

Rethink your community management team structure

By Leigh Andrews

3 Aug 2017

Mike Stopforth's focus on the second day of Red & Yellow School's executive education social media workshop was on community management and crisis communication in the social space. It's fraught with 'process and person' issues - here's why consistency is key.



We hope your community management team runs smoother than a war room. Image: Oleksiy Tsuper © - 123RF.com

Social media posting for business is so much more detailed than just coming up with a clever status update. In fact, most of it should come from the editorial board's creative process on content planning, often cemented weeks beforehand.

One of the main things to question is whether it is right to comment on every 'special day' or trending occasion, as this can backfire badly if there's a mismatch between the values of your brand and the occasion in question. There needs to be a good fit with the context and the overall content strategy.



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Stopforth adds that agencies aren't being asked to make content 'go viral' as much as before, as clients understand it's largely to do with the content itself, where the zeitgeist is at that moment and a huge dose of luck. The amount of organic content we just *don't* get to see is staggering. As a result, nowadays, you can actually include virality on the back of spend or paid social media postings. But who is this mythical being who manages your brand's community?

How customer care fits into community management

Many of the variables that go into content creation also go into community management. These include aspects like timeliness; tone; knowledge of the business, the audience and the platforms; rules of engagement; closing the loop and what you're allowed to say and not say; crisis communications, PR and escalation; having a thick skin; good spelling and grammar; being on brand; knowing your content strategy, as well as the content planning and creation process; opportunity spotting; influencer engagement; analytics and reporting; experience in and flair for customer care and service.

That's quite a mouthful, and something many companies expect a single employee to tack on to their existing responsibilities, or to rotate in shift leading to markedly different responses depending on time of day or day of week. Because it's not commonly understood as a multifaceted role, community management tends to either fall on 'the newbies' as they're young and understand social media yet are disempowered from making any real decisions and tend to get the blame when something goes wrong, or it falls on someone who is extraordinarily good at the role and truly embodies the brand, yet spends the bulk of their time responding to complaints with 'Kindly DM us your details'. To flip the script on this, companies and employees alike need to learn to see community management as a career rather than a role, with progression and different challenges.

“ *Diving into day 2 of Social Media for Leadership on howto build the right team for an effective social strategy.*

[#RYExecEd pic.twitter.com/moW4sx0Z72](https://pic.twitter.com/moW4sx0Z72)— Red & Yellow (@redyellowschool) August 3, 2017 ”

Looking at the content you post on social media then, Stopforth points out that it doesn't always have to be safe and predictable. You can take a risk where appropriate in adding your personality and delighting customers with an unexpected surprise, in order to turn a complaint into a good engagement experience.

Your social media interactions can be proactive or reactive, and the engagements themselves can be planned or unplanned. Planned proactive engagements are based on all the content in the editorial or social calendar that's posted at a specific time. Reactive planned content then is based on the FAQs around our product and first-line responses that the business can predict and cater for, such as queries about opening hours and branches, resulting in speedier responses. Unplanned proactive responses tend to be those that happen in real-time and focus on engagement, while reactive unplanned content is usually in the realm of crisis communications and escalated queries. Stopforth pointed out that each of these four forms of engagement should ideally be handled by a different team member or team, with an overarching team lead who can advise and escalate where necessary, perhaps across a number of clients. In addition to clarifying roles and responsibilities, structuring your community management team accordingly has the added benefit of helping justify resource planning. Proper online reputation management or ORM reporting will show you where you need the resources.

Geographically speaking, you could have a single or multi-location team. In addition, it could be internally resourced, externally resourced or hybrid resourced depending on needs.

Comparison of customer care channels' response times:

- **Call** can take 30 minutes to 2 hours
- **Email** within 48 hours
- **Webchat** is instant but needs escalation and can be expensive
- **Social** is usually instant, especially for FAQ-style responses
- **Walk-ins** and face-to-face also have long queues and can be inconsistent

Wearing your 'consumer' hat and looking at the above, it should come as no surprise that there are so many brand complaints aired on social media these days.

Stopforth concludes that brands need to understand that consumers default to the channel where they get the best response and that there are pros and cons to every model. Whichever model you go with, make sure you are consistent in your responses and on brand throughout.

[Click here](#) to view Stopforth's MyBiz profile, [here](#) for Red & Yellow School's press office and [here](#) to access Cerebra's free downloads.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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