

Bringing Social Media Interactions Into the Contact Center



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Gone are the days of MySpace, when social media use was principally confined to high school students. Today, social media is used by consumers and businesspeople of all ages. It has become a distinct communications medium, one with unique strengths and weaknesses.

I ncreasingly, how a company or organization behaves on and reacts to communications taking place on various social media platforms—be it Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube—reflects on its company and brand, whether they like it or not. The customer experience that a company delivers when replying to a single social media interaction can dramatically impact not only the lifetime value of the original customer—but also all of the present and potential customers the original one influences.

Understanding the Benefits

What are the benefits of integrating social media interactions into the contact center?

The interactions most likely to benefit from being brought into the contact center are those related to customer experience and service. While a company may receive thousands of tweets or comments on its Facebook

page, a high priority should be placed on expeditiously and appropriately handling the interactions coming from customers and potential customers. Bringing social media interactions into the contact center helps ensure that the right interactions are selected and sent to the best resources to handle the communication—just as you are already doing with voice calls, emails, etc.

By handling social media interactions in the contact center, communications coming from Twitter, Facebook, or even comments to the company's blogs can be delivered to agents with the same full context as calls or emails. This information can come from company databases if a customer can be identified, from Internet-based data sources (e.g., the number of followers or friends), the sentiment of the comment (e.g., weighted positive or negative scoring), and even the potential influence of the tweeter.



Social network

A social structure which enables multiple users to communicate by posting information, commercial images, video or any other content, friendship, common interest

How will handling social media in the contact center help me improve the customer experience?

Many companies today have very loose processes for monitoring and responding to social media inquiries. One IT executive reports that an employee on family leave, looking to work from home a few hours a week, was felt to be the perfect solution for handling the company's social media traffic.

Handling social media in the contact center helps ensure a timely response to interactions without duplicating responses to the same question or comment. It can improve customer satisfaction by helping ensure that the company has a proactive approach to replying to social media and that comments or queries don't go unanswered for long periods of time. Additionally, handling social media interactions in the contact center

improves the customer experience by making certain social media is handled consistently by agents specifically trained to deal with that type of interaction. A dedicated team can be trained to know what to look for, such as grammar that is specific to social media (# has a specific meaning in Twitter) and rules of etiquette (taking personal conversations to private channels, e.g., direct messages).

The same resources agents use when responding to emails, voice calls, and Web chats—product information, knowledge bases, and suggested responses—can be available to agents handling social media interactions. This means that agents can easily access the information needed to handle the inquiry and customers are given consistent answers regardless of how they choose to communicate. ➔



Social media contact center applications can analyze keywords and sentiment to help you prioritize the comments that matter most.

In summary, bringing social media interactions into the contact center helps ensure that valuable customer and prospect communications are treated with the timeliness and attention they deserve by employee resources dedicated to the task.

Budgets are always tight. How can an investment of resources to manage social media interactions in the contact center be justified?

There are plenty of articles that point to avoidance of a public relations calamity as reason enough to invest in social media management. However, there are also positive, revenue-generating reasons to formalize the company's approach to social media. Just as businesses can mine calls and emails coming into the contact center for cross-selling and up-selling opportunities, the same kind of opportunities exist for social media interactions. In addition, your company's consistent responses to

and defined by the business, pulling only those interactions that contain actionable questions or comments. Avaya Social Media Manager can also assign a positive or negative weighted sentiment score to a tweet, status, or comment. This sentiment score can be used to route the interaction to the most appropriately trained employee. It can also trigger the contact center application to perform special tasks (e.g., to present a specific screen to the agent).

Organizational Matters
Won't social media interactions be distracting to my agents? How will they be able to concentrate on other customer interactions?

Routing a prioritized subset of social media interactions to contact center agents specifically trained to handle them means that tweets and Facebook comments, for example, can be delivered to the agent desktop the same way that voice calls or emails

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How do I prioritize the sheer volume of social media interactions that are related to our company's Twitter, Facebook, or blog presence?

Social media contact center applications have been developed with built-in features to assist with prioritization. For example, using integrated capabilities, Avaya Social Media Manager can examine social media interactions for keywords or industry terms that are relevant to

are handled: one at a time. Agents on phone calls won't be distracted by having to watch a tweet stream or Facebook page; instead, single media or blended work items can be delivered to the agent desktop.

My company's marketing department handles social media. Does that mean the contact center organization should remain uninvolved?

As a company's social media management system matures, shifting the responsibility for handling these interactions to the contact center is a natural progression. Marketing can and should continue to drive the strategy ➡



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and positioning of the messages delivered to customers, but the contact center is where the majority of customer communications are already being handled. Contact center employees are constantly trained on the latest sales and marketing campaigns. Handling social media interactions here means that the responses benefit from both the training and the experience dealing with similar queries coming in from other media. Also, detailed context on the customer's interaction history with the company can be used to help ensure a customer-centric and, when needed, more personalized response.

Technical Considerations

My company hasn't moved to IP or SIP enterprise telephony yet. Can I still bring social media into the contact center?

It is true that some vendors will require a company to migrate from installed technology to IP or SIP because its social media solution will only work in that environment. As you look to integrate social media interactions into your contact center, you will want to find a vendor (such as Avaya) that has a solution that works with your current technology, be it time-division multiplexing (TDM), IP, or SIP. While there are many good reasons for a company to consider moving from a TDM to SIP technology infrastructure, handling social media interactions does not have to drive that decision.

Are there different ways contact center agents can handle social media interactions?

As is true with other types of nonvoice interactions (e.g., email, text, chat), there are a number of ways to operationalize routing social media interactions to

agents. Some companies choose (especially during a pilot or initial rollout) to dedicate a pool of agents to a new interaction type. Other companies find that all nonvoice media are similar enough to be handled by a multimedia team. Agents that currently handle email and/or chat might also be used to process social media. Still other companies have found that agents are able to handle a completely blended mix of interactions, including voice, email, chat, and social media. Avaya Aura® Contact Center with Social Media Manager can support any of these modes of operation.

My company is considering implementation of a social media application that wouldn't be integrated with the contact center. Is that a mistake?

The short answer is no, it is not a mistake. As social media usage has continued to explode, a class of application called social media monitoring has emerged. This can include, for example, online articles, blog posts, tweets, and Facebook comments. Marketing departments are typically the ones implementing social media monitoring applications, proactively keeping track of comments—positive or negative—that may be posted.

The longer answer is that there are numerous benefits to integrating these monitoring tools into the contact center. Social media integration with the contact center allows social media interactions to be captured and recorded if company practice dictates. It also helps ensure that reporting is done in a consistent and meaningful manner, providing a complete picture by combining social media interactions with the data from other media interactions, such as voice and email. ➡

Beginning the Process

My company isn't using social media. Until it does, no contact center involvement is required, right?

Even if your company doesn't yet have a social media presence, it doesn't mean that people aren't talking about your company and brand on social media sites. Go to Twitter.com and type in the name of your company or one of your brands. What you'll likely see is that even in the absence of social media accounts, people are likely out there talking about your business and its products. Customers may even be sending out messages that today are not getting a response.

Determine whether social media is becoming important in the market you serve. Check whether your key competitors have a social media presence. Similarly, you should regularly search for "[your company name]" and "#fail." If customers or potential customers are posting #fail messages about your industry—or your business in particular—they should be monitored.

I'm beginning to see that there are benefits to integrating social media interactions into the contact center. Where do I start?

The first step is to document the specific challenges customers face when interacting with your company via social media and to determine how managing those communications in the contact center would offer solutions. As with any technology decision your company makes, the benefits that the business accrues from providing an improved customer experience will drive return on investment by increasing the lifetime value of each customer.

Specifically, what will I need to buy in order to route social media interactions to the contact center?

If your company has already implemented multichannel interaction routing (e.g., email or chat) to agents, many of the required components probably already exist. Many (but not all) contact center solutions available today can route social media interactions to agents using a universal queue for all interaction types. If your contact center operation is voice-only today, talk to your contact center vendor about the steps that would be required to start a trial of social media interaction routing.

You will also need a way to filter interactions to process only those that are relevant. To accomplish this, some vendors will require the addition of a third-party monitoring tool. Avaya Social Media Manager has embedded capabilities for language identification, automated filtering, and sentiment analysis.

Where can my company get help with implementing social media in the contact center?

Although it is still a relatively young technology, social media experts and consulting practices are emerging. Often, however, consultants concentrate on the marketing aspects of social media, rather than the complete customer experience. For that, look for support from practices with a combination of contact center, social media, and communications consulting expertise. To address this emerging consulting requirement in the market, Avaya has built a consulting practice focused on social media and is leveraging its extensive expertise in customer service to help customers navigate the social media space successfully. [A]

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