What Customers Really Want from Your Social Brand

A little trust, a little love, and a lot of convenience

Contents

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New forces are changing the rules of customer engagement.

We're entering a new digital age—
one that's focused primarily on
individual consumer experiences—
which is changing how brands and
customers interact online.

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We call this the Age of the Individual

In this age, it's no longer enough to simply offer a great customer experience. This experience must be relevant, timely, and completely centered on the unique needs of each customer.

Customers now expect businesses to not only know their needs, but to anticipate them in advance. And when they choose to interact with your brand, they do so whenever and however they want—whether that's shopping from their phones, walking into a store, or contacting someone directly.

In fact, 85% of consumers want an experience that is a blend of both digital and physical interactions, all tailored to their personal preferences.[1] And this is true of customers of all generations, from baby boomers to millennials and Gen Z.

This makes context more important than channels. You must meet customers in their moment and not yours.

In the Age of the Individual, consumers seek control.

While customer demands have certainly heightened around technology, people are also taking back control of their constantly connected lives.

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One in five people have taken a "digital detox"[2] and 78% of people say they feel happier about their online usage after using a digital wellbeing app.[3]

Concerns about data privacy are also rising. According to our Digital 2020 report, 64% of people around the globe say they are concerned about data privacy.[4]

Even Gen Z—the most connected people on the planet—are disconnecting, with 47% installing ad blocking software in the last year.[5] And they're not alone; every generation is trying to take control of their online life.

All generations want more control in their online life

SCREEN TIME TRACKING
Percent who say they have used their mobile device to track their screen time or set limits for certain apps

Age	Percent
16 – 24	28%
25 – 34	25
35 – 44	18
45 – 54	13
55 – 64	13
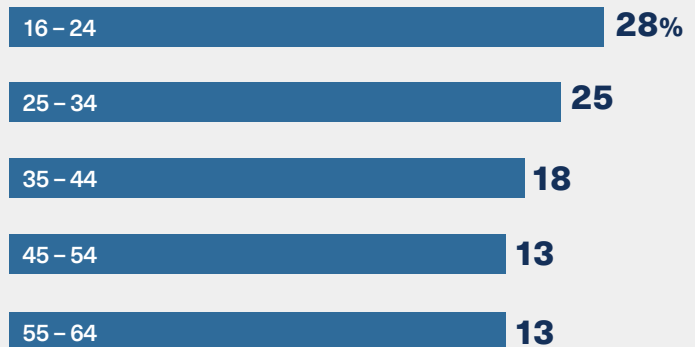
Source: GlobalWebIndex

Hearing these concerns loud and clear, social platforms are taking action. Instagram and Facebook are starting to remove Like counts in an effort to reduce user anxiety and social pressure. Instagram launched Threads, a camera-first messaging app that allows users to connect with close friends in a dedicated, private space. And LinkedIn launched Teammates, a feature that helps users see more content from people they work with in real life.

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With all these changes, it can be hard to know what actions to take.

So what *won't* be changing?

The 3 C's of Customer Engagement

Focusing on the fundamentals of customer engagement—key areas that won't be changing anytime soon—will give you solid ground on which to build a lasting marketing strategy.
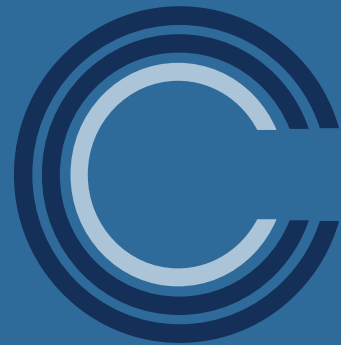
In this guide, we'll look at the 3 C's of customer engagement:

CONFIDENCE   **CONNECTION**   **CONVENIENCE**
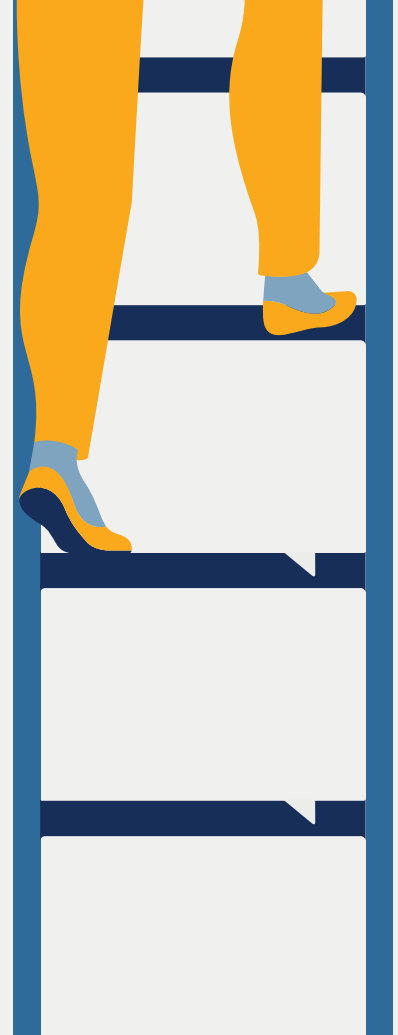
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1

Rebuild Confidence

Take bold steps to earn customer and employee trust with a connected organizational culture.

Trust is the foundation of any relationship.

And with rising concerns about privacy and global mistrust in mainstream institutions, many consumers don't believe companies have their best interests at heart.

This must be fixed. And when you want to fix something, it's tempting to turn to shiny new trends—like jumping on the newest platforms, swapping 1:1 connections in favor of automated content, or chasing reach instead of real relationships.

These short-term tactics only generate more meaningless content consumption, not lasting customer confidence.

Brands that focus on earning (and retaining) trust through long-term strategies will be rewarded with generational relevance and stronger relationships with customers.

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Build a trusted brand from the inside out.

Employees can be invaluable beacons of trust for customers on social media. According to Edelman, 54% of all global consumers see employees as "extremely credible" sources for learning about companies—more credible than journalists, industry analysts, or celebrities.[6]

A strong internal culture will empower and inspire employees to advocate on your organization's behalf, whether it's an employee sharing their appreciation for your company's values or your CEO taking a bold stance on a timely issue.

Lead from the top.

To earn trust with today's consumers, business leaders need to speak up.

According to Edelman, 92% of employees expect their company's CEO to speak up on societal issues.[7] And building confidence from the top down is particularly important for earning the trust of the largest consumer group out there: millennials. Only 37% of millennials believe business leaders make a positive impact on the world, and more than a quarter don't trust business leaders as sources of reliable and accurate information.[8]

patagonia

### Wins social accolades and boosts retention with progressive employee benefits

One Patagonia employee took to LinkedIn to share her gratitude for the company's parental policies and to encourage others to follow suit, noting that Patagonia has a 100% retention rate for employees returning from maternity leave. The post has generated over 87,000 reactions on LinkedIn, and is a clear example of the internal culture that has landed Patagonia on the 2019 Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For list.[9]

87,725 · 1,916 Comments

Reactions

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2
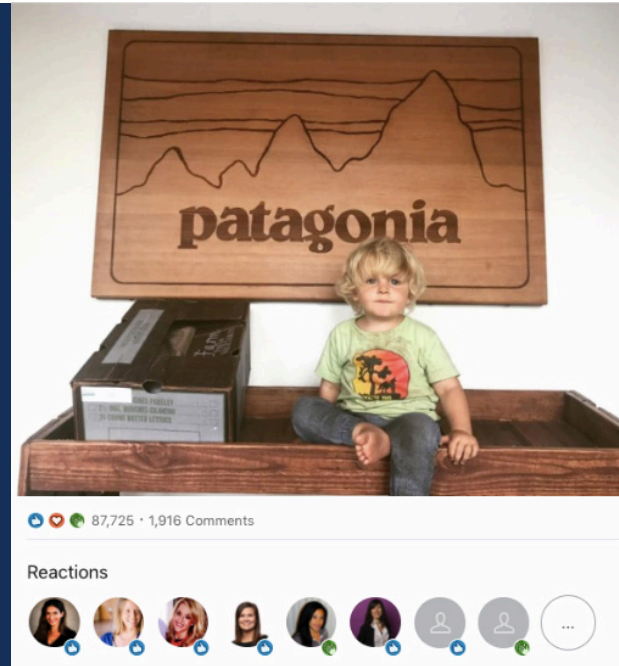
Create Connection

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Gain meaningful connections through emotional content and 1:1 interactions
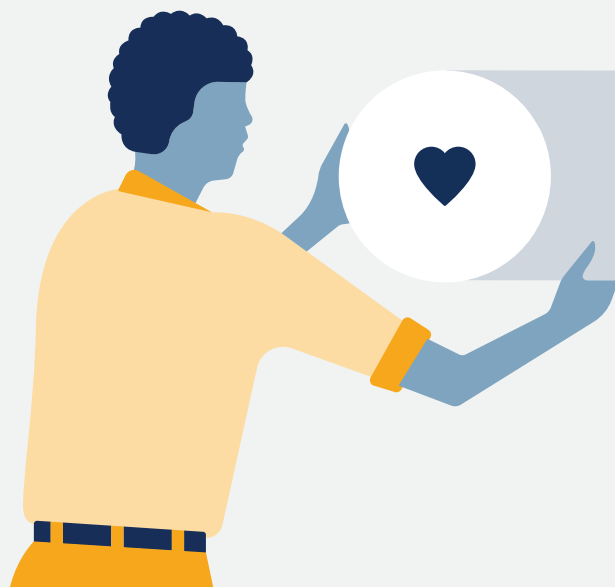
The data is clear: Customers are looking for less corporate content and empty experiences—and more meaningful connections.

With over a decade of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram under our belts, our personal social networks have grown to hundreds (sometimes thousands) of friends and followers.

This explains why 63% of people now prefer sharing and talking about content in private channels like messaging apps: Customers want smaller circles and more relevant content on social media.[10] Messaging is so prevalent that 25% of smartphone users don't make a phone call at all in a given week.[11]

It's a given that businesses have to be available on messaging apps to connect with customers.

But you shouldn't completely abandon public social feeds.

Data shows that public social feeds remain a critical place for customer acquisition and engagement.

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In our annual global study of digital habits, we found that 52% of brand discovery online still happens in public social feeds.[12] Finding entertaining content, reading news, researching and asking questions about products—these are all still major motivations for using social media, and are just as central to the customer experience as direct messaging.[13]

Focus on emotional experiences

Whether you're engaging publicly or privately, if you're not focusing on the emotional experience you're creating for your customers, you're focusing on the wrong thing. In every customer experience index Forrester has ever done, emotion has a bigger impact on loyalty than anything else, including effectiveness and ease.

But a strong emotional connection isn't created from just one experience—it happens over a series of interactions. Forrester found that leading brands delivered 22 emotionally positive experiences for every negative one. Laggards, on the other hand, only delivered three emotionally positive experiences.[14]

Simple human interactions go a long way in creating emotion. A positive experience could be a piece of content that tells an incredible story, a direct 1:1 interaction on Instagram, or an experience with an empathetic support person.

Balance automation and 1:1 human connection

People and businesses now exchange over 20 billion messages each month on Facebook Messenger—ten times more than they did in 2016—and responding to these individual messages at scale is a challenge for businesses of every size.[15]

Messaging bots can help reduce the workload, but too much automation can have negative consequences. In a survey conducted by Invoca and Harris Poll, 52% of consumers say they get frustrated when brands don't offer any human interaction.[16] And according to GlobalWebIndex's 2020 Consumer Trends report, consumers in the top income bracket are nearly twice as likely to prefer human interaction for customer service.[17]

Use a blend of automation and human connection to build strong connections on private channels. Bots are best for addressing the most common customer queries, the ones that come up time and time again, but real people still need to be available to handle the more nuanced customer inquiries.

Attracts competitive candidates by gamifying public and private engagement

Leading hedge fund Citadel created the Data Open, a tournament aimed at identifying and recruiting the brightest young minds in math, statistics, and data science. They used public social feeds to raise awareness and create excitement about the tournament, and on private channels, including an invite-only Facebook Group, they helped students connect with each other and get career advice.

They also built a Facebook chatbot that challenged students to a series of complex math problems—and rewarded students who completed the problems successfully by sending their resumes to the front of the line for consideration.

As a result, the number of applications for entry-level positions increased by 74%, and Citadel saw a 200% higher click-through rate compared to previous paid advertising efforts around the tournament. Students interested in the Data Open spent 149% more time on the Citadel website than other visitors, and the Facebook chatbot garnered over 5,500 valuable new conversations.[18]

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3

Increase Convenience

Reduce customer friction by focusing on the future heart of all customer interactions: social

Customers have always been drawn to convenience. And with mobile and social now at the center of customer engagement, their expectations of less friction and fast, seamless interactions are even higher.

Small frustrations in the customer journey come with a high cost.

As the CMO Council found, 84% of customers feel frustrated when they have to restart the conversation or explain their issue again in a different channel when they contact a brand.[19] If a customer is being passed from a direct message, to an email, to a phone call—the experience must be unified. Any broken loops in the engagement process make the majority of customers think of switching brands.

Time has become a key competitive advantage.

Forrester found that 73% of customers say that "a company valuing their time" is the most critical part of good customer experience.[20] And companies like Amazon have set the bar high for other brands to follow when it comes to speed and convenience.

Social media also continues to compress the customer journey from days to just hours. A customer can instantly discover your brand, evaluate it against competitors, purchase a product, and request support—all on social.

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Empower 1:1 engagement at scale.

Every employee in your business is now at the front line of customer engagement thanks to social media. To make this experience as seamless and consistent as possible, every department in your organization—from customer support agents and recruiters to sales teams and leadership—needs tools and training for interacting with customers on social.

Protect your brand by establishing organization-wide governance for 1:1 engagement on social. This includes a social media policy that outlines how employees are welcome to use social media, what kind of use is discouraged, what process they should follow if they are unsure of what's appropriate, and the consequences for social media misuse. Security and compliance tools should also be implemented across your organization to prevent your brand from being exposed to hackers and cyberattacks.

MELIÃ
HOTELS & RESORTS

Expands social beyond marketing to win new customers and employees

Meliá uses Hootsuite Amplify to expand social beyond marketing to their employees and hotels. Employees are pushed to a stream of brand-approved updates, which they can reshare with their own following—exponentially increasing Meliá's reach. And they activate their 370 hotels on social with tools and training.

Meliá's HR department is also a big supporter of social. In one year, they almost doubled the number of candidates per job offer. In addition, their CEO is now fully active on social—and answers questions with the hashtag #AskCEOMelia. This focus on organization-wide advocacy has led to a 30% increase in website visits, more followers, and increased brand recognition.[21]

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Unify measurement to track clear customer insights and business outcomes

To meet and exceed the expectations of your customers, you have to know who they are and what they want in the first place.

Get a holistic view of your customer by gathering data at every stage of the social customer journey and analyzing it alongside web data, digital analytics, and CRM systems. This will deepen your understanding of their needs, so you can reduce friction across the entire customer journey, from awareness to purchase to advocacy.

JAGUAR

Tracks the entire customer journey on social

Automotive brand Jaguar Land Rover undertook a large project using Hootsuite Impact to consolidate all its organic social data with acquisition data on a global scale: all regions, brands, and vehicle models.

The impact? Drastically simplified reporting that helps them track the entire customer journey—from brand engagement to brochure downloads and test drives to repurchase.

Now that the company has consolidated social data, the next project is to integrate this data. That's not an easy task for a global brand, but it's an investment that will give them a clear view of the entire customer experience.

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The future of customer engagement is social

The opportunity isn't to just use social to achieve a few business objectives.

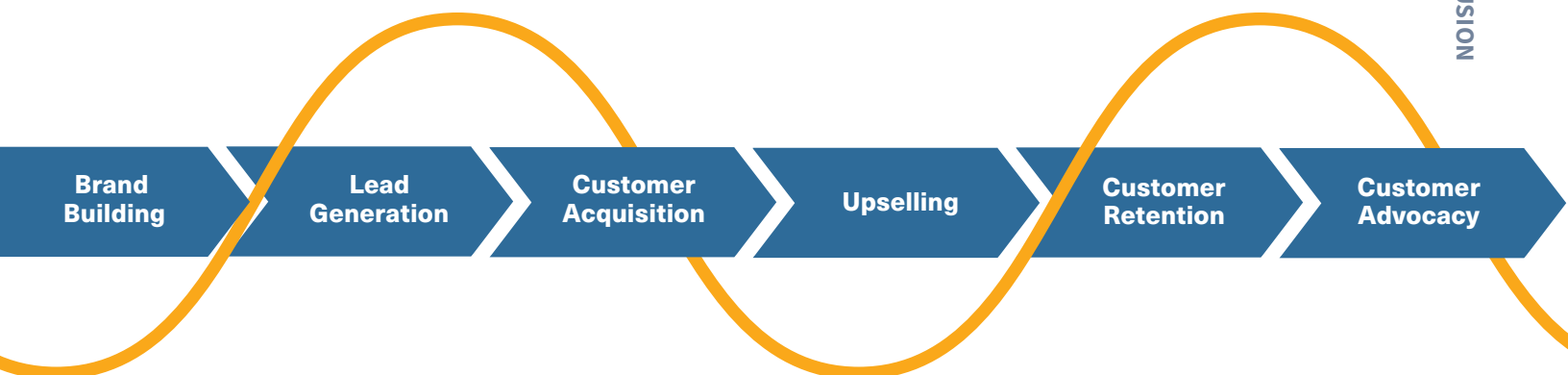**It's to use social to transform *how* we do business.**

Early adopters of social were right to think bigger than just conversion metrics and direct sales.

Social is bigger than a channel, bigger than a marketing strategy. Because it touches every stage of the customer lifecycle, social offers broad value for building stronger brands, transforming customer and employee experience, and unlocking unparalleled customer insights.

This means that it's short-sighted to value social based on only direct conversions, as successful social media strategies lift all channels in the marketing mix. For example, search and social—both from an organic and paid perspective—work together in the customer purchase journey, with Forrester finding that 56% of consumers use both channels in complementary ways.[22] Facebook has been shown to prime audiences to drive higher responses to TV advertising. And campaigns that use a cross-channel approach with social and other forms of marketing activity produce higher ROI.

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Today, customer engagement is often an organizational island. But social can be the golden thread that unites your company with your customers at every stage.

| Brand Building | Lead Generation | Customer Acquisition | Upselling | Customer Retention | Customer Advocacy |

Connecting social to every department and transforming your customer relationships are lofty goals.

But they're achievable—and when you're ready, we've got the tools and expertise to help you make them a reality.

To learn more about how Hootsuite can help your organization unlock the value of social, contact your customer success manager or visit hootsuite.com/enterprise to request a demo.
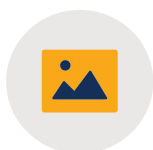
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How Hootsuite Helps

Benchmark your social strategy against industry peers

Use Hootsuite's Social Maturity Assessment to benchmark your organization's technology, strategy, and measurement practices against 500+ organizations in 12 industries. See how your organization compares by requesting a complimentary custom assessment, including personalized recommendations from an expert at Hootsuite.

Contact us to request a custom assessment

Hootsuite Ads

Improve the effectiveness of your organic and paid ads with our automated ad solution.

Learn more

Hootsuite Amplify

Expand your social reach by empowering your employees with our scalable advocacy solution.

Learn more

Hootsuite Impact

Make data-driven business decisions with our social analytics solution.

Learn more

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Endnotes

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