

A Guide to Supporting Your Customers With Twitter

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Introduction

Twitter is closing in on 200 million members. That's a lot of people vocalizing their opinions and experiences each day. Chances are more than a few tweeters have mentioned your brand or talked about your product or service already. But while Twitter has proven itself as an amazingly powerful marketing tool, the biggest opportunity businesses have when it comes to Twitter is integrating it into a total multi-channel support strategy.

Today, customers are engaging with brands through multiple channels. Email, voice, online chat, forums, knowledge bases and social networks are all active channels through which organizations receive comments, complaints, and questions.

Zendesk enables companies to capture all these conversations in one place, harnessing the voice of their customers for product improvement and positive word of mouth.

Since each month almost 20 percent of people who use Twitter are seeking customer support from a business, Twitter should be at the front line of your customer support.

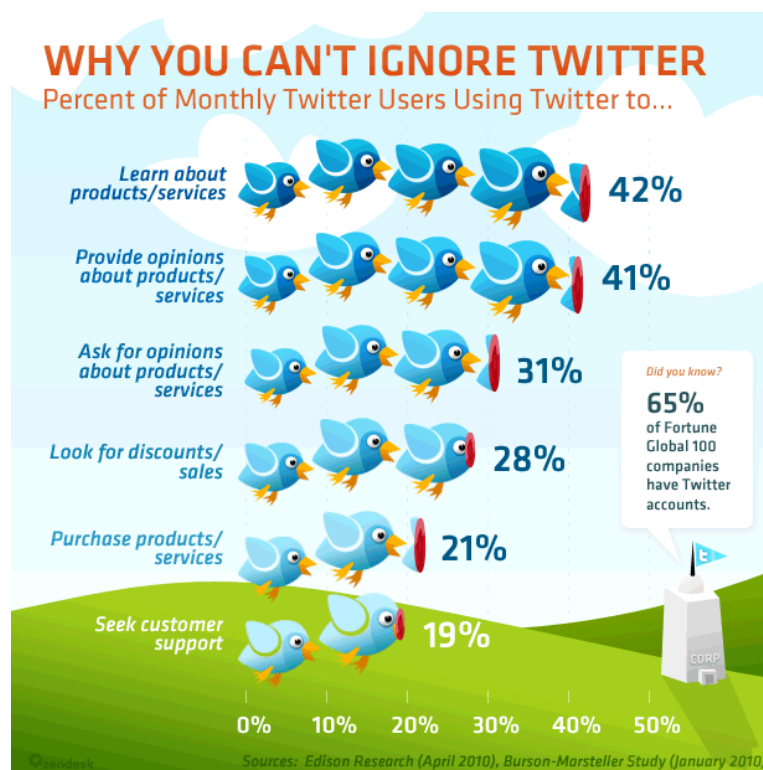


Figure 1 – Percentage of monthly Twitter users using Twitter for business
Source: Edison Research (April 2010)

Research on Customer Service and user behavior on Twitter is abundant with evidence that people are craving opportunities to engage and connect with brands and businesses.

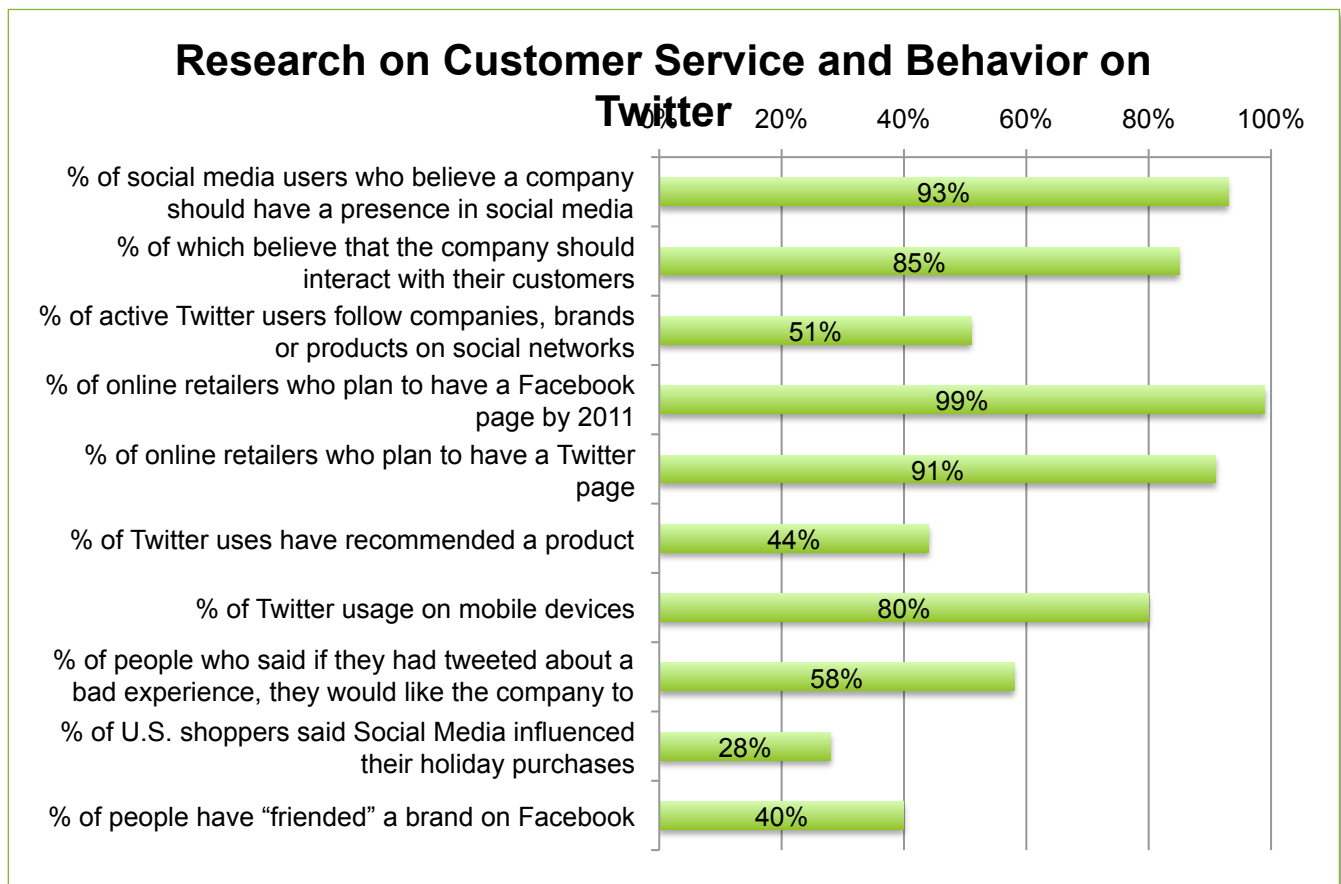


Figure 2 – Research on customer service and user behavior on Twitter

Source: <http://ismdealers.com/social-media-stats-and-why-dealers-should-care/>

When well integrated, Twitter can streamline your whole customer service experience and bolster your team's effectiveness. And that's important when you consider that 7,000 consumers ranked the majority of 154 brands as "okay" to "very poor," according to a recent Forrester Research report. In fact, only 6 percent of firms ended up in the "excellent" column for its customer experience. These staggering statistics illustrate that huge gains are to be made by differentiating your business with positive, proactive customer service that can be accomplished through a tool such as Twitter.

Support is all about solving problems, helping your customers figure out new features, processing returns quickly, or resolving payment issues. When carried out in a public forum, such as Twitter, these interactions also help promote your business. Whether it's thanking someone for recommending you or answering their questions, Twitter is a very powerful way to publicly engage and support your customers.

Moreover, Twitter is a support channel that can save your company time and money. Customer service calls can last anywhere from a few seconds to a few hours. According to research by [Benchmark Portal](#), the average customer service call time is [5.97 minutes](#). Face-to-face customer service costs a company the most money, followed by phone calls. By using Twitter, customer service issues can be identified immediately and resolved at a very low cost in a fraction of the time.

Getting Started

It's very easy to feel swamped and bombarded by all the messages you receive each day. Whether you're in marketing, communications, public relations or customer service there's no doubt people are challenging you with questions from all directions.

Zendesk is a web-based, multi-channel support tool you can use to collect all these conversations together and make sense of them. Moreover, because these channels support and encourage two-way interactions, how you engage people in a multi-channel environment is crucial.

Evaluate Your Twitter Presence

Before you can start you need to make sure everyone in your company understands what Twitter is, and why you're offering customer service through it.

Run a Twitter search on <http://search.twitter.com> for your brand and product names to see if people are talking about you already, and if so how many mentions you are receiving. Mentions may be your @TwitterName or just your brand name without the @ sign, so look for both.

If you want to widen the search to other social networks try <http://socialmention.com> as a free tool to start with. There are hundreds of social media tools out there both free and paid you can use to search, review, and analyze conversations and mentions of your brand online. A good place to search through reviews and opinions is oneforty.com which will help you select the best tool to trial for your organizations needs.

Next, identify what percentage of the tweets mentioning your brand are questions seeking support, general comments or conversations that may not need to involve you.

Zendesk's Twitter integration lets you create custom searches for your brand name, product names or perhaps a common question phrase. Your social media manager or customer service agents monitoring the feed can then very easily convert that tweet to a ticket in your help desk. The ticket can be assigned to anyone in your company to reply to. The customer receives a tweet or direct message (DM) from you with the answer and a link to the full ticket in your Zendesk help desk.

Here is Zendesk's Twitter search feed. The green icons show the tweet has been converted to a ticket in our help desk

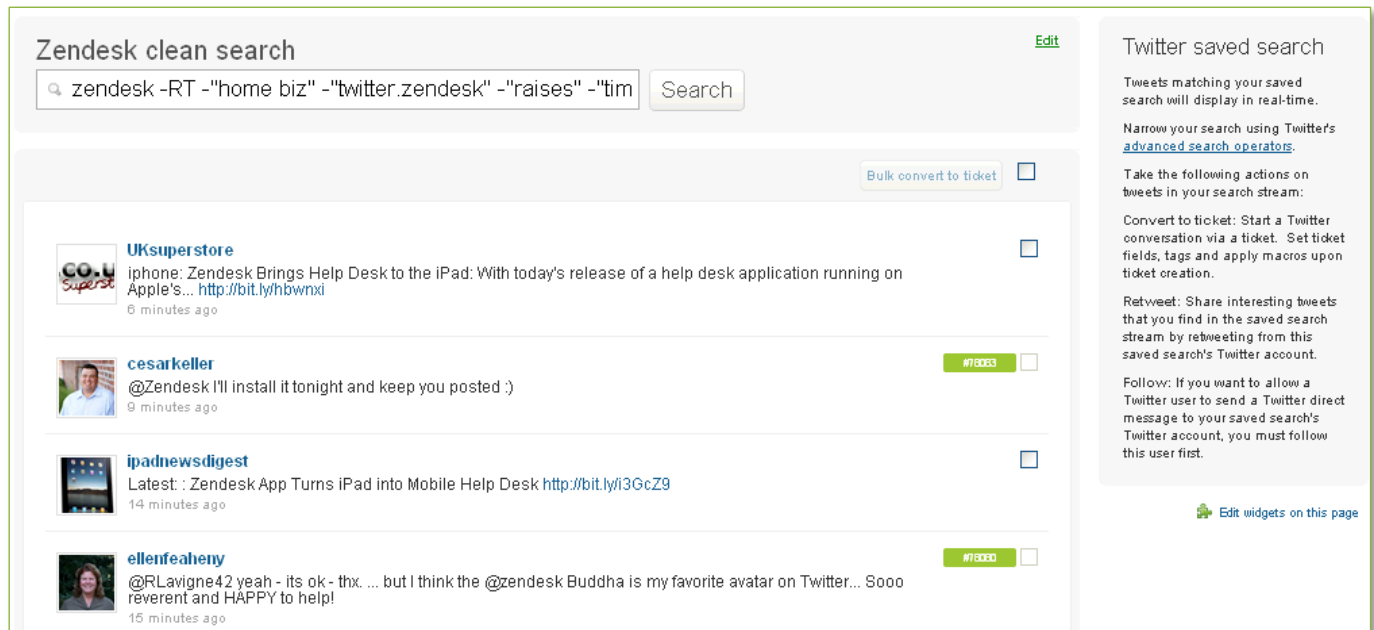


Figure 3 – Twitter search feed within Zendesk

With this tight integration, companies are no longer faced with diverting questions from Twitter to an email address or a phone number. This saves the customer any additional steps in order to reach the right person and likely results in shorter resolution times.

Team Members

It's important to identify the key departments and staff members in your organization who are directly impacted by the use of social media as a support channel. These are the people who will help you deploy and maintain your social media strategy. That said, it's important everyone in your organization understands how they can help make a difference and contribute to the program.

The key people to include in upholding your company's day-to-day social media activity should include a couple of support agents and at least one person from your marketing or public relations team. These are the people who will be responsible for listening and responding to customers and will help you develop a consistent approach.

Spruce Up Your Twitter Profile

You may already have a company Twitter profile, but if you haven't created it yet, think carefully about the @Name you want to use.

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Comcast has the handle @Comcast but most of the dialog happens on @Comcastcares. Dell has @DellTechCenter as its Twitter support channel and HP has @HPSupport. Dominos and 37 Signals, however, only use their company name: @Dominos and @37signals respectively.

Some of the larger brands on Twitter such as @Ford have corporate stars like @Scottmonty, while Honda has @Alicia_at_Honda. Creating handles that are this personal help customers feel they have a more personal relationship with the company.

Comcast has really set the bar high when it comes to taking a personal approach to customer service via Twitter. For instance, [@ComcastCares](#) is the main support account, but its customer support staff also have individual Twitter profiles, such as [@ComcastBill](#). This means agents can personally engage and reply to questions just as they would be doing in a traditional help desk or call center environment.

Update your Twitter bio and background image to promote your customer service on Twitter. Your Twitter page is a key branding opportunity and sets the tone for your customer's Twitter experience with you. Many people refer to a Twitter bio and the Twitter page for links to resources, your website and the people behind the account.

Make sure it's clear to your followers that they can @mention you and ask a question or give feedback. For example, here is [Zendesk's Twitter](#) background:



Figure 4 – Zendesk profile on Twitter

Meanwhile, this page offers a long list of background designs and examples. You could also add pictures of the key people tweeting from your account to your background.

If you don't have 24-hour support, then you might like to include your office hours in your background and/or bio so customers know they probably won't get a reply if it's late at night where you are based.

How Quickly Do You Need to Reply

With Twitter you only have 140 characters to help a customer resolve their issue, so questions and answers must be very short and to the point. Add to that a certain expectation that Twitter is real-time and customers will expect a timely reply from you.

The number of people using Twitter from mobile devices is increasing. Recently Twitter CEO [Dick Costolo revealed](#) that 40 percent of all tweets come from mobile devices. This means people are far more likely to tweet you a question while they are in store, in their car or on the train. Replying two hours later might mean you missed your chance to resolve their issue as they were en route to your business. But every company's customer profile will be different so get to know your audience to further understand what their expectations are.

Promote Your New Support Channel

Now it's time to start conversations about your products or services.

Here's a quick fire list of 10 ways you can promote your Twitter support channel:

1. Newsletter feature or sidebar banner
2. Website banner or icon
3. In-app notifications
4. Email signatures
5. Business cards and other collateral
6. Write a blog post
7. Have call center staff notify customers
8. Add "Need Help? Tweet me @mybrand" stickers to your cars or packaging
9. Traditional offline media advertising
10. Corporate swag – T-shirts for conference staff and customers

New Zealand Post uses Zendesk for Twitter. View the full case study at <http://www.zendesk.com/customers>.

Rob Holmes at New Zealand Post says they have two people monitoring their Twitter account through Hootsuite and Zendesk.

Using Hootsuite's Zendesk button they push tweets to the helpdesk for the customer service team to respond. They deal with about five support related tweets per day.

Once the tickets are created escalating them becomes a breeze as they follow the same workflow as other requests.

Proactive Support

Support is more than just answering questions, it's about being proactive and offering customers information and resources to help them get the most benefit and have the best possible experience with your product or service.

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Create content programs that showcase your company's thought leadership and teach people how to use your products or services in new ways. This might be a daily tip tweet, a blog post highlighting a unique feature of your product and how to use it or perhaps a customer story about how they use your product.

In each case your content will ignite questions and ideas creating further opportunities for you to help your customers.

Find your industry hashtag. A word with a # sign in front of it like #custserv creates a clickable link in your tweet. People can click the hashtag to find all the tweets that contain the same tag. These discussions enable your brand to participate in broader topic and industry based conversations.

Start conversations by asking questions. Search for industry related topics you could discuss, think about future trends and how your customers may or may not be preparing for them.

With your Zendesk for Twitter integration create a couple of searches for common questions such as, "What's the best app for..." or "Where can I buy a in Vancouver?" This tactic widens your scope enabling you to answer related questions from people that might not be your customer now but certainly could be.

How to Handle Complaints on Twitter

How you handle customer complaints on Twitter is crucial.

Frank Eliason who reinvented Customer Service at Comcast with @Comcastcares is now at Citi but has some wise words on this topic. Check out this video interview with Frank <http://www.ragan.com/Main/Video/1482.aspx>

Some quick tips when dealing with customer conflicts on Twitter are:

- Say sorry and acknowledge the problem
- Speed is imperative, respond within a few minutes if you can, especially for complaints
- Be open and transparent
- Explain what happened the best you can and resolve the matter quickly

When customers see you're taking action they will start to relax and work with you to resolve the issue. If the problem requires a fast resolution and they don't hear back from you, the situation can escalate very quickly into negative blog posts, more tweets and your competition might even wade in to offer their solution.

Smarter Not Harder

Once you start growing an active community it's likely some people will contribute more than others. They're the people always replying to your questions, making comments and suggestions. They may even answer questions on your behalf.

Peer-to-peer recommendations are the most highly trusted. 78 percent of consumers trust peer recommendations, whereas only 14 percent of people trust advertisements. So any time one of your customers answers another customers question, recommends or refers someone to you; make sure you show your appreciation.

Your knowledge base and forums offers customers a self-service option but they are also a great resource to refer people to on Twitter. Using your Zendesk Macros you can easily create a set of canned responses to common questions you receive directing people to the appropriate resource in your knowledge base or even a discussion on your forums.

Measure Your Performance Via Social Media

It's important to collect some basic statistics from the start so you can benchmark your progress and show the rest of your team how the activity is progressing.

In Zendesk you can create macros to tag tickets created from tweets when you close the tickets. Once tickets are tagged you can run a report in Zendesk to show how many tickets from tweets you're dealing with each day. If you also tag tickets manually with the question topic you can start to gather information on frequently asked questions and begin to spot what additional resources you may want to start sharing with your followers.

Start building a basic Twitter activity report. You might get this data from your Twitter monitoring tool or with a free tool like [Tweetcounter](#):

- How many tweets you posted each day
- How many times people @mentioned you
- How many brand mentions you get each day
- How many retweets you receive
- How many new followers you get each day.

Conclusion

In the past customers mostly called or visited companies for support. Today customers can call, email, use web chat, forums and social networks like Twitter, so a multi-channel support strategy is essential.

Zendesk is a web-based application that's easy to use and set up. It's a support ticket system and self-service customer support platform to manage a multi-channel support strategy. It's well suited to any company focused on developing an active community of customers and fans. The fact that Twitter integrates seamlessly into Zendesk is an immense advantage to any organization looking to integrate support through social media channels into its overarching customer service platform.

Social media is not going away and it is no longer an activity restricted to the tech savvy. In fact, 93 percent of social media users believe a company should have a presence in social media, while 85 percent believe that the company should interact with their customers. Almost 60 percent of people who have tweeted about a bad customer experience feel the company should respond on Twitter (source: <http://ismdealers.com/social-media-stats-and-why-dealers-should-care/>).

But great customer service on Twitter is not just about answering questions and defusing or recovering from complaints. You have the opportunity to add value to your customer experience by sharing knowledge and resources that help your customers learn more about your products or services; answering questions they might not have asked yet; and integrating it into your multi-channel support program

Zendesk's web-based help desk funnels all your customer conversations into one place. The efficiency and transparency of a central point of contact enables your staff to proactively engage customers. Every interaction is an opportunity. Missing a tweet or a customer's email could create a poor experience and result in a lost sale or bad word of mouth.

Everything you say on Twitter is public and promotional. Every message is attached to your brand so while support is often a one-on-one exchange, handling that publicly shows everyone else that you care, are friendly, willing to help and be supportive.

People value peer recommendations far more than advertisements so positive brand sentiment online and consistent customer experiences not only attracts new customers but retains current customers too.

Twitter is not a silver bullet nor the only solution for social customer support. But there is no denying the power and impact it can have on your business as a part of your multi-channel support offering.

How to Get Started

Visit us to sign up for a free 30-day trial with full access to all features at www.zendesk.com/signup.
Contact Zendesk to get started at +1 (415) 418-7506 or email sales@zendesk.com.

About Zendesk

Zendesk is the proven cloud-based help desk software that is the fastest way to enable great customer service in rapidly growing companies. Zendesk is so easy to use, it's loved by support teams and their customers worldwide. More than 10,000 organizations including Adobe, MSNBC, Sony, and Groupon, trust Zendesk with their most valuable asset: their customers. Now, organizations can deliver exceptional support across the web, email, and social media. Founded in 2007, Zendesk is funded by Charles River Ventures, Benchmark Capital and Matrix Partners. Learn more at www.zendesk.com.

Resources and Further Reading

Twitter Background Design examples: <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/09/18/effective-twitter-backgrounds-examples-and-best-practices/>

Dick Costello Twitter Interview: <http://mashable.com/2011/01/07/40-of-all-tweets-come-from-mobile/>

<http://mashable.com/2009/05/09/twitter-customer-service/>

<http://www.openforum.com/idea-hub/topics/the-world/article/how-to-use-twitter-to-support-customers-guy-kawasaki>

<http://www.searchengineguide.com/paul-jahn/using-twitter-for-customer-service.php>

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<http://econsultancy.com/us/blog/5666-customer-service-across-social-media>

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<http://mashable.com/2011/01/07/40-of-all-tweets-come-from-mobile/>