

How customer complaints can benefit your marketing strategy

No one likes criticism. We all wish that every word spoken to and about us or the organisation we represent could be effusive praise. After all, compliments feel good, but complaints, well, not so much...

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Nevertheless, it's often through the greatest challenges and the most painful moments that we experience the most growth — including in business. Customer complaints and negative reviews may hurt, but they can also inspire you to make meaningful changes and innovations.

When you're developing a company's marketing platform or revising an existing campaign, customer complaints may well be your greatest asset. You just need to know how to use them to your advantage.

Learning from customer complaints

The most *common customer complaints* are often related to a product or service, the customer service a patron received, or the way a product or service was represented. No matter the type of complaint, however, there's always something you can learn about your customers and your organisation from this feedback.

It's crucial to look at all of the feedback you've been given and see if there are any patterns. Once you have that information, determine if you or your organisation can do anything about those complaints.

Marketers can always leverage it to support improvements both to business processes and to marketing campaigns in general. For instance, issues with a product can lead to efforts to create higher-quality goods, while problems with customer service can result in improved training for your organisation's representatives. These efforts can then be promoted in marketing materials.

This, in turn, enables marketing teams to cultivate a more responsive and service-oriented brand. You can work to *make your business more customer-focused* and improve the overall reputation of your brand. For example, negative reviews may even be featured on the company's website or social media pages alongside in-depth descriptions of how the company has responded to and resolved the issue. This can significantly enhance the effectiveness of your marketing strategy. Because customers value companies that hear them and care enough to make prompt and substantive changes to better serve them.

Improved market targeting

One of the most formidable challenges marketers can face is understanding exactly who their customers are, what they expect, and what they want. Customer complaints can be invaluable in this process.

One common customer complaint is that a product, service, or business has been misrepresented in marketing materials or product descriptions. Often, this perceived "misrepresentation" is not a misrepresentation at all. Rather, it's the failure of the marketing strategy to reach the appropriate audience. Understanding your audience is the first and most important step of *successful content marketing*. If you don't know who you're trying to speak to, you won't be able to send the right message and your efforts are unlikely to have the impact you seek.

For instance, older consumers are likely to have a far different idea than

younger audiences of what a product promoted as a “user-friendly” digital mobile device will look like. Teens and young adults are *digital natives*. Having come of age in the wake of the digital revolution, they tend to be more comfortable with and skilled in using advanced technologies than are consumers of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

Thus, older consumers may perceive a highly sophisticated technology promoted as “user-friendly” to have been misrepresented when, in fact, the promotion was merely targeted toward the incorrect market demographic. But if you know how different groups feel about the same product, you can use that insight to guide and improve your marketing efforts so they speak to each audience.

Using complaints to direct, not dictate, your marketing

Another critical advantage of customer complaints is that they can make you a more judicious marketer. The voice of the customer should always be heard and respected, but that does not mean that *customers are always right*.

As a marketer, it’s important to retain your power and expertise, even in the face of customer complaints. Use the information you learn to direct, but not dictate, your strategies. If you allow your customers to dictate your marketing plans without giving each due consideration, then you’re never going to create a cohesive and effective strategy.

Instead of automatically acceding to every issue a customer might raise, use those critical comments to help you refine your professional expertise. Over time, you will learn which complaints are legitimate and useful for your purposes and which aren’t. Complaints can be the foundation through which you more accurately design a results-getting marketing strategy — one based on deliberation and data, rather than on

some amorphous intuition or instinct.

The takeaway

Customer complaints can be one of your most valuable tools for innovation and improvement. Negative reviews and criticism can be leveraged to better meet customer expectations and, in the process, cultivate a brand for responsiveness and service. In addition, negative feedback can help you to better understand and address your target audience. It can even help you hone your expertise in determining what marketing strategies are best for your company and your customers.

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