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## Implementing Social CRM In The Call Center

By Karen Schwartz

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### How To Align Call Center Strategy with Social Media Tools and Channels

When going through the software selection process for a call center software application, whether it's stand alone or part of an integrated *Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution*, you must keep three critical thoughts in mind: social media, social media, social media.

The fact is that the use of social media has evolved to the point that if you have not incorporated *social media* strategy and tools into your call center operations, you have started down the slippery slope of not only losing touch with your customers but losing control of your company's brand and reputation.

Unfortunately, integrating social media strategy and tools into call centers is not a simple matter of buying an additional module and training staff. Social media is so widely dispersed, fragmented and so unstructured that it defies the metrics and analytics that make traditional call center channels such easy targets for extracting value. You cannot run reports on conversations about your products that take place on Twitter and Facebook.

Or can you? *CRM software* vendors are aware of the increasing influence of social media channels and are struggling to meet the challenge with monitoring and reporting tools. Analysts are likewise busy coming up with new methodologies to bring social media into the CRM value chain. Third-party vendors are filling the gap with listening and engagement platforms and in many ways are the reigning heroes of this ungovernable territory. But the fact remains that this Web 2.0 industry hasn't had sufficient time to establish a set of tried-and-true social media best practices that can be replicated with consistent success.

But you can't afford to let the absence of best practices stop you from bringing social media channels into your call center. You don't have time to let the industry mature. If you don't monitor social conversations about your company and products, not only are you missing out on opportunities to analyze data and extract actionable value, you are literally abandoning those advocates who love your products so much they are willing to spend their free time in chat rooms promoting features they like and assisting other customers who would otherwise be in your call waiting queue. These product evangelists are valuable assets and should be treated as such. Identify them, engage with them, reward and incent them.

Along with the boosters, however, there are inevitably the knockers; those people who complain about product features they don't like, make unflattering comparisons to competitive products and—heaven forbid—they should have a bad customer service experience and go viral with it. Perhaps these negatrons are poorly informed about your products, perhaps you have released a new version that fixes problems and improves the product overall—but they don't know about it. These detractors can create a lot of bad buzz about your company. Identify them as you would advocates and engage, correcting misinformation and countering unfounded complaints. But also listen carefully for those valid points that can lead to product improvements.

In the meantime, as you evaluate call center software solutions, focus on the customer management software vendors that are promoting social tools in their product offerings (Microsoft Dynamics, NetSuite, Sugar CRM and Salesforce.com's Service Cloud to name four). Many of them are partnering with third party vendors for listening platforms and other social media tools. Employ brand-monitoring tools such as Radian 6, Visible technology and CoTweet. Discuss social media with your sales and marketing departments to coordinate messaging and outreach efforts. They need this information as much as the call center. Most of all think strategically—how can social media help you achieve your business objectives?

How will social media alter your call center? One scenario is that your agents will be provided with monitoring tools that alert them when your company or products are being discussed on a high-value site. Your agent will view the conversation. He is now empowered to correct misconceptions, suggest solutions, and pass on information. He can triage with another employee who may be in a better position to answer the questions. He is the guardian of your company's reputation as it is tossed about in the chaos of social networking sites.

It helps to understand that CRM is in the throes of its third revolution. The first happened in the '80s when customer service, marketing and sales operations were automated and integrated into CRM suites where they could seamlessly share customer data and provide a holistic view of the customer relationship. The second wave came in the late '90s when CRM moved online and became (briefly) eCRM. Social media is the culprit behind the third revolution. To mature it will require a strategic approach, integration with marketing and sales and all the necessary algorithms and analytics to parse the data and make it easily consumable. Until that day comes, let intelligent listening and engagement be your social media guide. ■■

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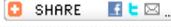
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