

Smart Spending: Many big retailers don't respond to customer questions on Facebook

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If you're hoping to get better customer service by posting questions to a retailer's Facebook page, be prepared for disappointment, according to a survey released today. Major retailers including J. Crew, Victoria's Secret and Radio Shack not only didn't respond to questions within two days, they actually deleted them, the customer service evaluation company STELLAService found.

The findings are something of a jolt to the idea that consumers can turn to social media to get more effective customer service. While there are still plenty of examples of consumers using both Twitter and Facebook to their advantage, this survey shows just how inconsistent the results can be, and that some are far more committed to properly playing the social networking game than others.

Only five of 20 retailers both responded within 48 hours and left customer queries on their Facebook pages: B&H Photo, Gap, Bed Bath & Beyond, JackThreads.com, and Williams-Sonoma.

Others that deleted questions from their customers, according to STELLAService: Best Buy, Crate & Barrel, Gilt.com, and Rue La La. Some, however, actually answered questions before erasing them.

Two days was plenty of time to wait for an answer, according to the company that conducted the survey.

"While retailers have enthusiastically embraced Facebook as a way to engage with consumers, many have yet to fully appreciate social media's two-way nature when it comes to providing customer service," STELLAService CEO Jordy Leiser said. "Retailers need to realize that two days in Facebook time is like two years in real-time. Consumers are used to real-time engagement with friends on Facebook, so it's unnatural to spend days waiting for any kind of response."

On the bright side, STELLAService found that B&H Photo responded the fastest – within two minutes, and Bed Bath & Beyond, Williams Sonoma, Sur La Table, and Footlocker all answered inside of 30 minutes.

Consumers appear to have the best chance of getting an answer if they post directly to a retailer's Facebook wall. Questions posted directly to the store's Facebook wall were more likely to get an answer, STELLAService found, than if they were included in the comments of a post.

Of the 20 retailers tested, 13 didn't answer a question that was posted among comments to one of their post, STELLAService said. They are Best Buy, Bose, Brooks Brothers, Cooking.com, Fab.com, Foot Locker, Gap, Gilt.com, J. Crew, One Kings Lane, Radio Shack, Sur La Table and Victoria's Secret.

Facebook as a customer service tool has not yet evolved to the point of consistency, STELLAService's Leiser said. He said that picking up the phone or using instant messaging remain more predictable, reliable methods to getting quick responses to your questions.

If you still want to use Facebook to deal with a retailer, he suggested being concise and polite, and include all relevant information needed to get an answer. If you don't hear back within 24 hours, Leiser suggested using another means to get in touch with the company.

Leiser said on his company blog that this is an opportunity for retailers to show their customers that they're serious about using social networking as a customer service tool and separate themselves from the pack. "There's no doubt that retailers are receiving questions from customers on Facebook," he said. "The questions we asked as part of this test were often stacked on top of other questions from customers. Someone is going to differentiate by going above and beyond with customer service on Facebook, and they will win sales and loyalty as a result."

Fonte: Time, 27 Mar. 2012. Disponível em: <<http://www.time.com>>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012. On-line.