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Developing the 21st Century Workforce and Customer Service in the Digital Age: **The Millennial Movement**

DEVELOPING THE 21ST
CENTURY WORKFORCE

Dr. Carl Blue
University of Southern Maine



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Problem Statement

Is your customer service (CS) and client outreach keeping pace with the changing environment of emerging digital communication technologies and evolving social networks?

We are seeing a dramatic cultural shift that is bringing us back full circle, and that the world we live and work in now operates in a way that is comparable to the one our ancestors understood generations ago. In order to succeed now and in the future, it's going to be essential that we revisit what worked well decades ago. Today, social media and emerging communication technologies are transforming our world into one great big "small town", dominated by the strength of interpersonal relationships, the currency of human compassion, and the power of word of mouth. For businesses and organization, many of the traditional customer service skills can still work in modern day operations.

However, it depends on innovative leaders, proactive managers, and individual CS agents to modernize their customer service talent and skills that reflect their clients' ability to use and control social media. These ever expanding communication channels have the potential to reward and/or chastise businesses through users' shared experiences. Customers now have a loudspeaker, a contagious – social mouthpiece. If you make a customer unhappy in the physical world they might tell six friends. If you make a customer unhappy on the Internet, they can tell 6000 friends. Customer experience is the competitive battleground in today's economy. Poor customer experience is a leading contributor to customer "churn". It is estimated that 87% of all consumers

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will never go back to an organization after a negative experience. To confront these tendencies in the digital age, many businesses and organizations are proactively creating innovative customer services and support within these same social media channels. These efforts have proven an effective and powerful method to reshape their corporate culture, grow customer relationships, and outmaneuver the competition [10], [11], [13], [15].

Within established conventional CS operations, effective solutions should extend beyond simply answering phone calls or replying to an Email in handling customer inquiries and complaints. Email has been around for twenty years is no longer considered instantaneous, and telephone based CS is no longer adequate. Customers have grown bitter on telephone CS, and modern digital devices and social media channels are not entirely responsible. Customers today tolerate interactive voice response (IRV) phone systems with their menu mazes, waiting on hold to talk with a CS agents, and at times forced to restate initial problems and issues. According to Seth Godin, an American author, entrepreneur, marketer, and public speaker, "The first rule of any technology used in business is that the automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify its inefficiency." Concurring, a recent American Express study, seven in ten Americans are willing to spend an average of 13% more on purchases provided by companies that they perceive in having excellent customer services. 'Relationships are everything in business,' and notably, online giants like Amazon are the future. These online retailers are more efficient in communicating with their clients and addressing customer needs. Competition is intense and service innovation is everywhere, adding pressure on customer service leaders to differentiate, with CS increasingly becoming a differentiator. Consumers are demanding that companies shift from broadcasting and selling to listening and collaborating, regardless of the channel of communication, the consumer is expecting a response [3], [5], [6], [10], [13], [15].

What makes for a good Customer Service experiences? In order to leverage these social channels for a superior customer experiences, proactive organizations, business owners and managers need to implement strategies on parallel media that is available to their clients. Today's customers are far more digitally connected than previously with access to communication channels beyond the phone and

email. With hundreds of millions of users, social media affects everything customers do and redefines how businesses interact with their customer base. Is it practical to increase your CS skills for the digital age? *"Its simple:"* stated Peter Shankman, of Shankman|Honig, a CS consultancy, *"If the past ten years were about social media, the next twenty are going to be about customer service."* Beyond CS, marketing will continue to exist; yet as we become more connected, the ability to obtain the customers you want and keep translates into utilizing communication channels that are more immediate and personal. Service organizations can no longer ignore the influence of social media on existing and potential customer base. For example, 12% of US online adults agreed that complaints made about customer service via social media strongly influence their image of a company. Inadvertently, seeing that an issue has been resolved on social media repudiates the damage. When considering those expensive IRV phone systems as your business' convenience, it is just as important to consider the expense of your client's time and efforts navigating the IRV menu maze. Service organizations need to embrace the power of social media and use it to communicate with their customers in the way they want to be communicated with [1], [5], [7].



Possible Solutions

Who are your customers in the digital age? Pew Research Center provides a website, "How Millennial Are You?" (<http://www.pewresearch.org/quiz/how-millennial-are-you/>) There is a 14-item quiz that can tell you how "Millennial" you are, on a scale from 0 to 100. Also it compares your answers with those of other respondents to this scientific nationwide survey. Additionally, it can inform and compare those results against other users the same age range. These results demonstrate that being a "Millennial" may have more to do with an embraced lifestyle than an age bracket [14].

Youth

There are discernable digital behaviors that include GenX, GenY, Millennials, and all those that adopt emerging digital communication technologies and social media lifestyles. These behaviors offer potential insights useful for businesses and organizations in their quest for better customer service and

outreach. One study reported by Entrepreneur.com on Millennials found that marketers should avoid “interruption” marketing and embrace “complementary” marketing. This means creating strategies where the client is made to feel part of the experience rather than external to it. This includes matching the message with the proper communications channels, and understanding those platforms and who is using them. This comprises an appreciation of why specific channels are being used, in order to take advantage of how best they can be used to share content. Some of the ways innovative companies are leveraging social media include [12]:

- Rather than filling an Instagram (photo sharing) feed with product images, men’s clothing site “Bonobos” celebrates the user by keeping the consumer and brands’ interests front and center while posting images of customers wearing the clothing while attending an actual popular musicians event.
- Provide an unexpected shortcut. Users know sites like Pinterest for their inspiration and style. Shoppers are 36% more likely to purchase new items if they’re shared on Pinterest with pricing. JCrew has been innovative and successful in sharing its product lines.
- Invite the world. Brands reach out to millennials by live-streaming videos through Youtube [12]. Incidentally, YouTube is now the second largest search engine in the world [5].

Elderly

This year, 80 million Baby Boomers (BBs) turn 65 and officially become senior citizens. It is commonly believed that BBs are slow to new technologies. BBs are neck in neck with Gen X and Gen Y in terms of having computers, high speed Internet, cell phones, digital cameras, and DVR systems. BBs are among the fastest growing demographic on Facebook at 15.5 million, LinkedIn, and Twitter usage has nearly doubled to 42%. BBs are the fastest growing demographic for social media and assimilating newer technologies [2], [4]. Some of the key takeaways inferred:

- A growing number of older adults are taking advantage of the Internet.
- There is a need to assure that developers are building communication channels that empower everyone, not just the youth.

- Accessibility has to be built into the planning processes with considerations at address design, readability, and physical usability.
- Once new products and services are available for public consumption, education and support are key to ensure seniors are not victims of the *digital divide [4].

** A digital divide is an economic inequality between groups, broadly construed, in terms of access to, use of, or knowledge of information and communication technologies.*

While overall usage of mobile devices is still small among older generation, it's important to note that usage is growing with as many as 15% of age 55 and older is using smartphones. Around 13% of 55-64 year olds and 5% of persons over 65 are playing games on these devices [4].

Providing CS and support through these new channels of communications that are being adopted by a growing diversity of Americans is an effective and powerful way to reshape corporate culture, grow customer relationships, and set your company or organization apart from the competition. According to Nielsen, people spend three times as much time on blogs and social media than on email, across all age groups. If the social media site, Facebook were a county, it would be the third largest country in the world. Additionally half of the mobile traffic in the United Kingdom is accessing Facebook. These technologies not only facilitate social connections, they facilitate human connections

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by providing instant knowledge, generating trust, loyalty, and creating community. Bill Gates stated, "Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction – that is, the feeling that the product or service has met the customer expectation." "Customers have memories. They will remember you, whether you remember them or not." Furthermore "Customers' trust can be destroyed at once by a major service problem, or it can be undermined one day at a time, with a thousand small demonstrations of incompetence." There are few things as potent as a satisfied loyal customer who shares their extraordinary experiences through social media channels that today's digital world offers. In order to provide exceptional customer services, there are five opportunities [3], [5], [10]:

1. Transparent and public support leads to customer retention – Sincerity breeds trust, and trust leads to lifelong customers.
2. Rapid response is not just for crisis management; it's about demonstrating respect. Respond to clients within 24 hours.
3. Support and service clients through multiple channels builds advocacy.
4. Flexible support satisfies customer expectations.
5. There are organizational benefits to "Whole Company Support", team focus to customer service and product delivery [3]

For the novice, there are several fundamental customer strategies that can be easily adopted. Use social media to be reactive to customer comments, especially complaints. Monitor Twitter, Facebook, and any other social media channels that your customers are using. Interact with them at this level. Release and post value added content on your social media channels. Feature special customers, and create community around your products or services. In addition, create and exploit YouTube. Produce informational and value added videos for your customers. Become a valuable content resource and expert in your industry. Post testimonials from your customers using your products or services. Create video based product manuals and support information upon request. Finally the best strategy is to stick with the basics of great customer service, hire the right talent, train them, and manage their potential. Concentrate on creating a customer-focused culture in your business or organization [11].

According to Forrester.com, a customer research and communication technology-consulting firm, the cost of growing customers, and the danger of losing customers are exceedingly high. Acquiring a new

customer can cost up to 5 times more than retaining current customers. A 2% increase in customer retention can have the same effect on profits as cutting cost 10%. Forrester advises, customers want many social media service options and abilities:

- Customers want to be able to post chat questions.
- Customer want to be able to access forums where other customers can provide feedback.
- Customers want instant feedback and customer interaction.
- Customer want to access services via smart phones and other mobile media.
- Customers want to post tweets on Twitter with responses [15].

Ultimately each and every interaction between you and your customers is a “touch-point”, and most importantly an opportunity to leave an unforgettable impression. Each customer service experience is either a profitable opportunity to be made or lost. In the digital age, customer service means far more than answering a phone or replying to emails, it’s going beyond the basics and enabling customer purchases and developing community interactions. It comes down to an ability to deliver the right messages, on the right channel, to the right person at the right time. Marketers and CS are getting smarter, the technology is improving, and businesses are figuring out how to use the data for “how” to interact with their customers. Enhancing these customer relationships will necessitate some simple rules. Within these new social media channels, it is important that your CS organizations be honest, be available, speak their language, follow through on customer expectations, and follow up on customer satisfaction [7], [9], [15].



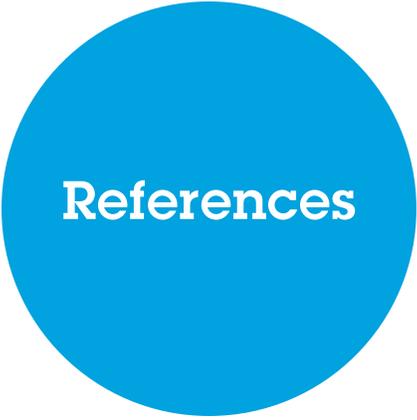
Potential Significance

The focus of this white paper is to borrow from many of the digital communication and educational technologies developed and utilized for delivering modern hybrid and online curriculum for educating and communicating with generation Millennials and digital savvy X’ers and those that adopt digital technologies. Along with these curriculum development observations, and a meta-analysis of available scholarly and eminent resources for developing customer service skills in the digital age, the goal is to provide superior customer service strategies and practices for industry and commerce. As educators, we have learned that the modern student (client) has many

diverse expectations that have altered the contemporary classroom. Students have expectations of transparency, availability, common language, following through with guidance, and following up on progress that ensures the process is facilitated and the content distributed. These expectations reflect both a change in our imminent culture and the needs of transformation in processes of both delivery and communication of curriculum (services).

The future will be a focus on customer-centric marketing that will lead to building brand advocacy. Marketers and CS will have access to more tools, more resources and more channels available than ever before to reach Millennials, and all those that adopt emerging digital communication technologies. Presently, General Electric (GE) is under pressure to adapt to the digital age and will invest \$2 billion in healthcare software development. GE's primary focus is to help doctors to securely collaborate and share information and streamline processes through social media tools. The progression will continue over the next five years with a mission to improve efficiency in hospitals, and expand clinical practices throughout the US and in emerging nations [7], [8].

Bottom line? It's vital and very necessary to leverage the social channels for a superior customer experience. In developing the 21st Century workforce, it is important to understand that your clients are already using more avenues than ever to reach out to you through the Internet and social media. It may be prudent to consider whether if you can deliver expected customer service experiences that your customers want on these same social media channels, as well as many of these emerging communication technologies? Or, will your customers be disappointed when they cannot find anyone there to help. The conclusion is to acquire the right customer service skills to master these new channels. Social media is about engaging. It's about talking to your customers rather than talking at them. It's about listening to their responses and providing feedback. It's about building relationships and community.



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**Author
information**

Dr. Carl Blue, University of Southern Maine, 919-815-7930
cblue@usm.maine.edu