

Center for Profitable Agriculture

HOW TO HANDLE COMPLAINTS AND POOR REVIEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: DIRECT MARKETING TIPS FOR SPECIALTY CROP GROWERS

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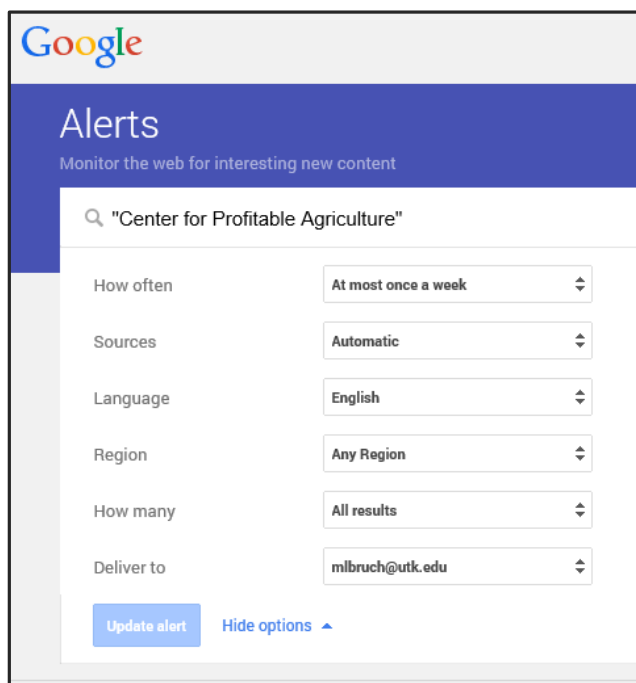
Social media is integral to today's marketing plans as a means for businesses — including specialty crop growers directly marketing to customers — to connect with, build and maintain relationships with customers. Customers can interact with businesses on social media and voice their comments, suggestions and complaints in a public forum. Many businesses encourage customers to post reviews, pictures and comments about their experiences as a means of generating word of mouth referrals and obtaining feedback on their products and services. Not all of the posts and reviews by customers are positive, however.

If handled appropriately, both positive and negative posts can create opportunities for growers to build relationships with customers.

This fact sheet provides some tips on how specialty crop growers can most effectively deal with complaints and poor reviews on social media. Several of these tips come from growers and industry partners who answered a call for tips on their associations' members' only Facebook pages. Additional information was adapted from Southern Style Hospitality, a customer service training program offered through the Center for Profitable Agriculture.

1. When available, set privacy settings carefully on social media tools to manage posts and comments.
 - Currently, some social media tools, such as Facebook, allow you to set parameters on posts and comments. In some cases, you can determine who can post, where comments are allowed and if posts have to be approved before being made public. You can set a profanity filter to various strengths and even block posts and comments containing designated words.
2. Monitor social media for reviews, comments, suggestions and complaints.
 - You can only address comments that you are aware of. Therefore, it is important to actively check and search for reviews, comments, suggestions and complaints on social media. This includes social media tools where you have actively created a presence, such as a business Facebook page or Twitter account, as well as on sites where you may not have an active presence — on a customer's blog or review sites such as Yelp or TripAdvisor.

- One monitoring method is to set up Google Alerts to help identify online activity that may need your attention. You can sign up at www.google.com/alerts to receive emails when Google finds Internet content with terms that you specify, such as your farm name, other common names for your farm or common misspellings of your farm name.



These settings allow Google Alerts to notifications to the author up to once a week about Web content mentioning the Center for Profitable Agriculture.

3. Consider a comment, suggestion or complaint as an opportunity.
 - Positive feedback helps you determine what you are doing well and what you can build upon further.
 - Receiving a complaint is an opportunity to identify an issue that may need attention within your operation to better satisfy customers and help you turn an unsatisfied customer into a loyal customer. For instance, you may have something
- going wrong and may not know it until a customer tells you. For every person who complains, typically, more than 25 do not. Those non-complainers just take their business elsewhere and likely tell their friends and family about their poor experiences at your operation. A complaint gives you an opportunity to fix a problem before you lose more customers.
4. Show you are listening to and care about your customers.
 - A comment on social media may alert you to a perception customers have about your products, service or farm. While this perception may not be accurate, it is reality to customers. Knowing what perceptions exist enables you to make changes to create a more favorable or more accurate view.
 - Choose a person on the farm staff that is patient, calm and an effective communicator to respond to social media comments. Some people are able to communicate with customers and handle customer complaints better than others.
 - Do not ignore comments (positive or negative).
 - Respond to comments and reviews publicly and in a timely manner. The sense of timeliness varies by the social media tool being used. For instance, Twitter users may expect a response more quickly than Facebook users. Both of those tools, though, require more timely responses than would typically be expected from email or a phone call.

- Do not delete comments unless they are vulgar or use profanity. When you do need to delete a post, you may want to create a post saying you are sorry a post had to be removed due to inappropriate language, etc.
 - Thank customers for positive comments by publicly responding to positive posts.
5. Respond to complaints and critical reviews professionally and then continue the conversation offline.
- Try to see the situation from the customer's point of view and understand the motivation behind the comments. Why is the customer complaining or giving a bad review? What does the customer want?



Study the infographic from ExactTarget on pages 6 and 7 called "Five Types of Social Media Complainers and How to Deal With Them."

- Take enough time to pause and carefully develop a positive, calm, nondefensive, professional response. If appropriate, visit with staff members to see if they have any additional information about a particular situation or history with the complainant to take into consideration when developing a response.
- Generate a unique social media response for each complaint. (Do not copy a generic, canned response.)
- Thank customers for taking time to provide feedback or comments. Let them know you appreciate the opportunity evaluate or improve your product or service.
- Before posting, have someone else read the response to be sure it is positive, calm, nondefensive and professional and that it cannot likely be taken out of context.
- Acknowledge the customer comment and invite the customer to speak with you offline. If the conversation is taken offline, let that be known on the original space or media so that others who may be following the conversation know how it is being handled. If appropriate, you may also wish to post a final resolution.
- You do not have to apologize for doing something wrong, if you did not. However, you should recognize that the customer may be upset, disappointed or frustrated.
- If you did do something wrong, be honest. Own up to it and apologize, if at all possible.

Drafting a response to a negative comment or poor review may be an intimidating task. A few examples may help you get started.

Example 1

Customer Sue:

It took forever to pay for the strawberries I picked at the farm yesterday. Your cashiers were so slow!

Farm Response:

Sue, thank you for letting us know that our wait times for checking out on Saturday did not meet your expectations. Your time is valuable, and we are sorry for the inconvenience. We will evaluate our checkout procedures to ensure we are as efficient as possible while making sure we maintain the quality of the berries with careful handling during the process. I would appreciate the opportunity to hear more about your experience at the farm and how we can better fulfill your needs and will send you a private message so we can connect.

Example 2

Customer John:

Don't buy your Christmas tree from these guys. I purchased mine two weeks ago, and it has already turned brown and is dropping its needles!

Farm Response:

John, I am sorry to learn your tree has not stayed fresh and green. This is certainly unusual and disappointing. We want to find out what happened and make sure it doesn't happen again. Please call the farm at your earliest convenience at ###-###-#### and ask for me (Farmer Phil) or send me an email with your phone number at Phil@treefarm.com.

Example 3

Customer Karen:

I ordered a gift basket of spiced nuts, pumpkin butter and blackberry jam more than a week ago for my mother's birthday. Her birthday party is in two days, and the order has not arrived yet.

Farm Response:

Karen, thank you for letting us know that your order is slower to arrive than expected. We are honored you chose our farm products as gifts for this special occasion, and we want to do all we can to make your gifts memorable. We will track your order and contact you shortly.

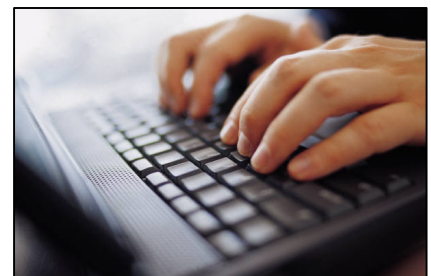
Example 4

Customer Steve:

Your blackberry price is so much higher than the frozen ones at the grocery store. It is highway robbery!

Farm Response:

Steve, you are correct in that our prices are a bit higher than the price for frozen berries at the grocery store. We feel that we are offering vine-ripe, sweet, juicy berries and a unique, authentic experience. We hope that our customers appreciate and enjoy the value of our locally grown, high-quality blackberries and the memories made with family and friends while picking them fresh from the farm.



6. Follow up.

- Be sure to follow up offline with the customer promptly and as promised.
- Connect the customer with the person at the farm who can best help them.
- Go the extra mile to find a satisfactory solution for the customer and you, when possible.
- Know when to say “no.” Explain why and apologize for not being able to do what the customer wants.
- Consider following up on social media posts or reviews thanking the customer again for letting you know there was an issue. Tell them you appreciated the opportunity to visit with them more about it and what you have done to fix the problem, if appropriate.

7. Know when to stop.

- Some people will not be happy no matter what you do and may continue to post negative comments. Make a genuine, sincere effort to resolve the matter professionally. Be patient and calm. Do not debate the issue in social media. Post positive responses inviting the customer to have a conversation offline. Other social media users will observe and respect your efforts. After making a concerted effort, stop responding.
- Often, other customers will see through these comments to a serial complainer. In some cases, other customers may post positive comments in your defense or to counter the negative posts.

- If a customer is harassing, threatening or is persistently negative over a period of time and cannot be satisfied, consider firing them — by banning them from your social media site, when possible.

Social media can be a great tool for specialty crop growers direct marketing products to consumers. Understanding how to interact with customers in ways to take advantage of opportunities presented through both positive and negative posts, comments, and reviews is important. Handling customer complaints and poor reviews professionally can go far in building customer respect and loyalty. Prepare now to handle complaints when they happen so you can respond quickly and appropriately.



FIVE TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLAINERS

AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

The customer complaint lifecycle differs by distinct complainer persona types, and social media plays a unique and critical part in protecting brand equity and customer loyalty. According to a recent article by the University of Florida, there are five types of complainers. To fully understand how social comes into play, it's important to humanize each interaction and think about the individual types of complainers so that you can respond accordingly via social.

THE MEEK CUSTOMER



The Meek Customer generally will not complain. However, they will post or comment on Facebook or Twitter when they have really been pushed to the edge. The Meek Customer will often have little to no history of complaining and is often just looking to be reassured that their voice is heard.


HOW COMMON: 

HOW DIFFICULT TO FIX: 


HOW IRRATIONAL: 


SOLUTION: A simple and public "I am sorry" on the social channel used for their comment will usually rectify the situation and turn the Meek Customer into a passive brand advocate.


THE AGGRESSIVE CUSTOMER



The Aggressive Customer readily complains, often loudly and at length. However, if you solve the problem for this customer in a quick and efficient manner, you are likely to have a very vocal and prolific brand advocate through all social channels. The Aggressive Customer does not respond well to excuses or aggression.

HOW COMMON: 

HOW DIFFICULT TO FIX: 

HOW IRRATIONAL: 

SOLUTION: Always take this consumer offline through direct messaging or email. Listen completely and ask: "What else?" Agree that a problem exists, and indicate what will be done to resolve it.



THE
HIGH-ROLLER CUSTOMER

The High-Roller Customer expects the absolute best and is willing to pay for it. They are likely to complain in a reasonable manner, unless they are a hybrid of the aggressive customer. They are interested in results and what you are going to do to recover from the customer service breakdown.

HOW COMMON: 

HOW DIFFICULT TO FIX: 

HOW IRRATIONAL: 

SOLUTION:
Always listen respectfully and actively, questioning carefully to fully determine cause. Quickly and publicly acknowledge the issue online and go offline to correct the situation.

THE
OPPORTUNIST CUSTOMER




For the Opportunist Customer, the goal is not to get the complaint satisfied, but rather to win by getting something the customer is not entitled to receive. A constant and repetitive "not good enough" response to efforts to satisfy this customer is a sure indicator of an opportunist.

HOW COMMON: 

HOW DIFFICULT TO FIX: 


HOW IRRATIONAL: 

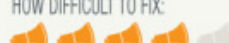
SOLUTION:
Remain unflinchingly objective. Use accurate quantified data to back up your response. Consider asking "What can I do to make things right?" after the first "not good enough."




THE
CHRONIC COMPLAINER CUSTOMER

The Chronic Complainer is never satisfied; there is always something wrong. This customer's mission is to whine. Yet, they are your customer, and as frustrating as this customer can be, they cannot be dismissed. In spite of their constant complaining, they tend to be good customers and will tell others about your positive response.

HOW COMMON: 

HOW DIFFICULT TO FIX: 

HOW IRRATIONAL: 

SOLUTION:
Extraordinary patience is required, but a two-way dialogue should never take place through social channels. One must listen carefully and completely and never get angry.

ExactTarget.

Reference

ExactTarget. *Five Types of Social Media Complainers and How to Deal with Them*. Accessed online August 19, 2014 at <http://www.exacttarget.com/resource-center/digital-marketing/infographics/social-media-complainers-how-to>.

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