

From reach to resolution: A social customer service story

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Over the past couple years, social customer service globally has gone from being the focus of a small number of highly innovative companies to a widely accepted requirement of doing business. My experience here in Africa over this time frame is that we are following the same global trend but with audience size and habit differentials that slow adoption.



Big telecommunications and financial services companies have embraced the opportunity but they have the scale and wherewithal to do so. Your average organisation is unable to throw resources at a problem to resolve it, there needs to be a sound business case to warrant the expense.

There are three stages where businesses find themselves on the journey from reach to resolution.



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Stage 1 - Social media for marketing and listening

At the start of the journey, social media is a marketing channel used almost exclusively for outbound publishing and promotion. Companies at this stage are 'reaching' out to their customers on social, but it's largely a one-way conversation. There may be basic community management and engagement, but genuine customer service issues are either ignored or deflected to more traditional channels like email and phone.

This is where we see a lot of small to medium sized retail brands in Africa. They may do this themselves or rely on an agency, but there is no meaningful issue resolution on social. As a result, companies in this stage fail to use social as a customer service channel and thus fail to meet customer expectations or to leverage the efficiency gains of service over social.

Stage 2 - Social customer service early adoption

At this stage, companies - often beginning with the marketing department - recognise the need for some sort of social customer service presence. These organisations adopt a token social customer service strategy in an effort to improve their engagement over social, usually achieved through working with the customer service department.

The contact centre resources allocated are usually just enough to deal with incoming volume and are in effect 'on loan' to marketing, typically using whatever tool the marketing team provides (often an all-in-one social media management system). This type of operation is usually managed outside normal resourcing and contact centre management, with few strict processes or KPIs.

As with global statistics, we find most African businesses with a significant social presence somewhere here. While companies in Stage Two are helping some customers over social media, their minimal coverage means response times are usually slower than consumers expect.

We are also seeing a break here where an issue is taken off social and onto traditional channels and then resolved or potentially moving back into the social space. This causes a disconnect as there is no single response platform and it has a negative effect on the customer experience. Additionally, the lack of information about agent and team performance makes efficient resourcing impossible, prevents the ability to integrate with CRM and business intelligence systems, and impedes the operation from being able to scale effectively.

Stage 3 - Social media in the contact centre

Here, the business as a whole recognises that social media is a key customer service channel, alongside phone, email and chat. The contact centre is given responsibility for managing, training and resourcing the social customer service operation. The focus of social customer service becomes full engagement and timely 'resolution.'

At this stage, social customer service is measured for maximum efficiency and ROI. Precise metrics are used to ensure social customer service teams are delivering the experience customers expect, and are resourcing their agents effectively. These tools enable companies to efficiently train and manage a wider pool of agents, who can focus exclusively on social media (either completely, or within any one particular shift). Most importantly, customers receive excellent customer service over social media.

Technology has now provided a platform to allow any organisation to reach Stage 3, serving their social customer where they are without having to interrupt internal processes. It cuts out the clutter of social media and enables an issue to seamlessly be passed around from the agency or marketing departments and into the correct customer service channels.

With the ability provide a quality customer experience whilst cutting service costs, I don't see scale or data having a lasting impact.

If you would like to learn more, check out the [2015 Definitive Guide to Social Customer Service](#). If you think your brand is getting it right, put your money where your mouth is and enter the [New Generation Social Customer Care Award](#).

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