



# The Art of Listening and Engagement

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## Customer Service is the New, New Marketing

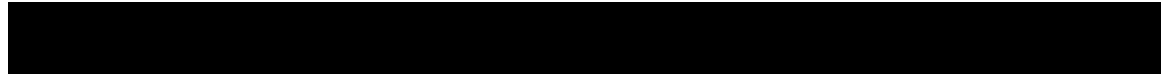


The topic of empowering your customers so that they become an extension of your marketing isn't new. Transforming people into a surrogate sales force is the dream of any service organization. The difference today is that the landscape has shifted to the point where good customer service is no longer the minimum ante to play the game.

Over the next year, customer service will fuse with marketing to become a holistic inbound, outbound campaign of listening to and engaging with customers that will rewrite the rules of the game. And, most importantly, the lessons learned in the field will be fed into the marketing department to create and run more intelligent, experienced, and real world initiatives across all forms of marketing, PR, sales, and advertising.

Over the last year, Social Media has intrigued and even inspired companies to engage in the communities where their brands and products, as well those of competitors, are actively discussed by the very people they want to reach, aka the new influencers.

Participation is no longer an option as Social Media isn't a spectator sport.



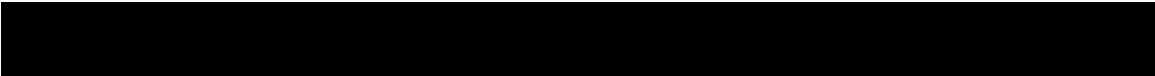
Whether you believe it or not, these conversations are taking place with or without you, so ignoring them only eliminates you from the conversation and also removes your company from the radar screens of your customers.

Marketing-savvy corporate executives are working with PR, Advertising, and Marcom teams to explore options and strategies on how to participate in relevant online conversations. This represents a shift in outbound marketing as it creates a direct channel between companies and customers, and ultimately people. It starts to look a lot less like marketing and a lot more like customer service.

Last year, I introduced customer service into the Social Media equation. As for every company, PR is truly is the responsibility of the entire organization. But it's much bigger than boxing it in a PR paradigm. I truly believe customer service is the new marketing and communities are at the very least, opportunities to engage customer service.

Social Media is rooted in conversations between people and peers, regardless of the technology that facilitates them, and everyday they take place across blogs, networks, forums, micromedia, and online groups. And, each day, with every new community and social tool that is introduced, brands, products and services are actively discussed, supported, and disassembled. Some companies are listening, while many aren't even paying attention.

Services such as [Satisfaction](#), ThisNext, and even DIY communities such as Ning, Yahoo and Google Groups, and Facebook are playing host to conversations between customers regarding products and services, and while they don't invite marketing, they do seek helpful information, advice, and direction.



## **Participation is Marketing**

Social Media represents an entirely new way to reach customers and connect with them directly. It adds an outbound channel that complements inbound customer service and traditional PR, direct marketing and advertising, placing companies and their customers on a level playing field to discuss things as peers. Most importantly, it transcends the process of simply answering questions to creating a community of enthusiasts and evangelists.

For the most part, the only way companies know that customers have questions, comments, or concerns, is if they contact customer service, make the news, form a public group, or if buying patterns, stock value, and sales trends suddenly shift.

You can bet that for every inbound customer inquiry, that there is a significant percentage of existing and potential customers actively discussing the same topic out in the open, simply looking for guidance, feedback, acknowledgment, and/or information. And usually, these discussions transpire without company participation, leaving people to resolve issues and questions on their own.

Why leave the door open for your competition to jump into the conversation and steer customers in their direction?



Companies must engage or they place themselves on the long road to inevitable obsolescence.

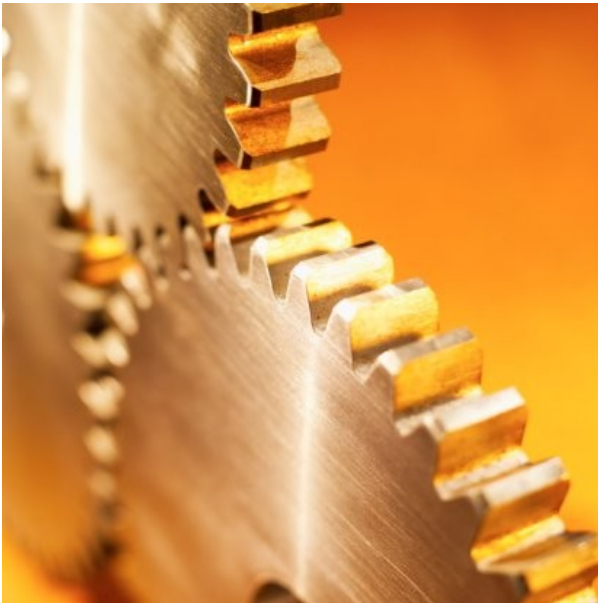
It's like the old adage, out of sight, out of mind. Or, quite simply, engage or die.

Nowadays participation is marketing.

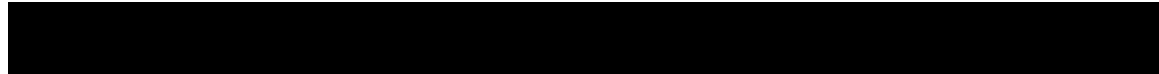
Conversations are a form of marketing.

However, marketing needs to be clarified as I am not referring to the traditional marketing that typically "speaks" at people through "messages." In Social Media, this is about dialog, two way discussions that bring people together in order to discover and share information. Joining the conversation isn't as simple as jumping in however.

Companies first need to listen in order to accurately analyze how, where, and when to participate.



Social Media forces companies to look outward to proactively find the conversations that are important to business and relationships. And it's not just



the responsibility of PR, it requires the participation by multiple disciplines across the organization in order to genuinely provide meaningful support and information. Again, we're not talking about messaging or sales propositions. If you stop to think about it, we're talking about fusing marketing, PR, community relations, and customer service in an entirely new socially-aware role.

## **Defining the Strategy and the Role**

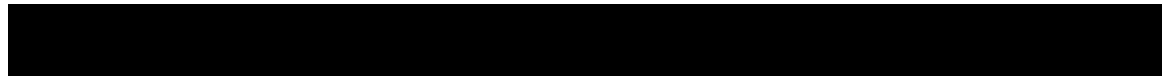
This is about formalizing outbound communications and community participation, creating a dedicated team to ensure that customers and influencers are not overlooked, but engaged.

We're already seeing companies that are either dividing outbound responsibilities among existing teams or dedicating roles to full time listening, participating, responding, and commenting across all forms of Social Media. But, this isn't limited to a select few businesses. This is a role that will become standard in companies around the globe, from SMBs to enterprise organizations, and will likely scale from one person to teams.

This is more than prioritizing enhanced customer service over bloggers. We shouldn't aim our fire hoses at only the fires that have public attention. We need to focus on customers that take the time to contribute to and participate in social networks that are simply seeking information - even if it is delivered in the form of a rant. Furthermore, we can not simply rely on inbound service. We have to analyze inbound activity in order to seek out related conversations among those that decide to take the conversation outside of the traditional service process.

In addition to PR and marcom, these new roles are combining a variety of marketing disciplines including, communications, customer support, and product management and go by several titles:

- Community Advocate
- Community Manager (although, I also hear push back on this title, as



communities can't really be managed.)

- Community Ambassador
- Social Media or Community Specialist
- Community Relations
- Community Builders

Many of us have been involved in online community relations since Web 1.0 through topic-driven discussion groups, user forums and other online communities such as DejaNews, Yahoo, and Google.

We did so as experts and didn't try to BS the people who were seeking advice and answers. This is an important note because, in order for any of this to work, you actually have to know not only about your products, services, reputation, strengths, weaknesses, and benefits, but also how you compete in the market and where you stand against the competition.

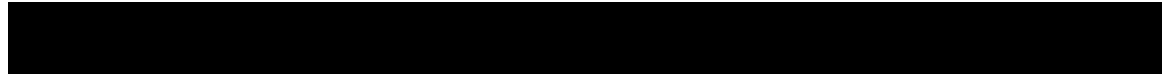
The social media landscape is vast and growing, and may require several internal people to listen and participate every day across blog posts, blog comments, forums, groups, social networks, micromedia, etc.

Please note, that contrary to the Social Media love fest that's taking place across the blogosphere, not anyone can jump in and solve problems. Companies need to create an internal game plan that officially assigns specific people who will go in and help customers.

### **Shhhhh. I'm Listening**

Listening to active communities will dictate your participation. But let me point out something very important here. It's not just about reactive community relations. Companies can and should learn from listening to and talking with customers to create specific content that addresses the wants and needs of customers and distribute it within their communities. This allows you to translate the lessons learned from one on one conversations for the greater good of the masses.





Outbound customer and community relations is among the most important campaigns any company can integrate in its immediate and future initiatives. It not only helps PR and customer service, it builds relationships, creates enthusiasts, and ultimately instills customer loyalty.

**Additional resources:**

The Four Tenets of Community Management by [Jeremiah Owyang](#)

Join the [International Online Community Management Association](#)

Public Relations is Customer Service by [Kami Huyse](#)

Customer Service is the New Marketing by [Valeria Maltoni](#)

## Transforming Customers into Evangelists: The Art of Listening and Engagement

I recently hosted a workshop at the GetSatisfaction event, *Customer Service is the New Marketing*. The topic I focused on is, “How to Listen to the Market and How to Engage Customers Online.”

Fellow workshop leaders include Christopher Carfi, Deb Schultz, Chris Heuer, Jeremiah Owyang, Becky Carroll, and Douglas Hanna



Empowering your customers to become an extension of your marketing and sales forces isn't new, but it isn't widely embraced either. In fact, the function of most customer service has been relegated to overseas companies or even automated as companies seek to reduce the costs of keeping customers happy.

However, in the era of Social Media, simply having a customer service infrastructure is no longer enough. This is about people and engaging them as people, evolving from an approach that connects faceless companies to anonymous customers. Let's humanize the entire process to not just keep customers happy, but also cultivating loyalty along the way.

Technology will always evolve and the tools will continually change.

Customer service, product marketing and marcom must fuse into a living, breathing commitment of inbound and outbound initiatives that not only answers

questions when they come in, but also seek them out wherever they seek insight from peers and other experts.

It's a combination of using Social and Traditional tools to discover, listen, learn, and engage directly with customers to help, not market, but help them make decisions and also do things that they couldn't, or didn't know how to do, before today.



And, most importantly, the lessons learned in the field should in turn be fed into the marketing department to create and run more intelligent, experienced, and real world initiatives across all forms of marketing, PR, sales, and advertising.

### **We are the Champions**

I know this all sounds wonderful, but where do you even start and who's responsible for what?

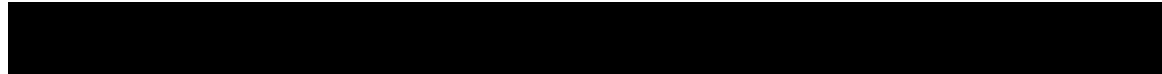
Truth is, that it's going to be different within each organization. It all starts with a champion and that person could be an executive, in PR, marcom, customer service, or product marketing or all of the above.

Someone needs to realize that it just can't be an inbound process, as Social Media is not a spectator sport. Those who sit on the sidelines will inevitably fall off the radar screens of their customers, giving way for competition to satisfy their needs.

Speak up. Don't question whose responsibility it is, just present it as an idea along with supporting data (it's out [there](#)). It's not only about pulling your company into the online conversations that will help customers, it's also about empowering your customers to help each other.

Delegate the responsibility of listening as well as assigning necessary responses among the most appropriate voices within your organization as well as your champions out in the field. In many cases, businesses are hiring "community managers" to keep the company's ear to the ground and to also act as the hub for coordinating all outbound conversations. The community manager usually works directly with PR, product marketing, customer service, and also the executive team to pull in the right people for the job and to also answer questions in case the CM needs to engage directly.





The best way to start is by setting up Google Alerts for your company, products, key personnel, and also competitors. Every time something comes up, you have an “almost” realtime opportunity to engage.

### **Social Tools for Social Media**

It’s also important to search and comb through services that track conversations and relevant topics such as Technorati, Blogpulse, Bloglines, b5, Google Blog Search, Blog Catalog, and also MyBlogLog. These tools allow you to proactively monitor memes and determine your level of engagement.

Social Media isn’t limited to blogs and communities. Social Media is also fueling social networks and the ability to find and host conversations related to brands and products. For example, Creating Facebook groups as well as searching other related groups are incredible opportunities to have conversations with people and as well, influence groups of people in the process.

Several companies I work with have created company-hosted groups across relevant social networks as well encouraged enthusiastic customers to do host conversations in places such as [Ning](#). Ning is a Do It Yourself (DIY) social network, and it’s definitely a place where people congregate to share and learn, among other things of course.

Another way to help customers is to bring them to you through your own company blog as well as hosting an integrated social network/discussion forum. Companies such as Leverage Software facilitate hosted conversations directly at the company site as a way of embracing customers and also encouraging peer-to-peer interaction...thus building and strengthening their community.



Companies such as [Satisfaction](#) are creating “people-powered” customer service forums where companies and customers can create a channel dedicated to helping people use products more effectively by solving their problems and answering questions all in one place. In many cases, services such as [Satisfaction](#) are complementary to all other campaigns.

Don’t count out micromedia tools...creating a presence in Twitter and Jaiku can help companies on the spot as these conversations are taking place.

In the case of Twitter, companies can create an account where they can proactively update their customers aka “followers” with new updates, answers, etc. Customers can also contact them through “direct” messaging or public [@companyname](#) posts. [#hashtags](#) is a growing trend within the service that allows users to callout topics such as [#customer+service](#) for others to locate through a dedicated [search tool](#).

Jaiku integrated channels last year, for example, allowing anyone, in this case, companies, to create a dedicated pipe to share and reply to users looking for specific information and conversations.

There’s still a 1.0 component to all of this however. User groups and forums haven’t gone away. They’re still thriving, and, determining which communities host conversations that matter to your business is critical in maintaining customer

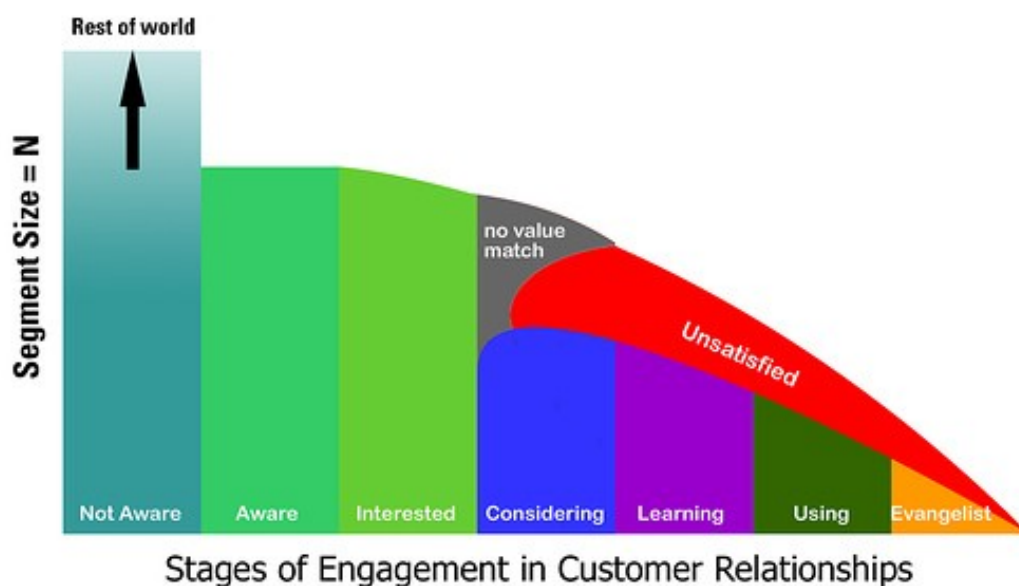
service and also instilling satisfaction and fostering enthusiasm.

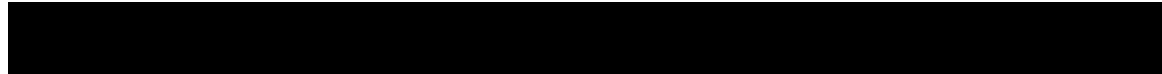
Which communities and tools should you use? You have to start by surveying the landscapes and listening. The results will tell you where to engage. Monitoring the culture of each community and the sociology of the interactions, will guide you in how to participate.

Whatever you do, don't engage as a marketer and don't participate from a top down approach – meaning be helpful, not “put out” from having to answer the same things over and over again.

### Becoming the Customer

We've all heard that in Social Media, we can't control the message. To some extent, we can't control perception, but we can help steer it. Be helpful and ensure that your solutions and benefits are clear in a way that can be understood by the different demographics of users that populate your markets. And remember, they need to hear things differently across each segment, from the head, to the long tail across every chasm in between. It's not just about the masses, but the niche markets as well. They all contribute to the bottom line.





Graphic, and insight, courtesy of [Chris Heuer](#)

The importance of engagement is to ensure that you engage on their terms according to the rules, and culture, across each community. Remember, in life, you are also customers. You buy things, you complain about products and services you don't like, and you recommend those that you love. So, you have to be a customer to think like a customer. Approaching them any other way isn't genuine and is going to deflate relationships and spark the possibility of pushing customers away.

Be the people you want to help.

Most importantly, make sure that you integrate customer success stories into your PR and marketing initiatives. Feature them on your blog. Invite them to events. Partner with them to be proactive voices to help rally other customers. After all, customers are the very thing that keep you in business. Show them that you know this by reaching out to them, not just waiting for them to come to you.



## **Customers Rock!**

by Becky Carroll, (<http://customersrock.wordpress.com>)

### **Customer Engagement Online**

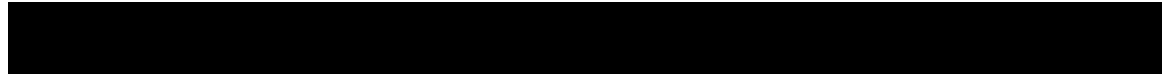
I have talked with many companies who tell me they aren't sure if they want to start an online conversation with their customers. Cord Silverstein asks this question in his post [Engage customers or die](#). He says,

*Is it a good thing for companies to try to engage their customers online? Does the good outweigh the possible repercussions that could come from it? And finally what are some of your ideas on how companies can engage online with their customers?*

Cord's post and comments start a great discussion on this topic! I think part of the concern companies have about engaging their customers in conversation online is that they have not already been engaging in ANY conversations with customers. Rather, marketing and PR have often created one-way communication vehicles (advertisements, press releases, articles/white papers). Ongoing, two-way interaction with customers is how we build customer relationships. Social media, ideally, is just one more channel by which to reach out and build relationships with customers. It is a great channel to use because it enables immediate, two-way conversation! Therefore, if your customers are interacting online, you need to be out there talking with them and learning from them in the online space.

### **With or Without You**

Customers are having conversations about companies, with or without the company's involvement with those discussions. Someone in Cord's comments suggested the way to engage with customers online is to have your PR department be new media-savvy and do the correspondence. Having the "traditional" PR person as the one to respond concerns me, as I believe



customers are looking for authentic responses, not carefully crafted company statements.

Creating a place on your own site, such as a community or a blog, is a great way to keep the conversation in your backyard - as long as you allow comments and take the time to respond. Southwest Airlines has done a good job of engaging with customers online, and they use their [blog](#) as a feedback channel for ideas, concerns, and questions. Everyone at SWA takes the time to write and respond, including pilots and the CEO. For example, their recent business decision on whether or not to assign seats was put to their customers in a few different blog posts; the most recent one elicited [over 360 comments!](#)

### **Conversation is Key to Customer Relationships**

Think about it. Can you get to know a new person you meet without having some kind of conversation? Whether it is in person, over email, or on a Facebook wall, there has to be some type of interaction in order to progress the relationship.

Customer relationships are no different! It is important to go where your customers are (be that online, at a retail store, in their own place of business), get to know them, find out their needs, and start doing something different based on what you learn. Customer trust and relationships will build, and the best ones will lead to more customers as they tell others about you.

Start the conversation!

## **The Role of Marketing**

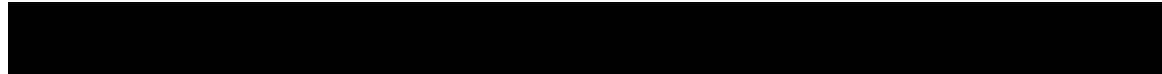
Marketing's role in an organization is changing. It is no longer enough to push a product or service at a customer, thinking it will meet that customer's need because they fit into a certain demographic. I may purchase a printer for my PC so I can print off email messages and documents; another person may purchase it to print their digital photos for a scrapbook. Both of us are between the ages of 18-36 and have a good income plus a college education. But that information is not enough to ascertain how that printer will be used.

Knowing which magazines I subscribe to, which TV shows I watch, and what kinds of products I purchase do not really tell you my story, either. It is marketing's role to truly understand the customer's need from a psycho-graphic and *behavioral* aspect. In order to do that, marketers are finding it necessary to view their company, its products and services, and even each place a customer touches that company from the customer's perspective. Only then can we begin to understand the underlying needs of a customer.

## **Experts Needed**

Marketers can no longer solely rely on their previous methods to understand customer needs. For example, focus groups will give us an idea of customer direction or a general understanding of behaviors, but we may not really understand what each customer segment needs without *asking them*. Why is this customer purchasing a printer? Have they ever purchased one before? What would they say they need from a printer? Better yet, what would they say they need to do with their computer? How much of that would be facilitated by the printer? Digging deeper into customer needs and behaviors is a new, yet critical marketing function that not many marketers are performing.

Marketing teams are becoming customer needs experts as part of their role in the new customer-centric business world. It is imperative that companies work across the organization to put into place a repeatable system for collecting



customer information, create a method for sharing that information throughout the organization, and finally, act on the information. Learning from our customers, then doing something with what we learn, is a solid way to create a barrier to exit for our customers. When we learn about our customer, then use that learning to do something different for that customer, we have created a unique value proposition for them that our competitors can't match. This is because we now have customer insight that they don't have. When we continue to learn from each interaction, and then change our behaviors to benefit our customer, we build a relationship with them, and ultimately, we build loyalty.

### **Gathering Info a Little at a Time**

We can begin learning from our customers with each interaction they have with us, at any touch point. When we remember and record those interactions, we can fill out the profiles we have on individual customers and share them with the rest of the organization. The use of Web 2.0 tools and social marketing techniques is a great way to have conversations with our customers in such a way that we can get immediate feedback from them on specific areas – as well as carry on an ongoing conversation. As we track these conversations with individuals over time and across our company, we begin to understand what they need from us. As we learn from our customers, whether we are in customer service, PR, marketing, or sales, we can begin to apply that to improving products, creating customer-focused services, and designing relevant campaigns.



## **Growing the Business**

As marketers begin to truly understand their customers' needs, they can then create campaigns which are more relevant, more customized, and more likely to spur engagement with the brand. This should result in increased action on the part of the customer.

When the organization remembers the customer's previous interactions and uses that corporate memory to improve the customer's experience for the next time, trust is built with customers. Trust, corporate memory, and relevant marketing are critical ingredients to building solid relationships with and getting loyalty from existing customers.

And of course, growing business from existing customers is one of the most cost-effective approaches there is!

## The Company-Customer Pact

# *The* COMPANY - CUSTOMER PACT

### THE CHALLENGE

We, customers and companies alike, need to trust the people with whom we do business. Customers expect honest, straightforward interactions where their voices are heard. Companies work to inspire brand loyalty and deliver satisfaction while trying to understand their customers better. It is evident that we all have a crucial stake—and responsibility—in transforming the adversarial tone that too often dominates the customer experience.

### A CALL FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Along with open, authentic communication comes the mutual responsibility to make it work. As each of us is both a customer *and* an employee, we share in the rewards and challenges of candor. By adopting these five practical measures, we can together realize a fundamental shift in our business relationships:

#### COMPANIES

1. Be human. Use a respectful, conversational voice, avoid scripts and *never* use corporate doublespeak.
2. Encourage employees to use their real names and use a personal touch.
3. Anticipate that problems will occur, and set clear, public expectations in advance for how you will address (and redress) issues.
4. Cultivate a public dialogue with customers so they feel they are being heard and to demonstrate your accountability.
5. Demonstrate your good intentions by speaking plainly, earnestly, and candidly with customers about problems that arise.

#### CUSTOMERS

- Be understanding. Show the respect and kindness to company reps that you'd like shown to you.
- Use your real identity, and foster your long-term reputation with the company.
- Recognize that problems will occur, and give companies the information and time required to competently address issues.
- Share issues directly, or through a forum where the company has an opportunity to respond, so it can work with you to solve problems.
- Give companies the benefit of the doubt, and be open to what they have to say.

### OUR PACT

By working together in these ways, people build long-term relationships that lead to trust, strong communities, and sustainable businesses. We, as companies and customers, support this call for change.



SUPPORT THE PACT AT [HTTP://CCFACT.COM](http://CCFACT.COM)

Now, let's take a look at a couple of examples (from a 40,000 foot view.) *If you have stories you'd like to share*, please send them in and I'll be sure to include them in the ebook that I'll publish as an extension to this post.

### Experience Case Study **FreshBooks**:



FreshBooks is by far, one of my favorite examples for a company that gets it. They live and breathe customer service and mandate that everyone, at every level, engage with customers to stay connected with them. In doing so, everything from sales, marketing, and also product development, stay on track with what their customers really need and want.

How FreshBooks Listens:

Comments on its blogs

Google alerts

Created a hosted forum, which is very active

They answer their phones...no automated attendant

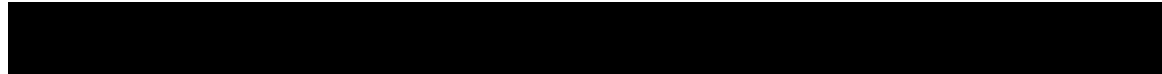
Twitter

Customer dinners

Attending conferences where their customers go

According to Michael McDerment of Freshbooks, "Since day one of FreshBooks operation there has been a mandate to over serve FreshBooks customers. A customer service department was formed before even a marketing team. That original mandate has carried on today with all the same principles."

Real Support and staying tapped in! Every member of the FreshBooks team, from the CEO to the Developers to the Marketing Department also doubles as the support team.



Real World Relationships! FreshBooks communicates with customers through their blog, forums, Twitter, a Newsletter called the **FRESHBOOKS SUPPER CLUB**, the real word version of the FreshBooks Supper Club. Basically any time someone from FB travels we take a group of customers out for a nice dinner for no reason other than to hang out and get to know them.

Make customers part of the PR process. Feature them regularly on the blog and through other promotional materials.

FreshBooks takes a “Treat people the way you want to be treated” philosophy because they feel that if the people are happy inside their walls, they will convey that happiness and excitement to their customers, and in turn, their customers will share that goodness with others.

FreshBooks takes customer service on the road and is **renting an RV** in February and driving from Miami to Texas to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner with customers. The idea of this came from the fact that they are attending two conferences (Future of Web Apps and South By South West) that are a week apart. Instead of flying, they’re driving and making key stops along the way to meet customers in their cities, host BBQs, and generally just show them that they’re important.

Results: Freshbooks went from a 98% referral rate in 2006 to an unbelievable 99% referral rate in 2007.



## You're Saving More Time.

Average number of hours a month spent invoicing...



## You're Getting Paid Faster.

Average number of days it took to get paid...



## You're Collecting More.

60% of our users report collecting more money since switching to FreshBooks.  
31% collect more than 10% more money!



## You're Referring Us More!

And remember that crazy number of 98% referral rate?



## Engagement Example: AOL



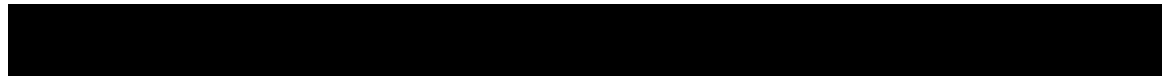
Will Morris, AOL's man in Silicon Valley, and Frank Gruber, who works out of the east coast HQ, vowed to help engage unhappy customers across the Web as well as critics of the company's products to help shed new light to each discussion, clarify confusion, and simply help in general.

Will recently [wrote about it](#) as a way of inspiring his co-workers to do the same, "Don't let people say silly things about your company. Yes I mean it. Your company." Morris continued, "Frank Gruber set an example for me last year. When he spots these comments, he follows up with a comment and (if possible) contacts the person who wrote it. And the response is normally good. If Frank can do it (as busy as he is), so can we all do it."

Frank [Gruber](#) added to the discussion, "Will Morris has been a leader at the AOL Silicon Valley campus for over 9 years...he is making sure that employees realize that they can make a difference by taking pride in their work and by engaging directly with customers."

Examples from Frank:

The moment [TechCrunch](#) announced myAOL, a new personalized startpage, it was met by critics that had not even looked at the product but saw it was from AOL and immediately took a negative stance. As the myAOL product lead, Gruber took this on as a challenge. He made sure to comment and contact individuals to get real feedback on the product. You can see some of the comments [here](#).



Gruber took the time to reach out through comments and emails. In one such case, Gruber contacted open critic, Matt Harwood. Harwood took a position that was very much against myAOL when the Sneak Preview video splashed onto pages of TechCrunch in June. In August, he had changed his mind and opted to [share his new sentiment](#) publicly.

Gruber responded, “Matt’s open dialog says a lot about his character and I really appreciate it. It is feedback like his that helps improve a product.”

## Case Study – ACDSee



ACDSee has a long tradition of providing quality software for digital photographers. This case study is an example of not only how social media was used to provide excellent customer service but also how it engaged a completely new market. This niche market continues to expand & thrive as customers tell others.

Listening initially:

A Community Manager position was established long before it was 'vogue'. In monitoring online conversations it was noticed that the software was being used in an unconventional manner. This began a dialogue with customers as the company listened to understand how the software was being used.

Engaging the new market:

- Identified evangelists
- Trained & encouraged them to use social media tools:
  - Google alerts, SEO, word of mouth
  - They created a site with a broad range of resources:
    - tutorials written in niche's language & Videos
    - FAQ's, tips on product use
    - Blog & weekly newsletter
  - Blogs, participation in online forums, real time chats at websites

Evangelists provide personalized customer support at a community-centric site

- Provided tech support by IM with Hello
- Created resources including Frequently Asked Questions
  - Customers self serve themselves
  - Encourage customers to support their peers
    - Presently non-customers & customers direct others to pertinent resources
- Gathered product use tips from customers & consolidated them into resources

Listening & providing for the community's needs:

- Feedback was gathered on desired features
- New features that were specific to the community were integrated into the product
- Evangelists maintain a continual conversation with the community
- Community specific items created & offered as promotions
- Integrated social media with traditional marketing, PR & affiliate marketing efforts

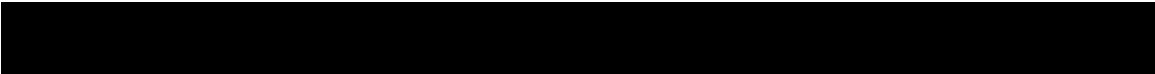
Expanding on success:

- Additional evangelists added to continue the level of support the community expects
- Offering a public beta on a new product to allow for community input
- Plans to apply the model to other user segments

Results after one year of active listening, engagement & participation:

- Brand was established in a month & half
- ACDSsee's product is recognized as the preferred tool over much larger competitors such as Adobe & Corel.
- The community has embraced ACDSsee products as the industry standard for organization.
- At present 97% of support is provided by evangelists in a personalized manner
- The high level of customer service that ACDSsee & the evangelists provide is frequently commented on
- Company customer support is in-house and has been shifted to reside under marketing.
- Customer feedback resulted in a new precedent of providing patches
- Establishing a system to gather customer feedback will be gathered before development begins (pre-beta)

Suggestions for best practices:

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- A community manager is invaluable to connect & collaborate with customers & in-house efforts.
  - Listen to your community & engage with them in an authentic manner.
    - Customers will notice & respect this then proceed to tell everyone.
  - Experiment with social media tools & use those that connect with your community.
    - Ex: our customers don't subscribe to rss feeds, so we created a weekly newsletter
  - Write tutorials & FAQ's in the customer's language rather than industry standard



Brian Solis is globally recognized for his views and insights on the convergence of PR, Traditional Media and Social Media. He actively contributes his thoughts and experiences through speaking appearances, books, articles and essays as a way of helping the marketing industry understand and embrace the new dynamics fueling new communications, marketing, and content creation.

Solis is Principal of [FutureWorks](#), an award-winning PR agency in Silicon Valley. Solis blogs at [PR2.0](#), [bub.blicio.us](#), [WebProNews](#), and BrandWeek. Solis is co-founder of the Social Media [Club](#), is an original member of the [Media 2.0](#) Workgroup, and also is a contributor to the Social Media [Collective](#).

Solis has been actively writing about new PR since the mid 90s to discuss how the Web was redefining the communications industry – he coined PR 2.0 along the way. Solis is considered an expert in traditional PR, media relations, and Social Media. He has dedicated his free time to helping PR professionals adapt to the new fusion of PR, Web marketing, and community relations. PR 2.0 is a top 10,000 Technorati blog and is ranked in the Ad Age Power 150 index of leading marketing bloggers.

In concert with Geoff Livingston, Solis recently released “Now is Gone” a new [book](#) that helps businesses learn how to engage in Social Media. He has also written several ebooks on the subjects of Social Media, New PR, and Blogger Relations.

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Becky Carroll is a long-time customer advocate and someone who is passionate about the customer experience. In 2005, she founded **Petra Consulting Group**, a strategic consultancy helping companies grow through lengthening and strengthening customer relationships. Through her work with companies such as HP, Electronic Arts, and Ford, Carroll has spent a lot of time improving customer experiences, driving increases in marketing results, and helping companies re-think their customer service and support.

Becky is also an accomplished international speaker and a frequent contributor to industry newsletters.

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