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Taking Social Support To The Next Level

by Diane Clarkson
for eBusiness & Channel Strategy Professionals

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How A Deeper Relationship With Marketing Can Elevate Social Support

by Diane Clarkson
with Zia Daniell Wigder and Lily Varon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many eBusinesses experimented with social support over the past two years. Today, forward-thinking eBusiness leaders recognize that social support represents a fundamental shift in how leading organizations approach support, brand, and engagement. These eBusiness leaders are operationalizing social support and embedding it within a social enterprise strategy that will seamlessly blend marketing, customer service, and other functions. Successful social support organizations have leveraged the synergy between social support and marketing by taking steps to: 1) ensure customer support plays a leading role is social strategy; 2) prioritize direct social support based on brand and customer influence; and 3) ensure social support measurement includes both traditional service metrics alongside brand favorability.

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NOTES & RESOURCES

Forrester interviewed vendors including Lithium Technologies, Moxie Software, and Salesforce.com.

Related Research Documents

"The Metamorphosis To Agile Customer Service"
August 23, 2011

"Defining Social CRM"
March 2, 2011

"Getting Social Customer Service Right"
October 18, 2010

"How To Create A Social Customer Service Strategy"
May 10, 2010

SOCIAL SUPPORT IS EVOLVING FROM AN EXPERIMENT TO AN IMPERATIVE

In the early years of social media, marketing functions strived to capitalize on the medium's potential to support branding strategies. These organizations quickly realized that they were sending brand messages into the social arena that were being derailed by customer complaints. In response, social support started in many organizations as an experiment. Savvy eBusiness leaders now recognize that there is a synergistic relationship between marketing and customer service. The challenge today is how to operationalize social support to drive eBusiness goals including engagement, satisfaction, sales, and support.

Social Media Is Dramatically Influencing Empowered Consumers' Support Expectations

Social media is fundamentally influencing how consumers want and expect to engage with companies. Today's social consumers:

- **Expect a company response to their comments on social media.** The majority of consumers expect companies to respond to comments and opinions — both negative and positive — that they post on social media websites. Nearly three out of four online US adults expect a reply to a negative comment posted on a ratings/reviews site and a positive comment posted on Facebook or Twitter (see Figure 1). Unfortunately, most brands fall short of meeting these expectations. According to Maritz Research, only three in 10 Twitter users received a response to a tweeted complaint about a brand's product or service.[1]

- **Increasingly reach out to social channels for support.** Social support can take two broad forms: Direct support where a company interacts via social media such as Twitter, or peer-to-peer such as an online community. In 2009, only 7% of US online consumers had used an online community, and only 1% had reached out to Twitter for customer service. In only two years, these numbers changed significantly. In 2011, 27% of US online consumers reached out to an online community support, and nearly one in five used Twitter for customer service.[2] Social support is more highly adopted by Gen X and Gen Y, but its appeal extends beyond youth with 30% of Gen X consumers between the ages of 32 and 45 and 20% of Younger Boomer online consumers between the ages of 46 and 55 using online communities for support (see Figure 2).

- **Have brand favorability influenced by customer service complaints on social media.** If handled effectively, customer service complaints in social media can boost a brand's image — but they can also easily thwart crafted brand messages. For example, a report by Conversocial cited an example in which Kmart and Costco did not respond to any customer inquiries on their Facebook pages, subsequently undercutting the retailers' branding effort of nurturing a fan community.[3] Indeed, 12% of US online adults agreed that complaints about customer service from other consumers on social sites like Facebook or Twitter strongly influence their image of the company. At the same time, seeing that an issue has been resolved on social media negates

the damage: According to the same survey, 13% of US online consumers agree that they have a very favorable reaction to a brand when they see that a company has responded to fix a consumer's negative comment on a social site such as TripAdvisor or Twitter.[4]

Figure 1 Most Online Consumers Expect A Company To Respond To Them On Social Media

"I expect companies to respond to comments and opinions I post in the following places:"
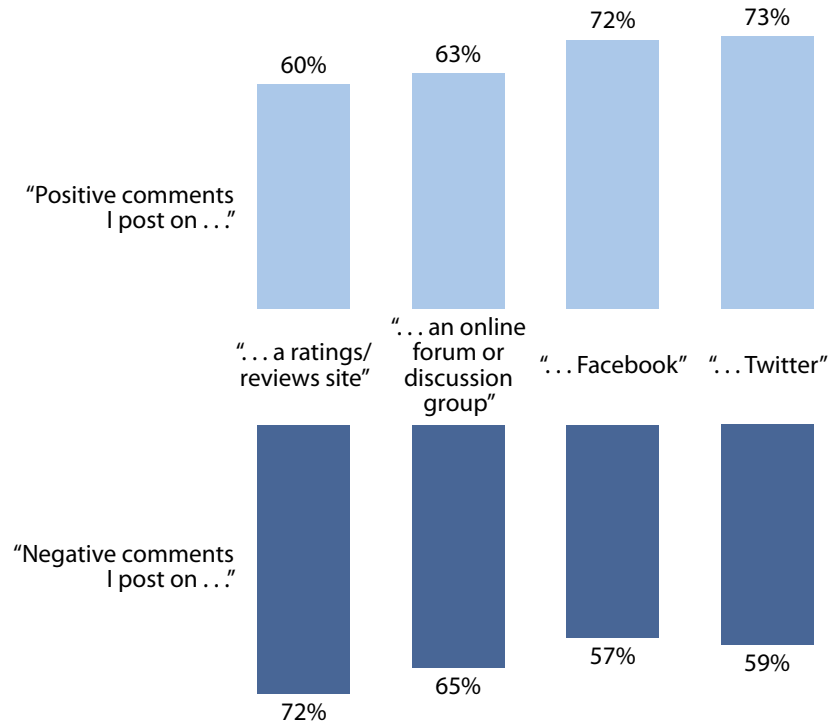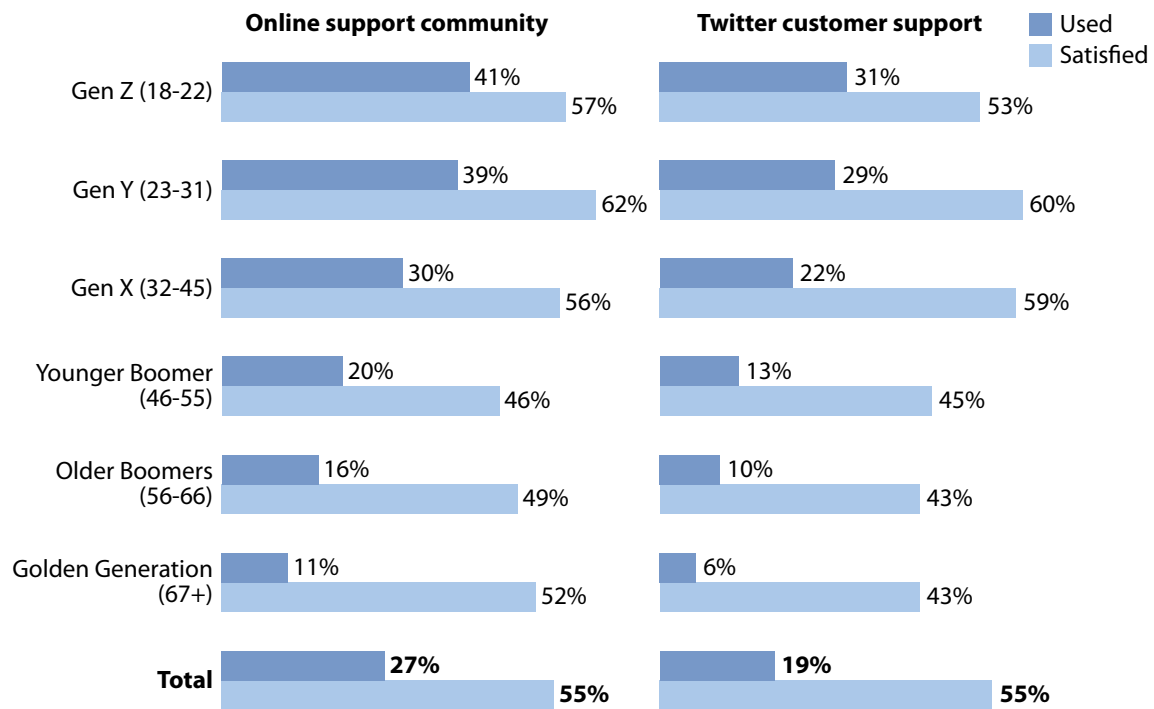

Base: US online adults

Note: Specific bases included in the downloadable spreadsheet associated with this figure.
Source: North American Technographics® Online Benchmark Recontact Survey, Q3 2011 (US, Canada)

61490   Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 2 Social Support Adoption Ranges Across All Generations

	Online support community	Twitter customer support	
			■ Used
			■ Satisfied
Gen Z (18-22)	41% / 57%	31% / 53%	
Gen Y (23-31)	39% / 62%	29% / 60%	
Gen X (32-45)	30% / 56%	22% / 59%	
Younger Boomer (46-55)	20% / 46%	13% / 45%	
Older Boomers (56-66)	16% / 49%	10% / 43%	
Golden Generation (67+)	11% / 52%	6% / 43%	
Total	**27% / 55%**	**19% / 55%**	

Base: 7,637 US online adults

Source: North American Technographics® Online Benchmark Recontact Survey, Q3 2011 (US)

61490   Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

## SOCIAL SUCCESS IS IN THE SYNERGY BETWEEN SUPPORT AND MARKETING

Savvy eBusiness leaders understand that creating a social enterprise means embracing the synergistic relationship between social support and marketing to connect employees and customers. Burberry CEO Angela Ahrendts says, "To any CEO who is skeptical at all: You have to be totally connected with everyone who touches your brand. You have to. You have to create a social enterprise today. If you don't do that, I don't know what your business model is in five years."[5]

Compelling Examples Of Social Support And Marketing Are Emerging

eBusinesses that successfully integrate social support into a holistic engagement strategy will support both marketing and customer service goals by leveraging the synergy between the functional areas. Compelling examples of social support blending with branding goals include:

- **Comcast demonstrates that social support can humanize brands.** Comcast uses Radian6 social media monitoring and engagement to actively listen and proactively respond to customer service issues on Twitter. These efforts also are also closely tied to influencing brand sentiment. According to Kip Wetzel, senior director social media services, Comcast, "Our ability to get away from a just corporate logo and make it about an individual representative who is there to help humanizes the brand."[6]

- **Home Depot demonstrates social support that blends with brand and engagement.** Home Depot's How-To forum, running on Lithium's platform, leverages both empowered employees and peer-to-peer support to provide a compelling example of brand, engagement, and support. The home improvement retailer has trained a team of store associates who spend a dedicated amount of time each week helping customers in the community. Many of the companies who make the products also participate in the community. Community members can ask questions, and share tips, pictures, and videos (see Figure 3).

- **eBusinesses show that Facebook can deepen the relationship between marketing and support.** eBusinesses such as British Telecom, HP, and Acuvue are expanding social support into Facebook. For example, British Telecom, also running on Lithium's platform, syndicates its community forum on its brand website and Facebook (see Figure 4). The relationship between marketing and support is broadening beyond social support, with companies such as Lenovo including its virtual agent on its Facebook page; Shure offering knowledge-based self-service through vendor RightNow; and Nykredit offering chat via its Facebook page through vendor Netop.

Figure 3 Home Depot's How-To Forum Is A Compelling Mix Of Brand, Engagement, And Support
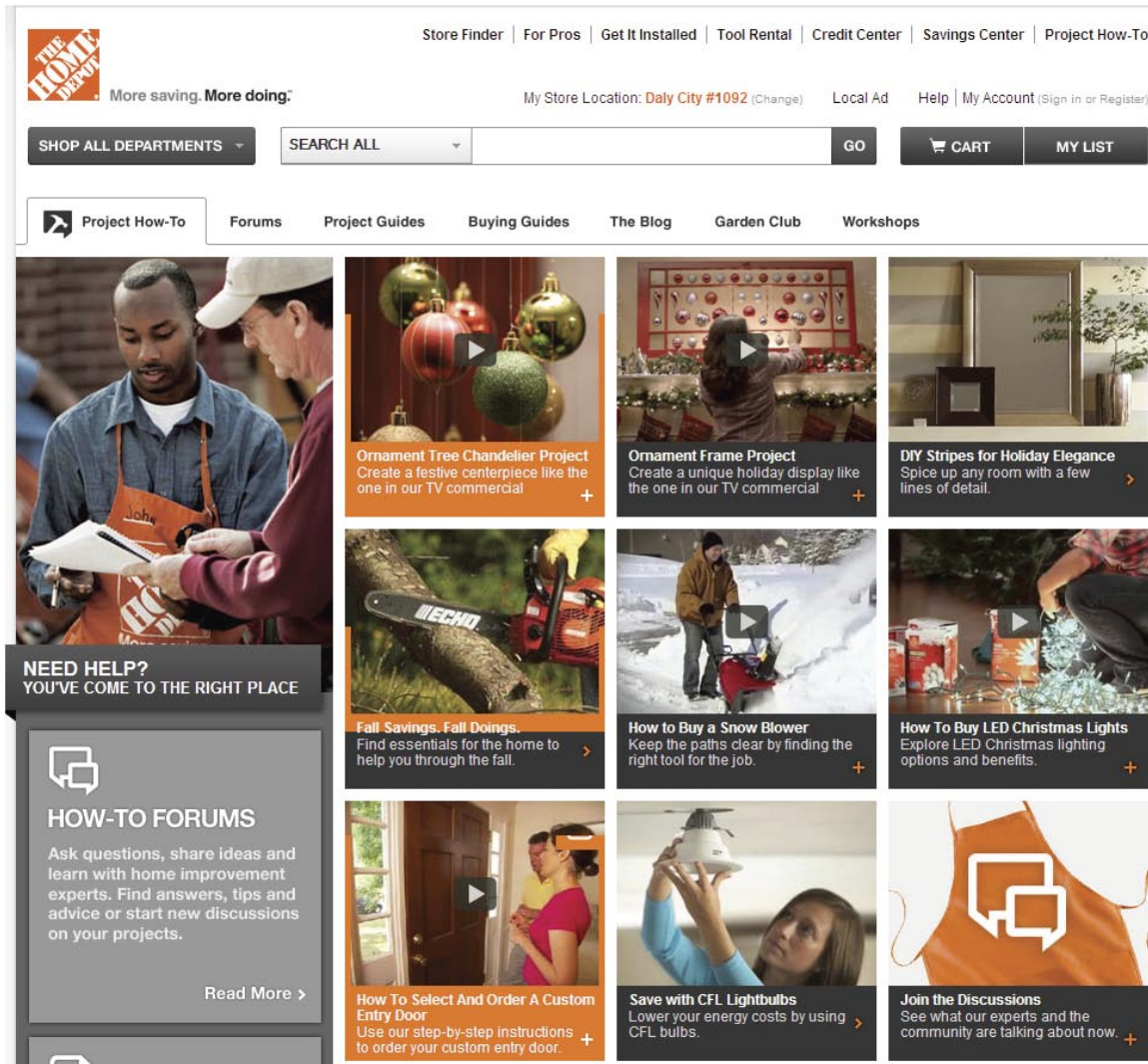
Source: Home Depot website

61490   Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 4 British Telecom BT UK Syndicates Social Support On Its Website And Facebook

Source: BT Facebook page
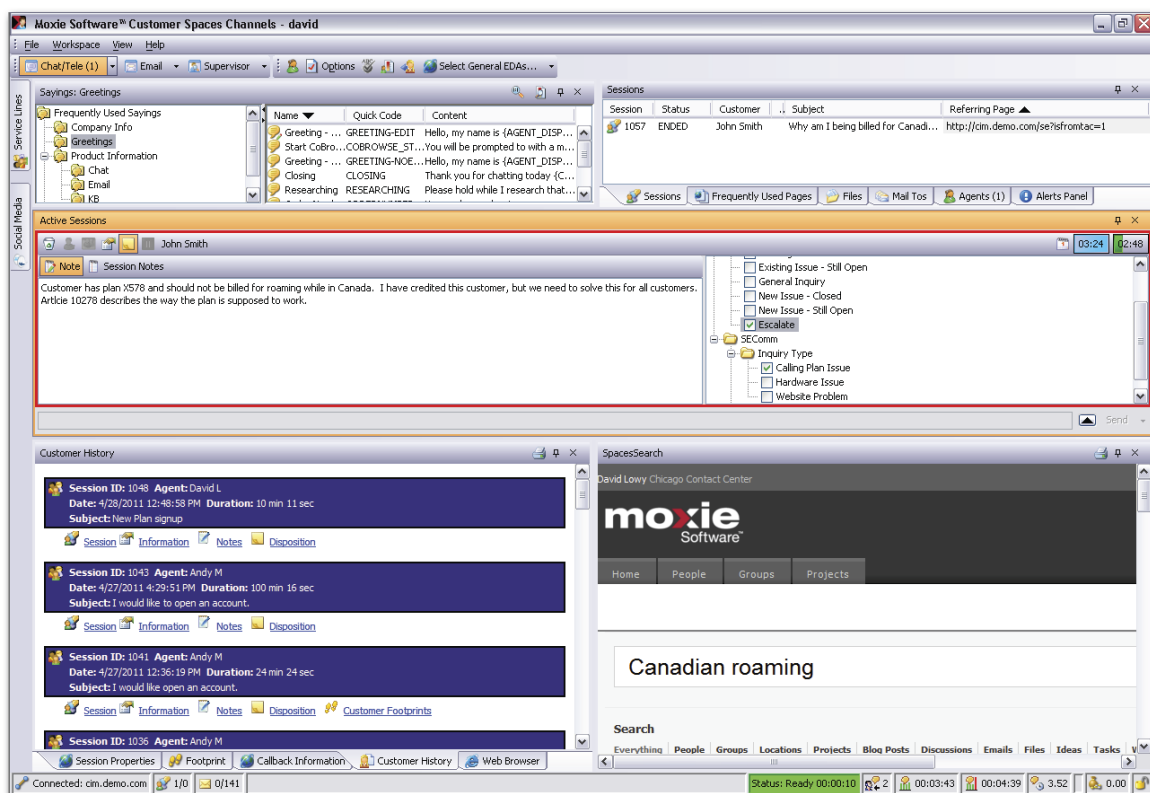
Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Social Support Vanguards Share Many Attributes

Shifting from dabbling in social support to being a social support leader means meeting the challenge of how to operationalize social support across a broader social engagement strategy. eBusiness leaders who have successfully integrated social media and customer support share the following attributes:

- **Customer service plays a leading role in enterprise social strategy.** The majority of organizations that employ social media have identified customer support as a key objective. According to a recent study from Booz & Company, 75% of marketers using social media identify customer service as a primary use of their social media platform, in third position behind advertising/promotion and public relations. However, there is a significant discrepancy between support objectives and leadership. According to the same Booz & Company survey, only 26% of respondents describe customer service as a department responsible for contributing leadership to social media strategies.[7] Leading vendors in the social support space have observed that the most successful social support implementations include a distributed ownership of social media with customer service taking on a key leadership role.

- **Direct support is prioritized for action for specific brands or sentiments.** Not all customer service issues are equal. According to Larry Robinson, vice president, product management Service Cloud at salesforce.com, "You have the big fire hose of your listening platform and the limited capacity of your service department. You need to prioritize to be able to say we'll prioritize based on if someone mentions X product with X sentiment and they have X influence." Vendors solutions such as salesforce.com, Moxie Software, Lithium, and Conversocial can reach into the cloud to determine the priority of a customer's issue and their influence to determine which issues should flow through to an agent or not.

- **Processes are in place to ensure a consistent direct support customer experience.** The essential difference between traditional customer support interaction and direct support on social media is that the latter occurs with an audience. This becomes even more complex because companies typically participate in multiple social media channels and operate multiple social accounts. Savvy eBusiness leaders have clear processes and workflows in place to ensure efficient and consistent customer support. This includes response road maps that gauge customer sentiment, guide confirming facts, present resolution options, and identify when and to whom escalation should proceed.

- **Metrics incorporate service and brand.** Like with other support channels, operational metrics such as average handle time and first contact resolution will be important to understand social support's performance and how it compares to other channels. At the same time, there are unique aspects to measuring social support. A full understanding of social support metrics also looks at the brand favorability element by prioritizing key issues and tracking issues that have been resolved and how many people are exposed to the positive engagement.

- **Community knowledge is leveraged to increase service and marketing reach.** Knowledge exists in a variety of disconnected silos and the introduction of community knowledge risks building yet another silo. Savvy eBusiness leaders approach knowledge management with a view toward integrating knowledge into a single system to ensure customers and agents access accurate content. A collaborative workplace can deliver build knowledge. For example, vendors including Lithium, Moxie Software, and salesforce.com allow an agent to post an issue internally and invite collaboration to facilitate expert participation; the resulting response can build knowledge while also improving agent efficiency and offering an enhanced support experience (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Spaces by Moxie Software Shows How Social Collaboration Improves Support

Source: Moxie

61490   Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

INTEGRATING SOCIAL SUPPORT INTO CRM UNDERPINS THE FUTURE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

To date, large-scale integration of social CRM for customer service remains nascent. The growth of social support and a deeper understanding of its business potential, however, will drive eBusinesses to tackle integrating social channels into CRM systems.

Integrating social channels into CRM can provide eBusinesses with a full interaction history across all of the communication channels and facilitate building operational processes and workflows based on customer-centric information. Social CRM integration will expand into multichannel capabilities, data, and analytic capabilities as well as broader marketing, sales, and engagement objectives. Organizations will understand what a customer has purchased, what assistance he has required, and how satisfied he is with his interactions with a brand. This will empower organizations with an unprecedented ability to develop personalized customer relationships.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Methodology

Forrester fielded the North American Technographics® Customer Experience Online Survey in October 2011 of 7,638 US individuals ages 18 to 88. For results based on a randomly chosen sample of this size (N = 7,638), there is 95% confidence that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 1.12% of what they would be if the entire population of US online individuals ages 18 and older had been surveyed. Forrester weighted the data by age, gender, income, broadband adoption, and region to demographically represent the adult US online population. The survey sample size, when weighted, was 7,637. (Note: Weighted sample sizes can be different from the actual number of respondents to account for individuals generally underrepresented in online panels.) Please note that this was an online survey. Respondents who participate in online surveys have in general more experience with the Internet and feel more comfortable transacting online. The data is weighted to be representative for the total online population on the weighting targets mentioned, but this sample bias may produce results that differ from Forrester's offline benchmark survey. The sample was drawn from members of MarketTools' online panel, and respondents were motivated by receiving points that can be redeemed for a reward. The sample provided by MarketTools is not a random sample. While individuals have been randomly sampled from MarketTools' panel for this particular survey, they have previously chosen to take part in the MarketTools online panel.

Forrester fielded the North American Technographics® Online Benchmark Recontact Survey in August 2011 of 37,350 US and Canadian online adults ages 18 to 88. For results based on a randomly chosen sample of this size (N = 37,350), there is 95% confidence that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus .51% of what they would be if the entire population of North American online individuals ages 18 and older had been surveyed. Forrester weighted the data by age, gender, income, broadband adoption, and region to demographically represent the adult US and Canadian online populations. The

survey sample size, when weighted, was 37,300. (Note: Weighted sample sizes can be different from the actual number of respondents to account for individuals generally underrepresented in online panels.) Please note that this was an online survey. Respondents who participate in online surveys generally have more experience with the Internet and feel more comfortable transacting online. The data is weighted to be representative of the total online population on the weighting targets mentioned, but this sample bias may produce results that differ from Forrester's offline benchmark survey. The sample was drawn from members of MarketTools' online panel, and respondents were motivated by receiving points that could be redeemed for a reward. The sample provided by MarketTools is not a random sample. While individuals have been randomly sampled from MarketTools' panel for this particular survey, they have previously chosen to take part in the MarketTools online panel.

Companies Interviewed For This Document

Conversocial

Lithium Technologies

Moxie Software

Salesforce.com

ENDNOTES

[1] Maritz Research and evolve24 surveyed an online panel of 1,298 US consumers in September 2011. The panel was pre-identified as Twitter users who frequently tweet, have used Twitter to complain about a specific product, service, brand, or company, and are at least 18 years of age. According to the survey, 29% of tweeters received a response from the company about which they tweeted while 71% did not. Source: "Maritz Research And Evolve24 Twitter Study," Evolve24, September 2011 (http://maritzresearch.com/~/media/Files/MaritzResearch/e24/ExecutiveSummaryTwitterPoll.ashx).

[2] There has been a dramatic increase in usage of social communities for customer service. In 2009, only 7% of US online consumers had used a forum or community for customer service; in 2011, that number has increased nearly fourfold. Even more notably, in 2009 only 1% of US online consumers had used Twitter for customer service; in 2011, 19% of consumers had reached out to the microblogging platform for support. Community support and Twitter are most widely adopted among younger consumers with 41% of Gen X and 39% of Gen Y consumers using these forms of social support. However, don't assume social support is the domain of younger consumers: online community support is also used by 30% of consumers between the ages of 32 and 45 and 20% of online consumers between ages of 46 and 55. See the January 23, 2012, "Understanding Customer Service Satisfaction To Inform Your 2012 eBusiness Strategy" report.

[3] Conversocial is software that enables customer service in Facebook and Twitter. Their research examined the Facebook customer service offerings of 10 US retailers over a period of five working days in September 2011. Source: Who's Ignoring Their Customers — A Survey of the Largest Retailers And Their Use of Social Media," Conversocial ,November 2011 (http://www.conversocial.com/blog/entry/whoa-s-ignoring-their-customers-a-survey-of-the-largest-us-retailers-and-their-use-of-social-media).

[4]   Source: Forrester's North American® Technographics Omnibus Online Survey, Q4 2010 (US).

[5]   Burberry CEO Angela Ahrendts is creating social enterprise using salesforce.com, incorporating social and mobile elements across the entire organization, and connecting with their employees and customers in a whole new way. Source: "Burberry Uses salesforce.com To Create The Ultimate Social Enterprise," Salesforce.com's YouTube Channel (http://www.youtube.com/salesforce#p/c/48A29F27D5C3DF0E/9/tpjMWNF9JqY).

[6]   Source: "Comcast Uses Salesforce.com To Create A Social Enterprise," Salesforce.com's YouTube Channel (http://www.youtube.com/salesforce#p/c/48A29F27D5C3DF0E/5/PgiErIf9Gig).

[7]   According to recent research by Booz & Co., almost half of survey respondents from 100 leading companies said they were still more interested in mass reach using social media than in using it to invest in relationships with customers. Source: Christopher Vollmer and Karen Premo, "Campaigns to Capabilities, Social Media & Marketing 2011 Selected Insights," Booz & Company/Buddy Media, October 2011 (http://www.booz.com/media/file/BoozCo-Campaigns-to-Capabilities-Social-Media-and-Marketing-2011.pdf).

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