The (eventual) rise of the social command centre in South Africa

By Mike Oelschig   8 Jan 2018

Terms like "command centre" or "digital centre of excellence" have been in the South African marketing landscape's lexicon for a few years now; but for the most part that is largely where the concept has remained. Until now.

Mike Oelschig, head of advisory at Cerebra.

The past 10 years have seen unparalleled disruption, spurred on by the social web and mobile accessibility that together fundamentally changed how organisations connect with their customers.

In this "social era of business", more and more customers are migrating to social media as their preferred channel of brand engagement and query resolution. Additionally, they are also demanding more authentic engagement, quicker responses, better quality content, profound insight and an intentional recognition of their humanity and individuality.

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The problem however, is that for the most part corporate South Africa haven't evolved their thinking to meet the service demands of today's customer. Community management in the current context of corporate South African is broken – for a few reasons.

Problem 1: Community management is one thing, with multiple functions

Because community management is a relatively new function in the marketing landscape, and because it overlaps with traditionally siloed business units like marketing, corporate communication and even HR and product development, agencies and corporates alike often expect community managers to cover a multitude of responsibilities.

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These include content planning, content strategy, content creation, media planning, media management, customer care, influencer engagement, crisis communication, data analysis, reporting, and more.

As a consequence, often very junior, ill-equipped resources find themselves compromised in situations that should require more experienced, strategic input (just think of how often brands are embarrassed online by poorly thought-out content or short-sighted customer engagement) and genuinely skilled and experienced community managers are often asked to do very menial, FAQ-style customer engagement which can be a poor use of their time.

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The organisations that employ these rare employees often see them leaving and churn is unhealthily high in this category.

Problem 2: Social service is the same as your call centre

Historically, a good grasp of spoken English and the ability to understand and use a company's customer service systems were about the only requirements for a customer service agent in a call centre environment. This is no longer true.

With customer service through social, most customer engagements are public and thus a potential reputational threat if it is not handled well. Of course, it is also an opportunity to publically demonstrate your commitment to customer centricity.

Social media war room.

Community managers are as much your brand's external spokespeople as the corporate communications or PR teams – who by all accounts are senior staff with very specific training and experience in dealing with external stakeholders. And yet, community managers aren't classed anywhere near as important.

Problem 3: Community management is a necessary evil

Most brands at least acknowledge that their customers are moving to social. It's what they do with that knowledge that is the problem.

> *Just put the intern on the channel, he "gets Facebook" is what many leaders think and do. It is seen as a tick-box exercise, not the strategic imperative that it should be.*

Great community management, with the right structure and resourcing, can be an incredibly powerful sales, customer engagement and business intelligence tool.

The solution: The social command centre

As the head of Cerebra's consulting division, I have been involved with, consulted to, designed, or set up no less than 5 social media command centres in the last 12 months. Corporate South Africa is waking up to the need for a centralised,

department-agnostic and strategically driven command centre that handles all social and digital customer engagements.

Benefits of the command centre model:

- ### *Driving efficiencies*

  Through a command centre model, community managers have measureable, business critical KPIs that are aimed at driving constant improvement.

  Response times decrease, the quality of responses improve, processes are continuously optimised and the risk of brain drain is dramatically reduced.

- ### *Employee engagement and reducing churn*

  By definition, a social command centre comes with a well thought-out, objectives-based, data-backed resourcing structure that ensures the right people, with the right experience are handling the right functions of the team. Seniors are empowered with work that correlates to their experience, and juniors have the ambition that comes with a clear growth path through the team.

- ### *Actionable business and customer insights*

  Having a team dedicated to improving the customer experience, with people skilled and engaged enough to do so, naturally results in a team that is absolutely committed to understanding the customer better. This level of insight into the customer leads to better products, better marketing and a much more customer-centric organisation all round.

In summary, not only do the benefits of this model far outweigh the costs involved, but more and more companies are going this way – so be rest assured that if your company isn't also doing so in 2018, you'll be outmatched and outclassed in customer engagement by your competitors that do.

ABOUT MIKE OELSCHIG

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