

# Via Rail – Human Way of Traveling Thanks to Social Media

There are times when all it takes to resolve a customer complaint is just a tweet. This is the precise objective at Via Rail as the railway company aims to resolve dissatisfaction that customers encounter in the train before they alight.

This is also one way through which social media is playing a key role in the way businesses relate with their clients. Despite the fact that Twitter and Facebook have been there for a while, there is still a lot that companies that want to interact with their customers can learn.



According to Sylvie Bourget, Via Rail's chief sales and marketing officer, companies should try and adapt to the customer needs in terms of how they want to communicate with the company. Bourget says that aim of Via Rail is to enable a more human way of travelling for Canadian people, and that is what has inspired the approach.

It does not matter whether the problem is a Wi-Fi connection or a shortage of refreshments. All that a customer needs to do is to send a message to Via Rail's Twitter account and they will get the attention of a customer service representative, according to Bourget.

Bourget adds that Via Rail aims to answer the tweet in a maximum of 10 minutes during their operation hours. In case the matter is an urgent one, the rail company will get in touch with the service manager of the train so that the customer complaint is attended to at the customer's seat.

According to Patrick Tomasso, creative content associate director at Grip Ltd., a Toronto-based company that focuses on creating content for companies to use on the social media, some businesses have challenges when it comes to interacting sincerely and personally with their clients.

Tomasso argues that social media was not designed for companies to post ads but rather for friends to interact with each other. Therefore he suggests that a human voice is very important here. He warns it should not be robotic. Companies should treat Facebook and Twitter not as a place to launch their products but as a kind of creative entertainment platform.

The most common mistakes that companies make is failing to offer timely responses to customer

questions and complaints. According to Syneyeve Matrix, Queen's University media professor, these recycled responses end up clogging their Twitter feeds, which projects the companies as being lazy.



Matrix further adds that there is a real danger of reputation damage happening online in an instant. This, she says, is brought about by companies giving up so much control regarding the conversation. It is important that, sometimes, businesses learn how to control themselves, and this is more important with regard to timing their social networking posts in the event of a PR crisis.

Over the holidays, Porter Airlines was in for some criticisms for sending seasonal greetings while scores of travelers could not find answers regarding their missing luggage. Ezra Hansen is one of the travelers who was caught up in the luggage mishap. He says that his perception of Porter Airlines was soured when the company posted a Happy New Year message on their Instagram account. According to Mr. Hansen, Porter Airlines carried on with other communications as if they were not facing any issue. He sees this as being insulting.

Additionally, companies should think beyond Twitter and Facebook for ideas. There are several alternatives that provide visual components that are more appealing for customer interaction. Some great options include Tumblr, a microblogging website, and Pinterest, a photo-sharing website.

Snapchat, an app for mobile photo messaging, is another option for smaller companies to experiment with the way they interact with their customers. Through the app, a business can send a 10-minute video or an image to recipients who then view the 'Snaps' before they are gone forever.



It's easy for companies to get carried away given the huge number of social media options. However, it is important that users who are just starting out keep it simple as well as strategic.

In Via Rail, there are six customer service employees spread out across the country and their sole aim is to respond to Twitter queries on an alternating schedule. There is also a team that is tasked with managing the social media editorial content, such as special offers and advertisements, according to

Bourget.

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