker Barrel restaurants asking why his wife got fired. He threatened legal action and on two other occasions posted to their page about it.

A comedian shared screenshots of this post, which was then shared over 76,000 times, and "Brad's Wife" quickly became a meme. Soon, #justiceforbradswife was trending on Twitter and a petition on Change.org had over 26,000 signatures. There was coverage of the incident on publications including The Washington Post, Fortune, and Inc.com. A full year later, every post by Cracker Barrel on Facebook and Twitter is still met with people commenting and asking about Brad's wife.

We imagine this vitriol must have been shocking and confusing to corporate, who would have had to weigh their brand persona with legal guidance on whether to respond and how. Because details about employment are confidential, Cracker Barrel inadvertently fueled the fire by never responding to this viral phenomenon.

At the time of the original post, the company could have responded directly to Brad stating that it's always unfortunate when they have to say goodbye to a team member, but those decisions are handled at the individual store location. They could offer to reach out to the store on his behalf if he wanted to message them with more details about where she worked. There's a chance that this wouldn't have changed anything, and the story would still have gone viral. However, the internet latched on to the not knowing part, and a company response could have tamped this down.

While the Cracker Barrel example may seem extreme, on a smaller scale every day customers are calling out brands online. They Tweet about bad service, Yelp about rude employees, and leave reviews that are shared with their networks online.

MAKE A PLAN

It's important to discuss with key stakeholders what you will do when you deal with call-out culture. Include your social media manager, legal contact, and marketing director to establish your communication expectations and agree upon your brand's tone in these scenarios. Train at all levels of how to handle complaints, both in-person and online. Most importantly, put the tools in place to be listening to what people are saying about your company on social media and review websites.



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