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Social
Works

Transport for London

How TfL put social media at the centre of customer service

The first cross-industry collaboration between



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Market context

Transport for London (TfL) is the managing authority for public transport in London: eg Tube, buses, Overground trains, river services, trams, DLR and Cycle Hire, as well as controlling London's major roads and operating the Oyster ticketing system.

A key part of its role is to provide users with real-time service updates, traffic and product information, alerts and tips, as well as responding to queries and complaints in order to optimise customer service and help people move around London.

TfL started using social media for broadcast in 2009. In February 2012 it started using it for real time updates sent by trained staff (original trials of automated updates were discontinued).

In March 2012 it began using it for Oyster customer service. With increasing customer demand, TfL rolled out customer service on social media across the board including all the real time feeds like @centralline and @tfltrafficnews from May 2012 onwards.

Business/marketing objectives

Due to its role at the heart of London's public transport system, it is important that TfL maintains a strong reputation among customers and stakeholders for being easy to do business with, and offering good customer service and innovation.

TfL has five strands to its overall customer strategy:

- To let customers know an integrated service is provided and customers are at the heart of everything they do
- To provide a customer experience that is reliable, consistent, personalised, safe, secure and accessible and easy to do business with
- To provide value for money
- To deliver progressive and innovative services, making investments in improvement
- All these underpin the requirement for customers to trust TfL

The key business and marketing objectives for its social media policy are:

- To make TfL easier to do business with
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Cut customer service costs
- Empower customers to have the information they need so they are less affected by disruptions when they happen – 79% of followers have changed the route of their journey as a result of following one of the Twitter feeds
- To use the channel to provide a human, personalised service to its customers and to show TfL listens and cares for our customers

In addition, TfL wanted to generate additional feedback and use analysis of interactions to improve customer insights.

Channel choice

TfL has an average 3,000 customer queries a day across various channels: email, telephone, letter, Twitter and Facebook. Volumes can vary enormously, depending on factors like weather and service conditions.

By speed of response, Twitter is the fastest of these with queries serviced on average in one minute. That compares with average response times of 15 minutes for email and letter; 7 minutes for telephone; and 2 minutes for Facebook.

Measured by cost of response, the same ratios apply.

In addition to speed and cost, social media was the obvious choice for TfL for several reasons:

- Because there was clear customer appetite for its use, especially among Oyster card holders
- Because it enabled TfL to engage with customers as and when they demanded it – especially on the move
- Because it is fast, efficient and could potentially improve customer service at a lower cost
- Because the volume of interactions would provide data and qualitative feedback
- Because it would allow TfL to present a human face
- Because it would bring together different parts of the organisation such as operations, ticketing, HR and engineering.

Social strategy

TfL has deployed 25 Twitter feeds (covering different modes of transport, individual tube lines, as well as feeds for road traffic updates, disabled access and so on).

You can find the main corporate one here (www.twitter.com/TfLOfficial) and the Northern Line one here (www.twitter.com/northernline).

All these can be seen at www.beta.tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/social-media-and-email-updates.

It also has a Facebook presence (www.facebook.com/transportforlondon).

No new staff were taken on to deliver the social strategy. Existing staff were retrained and can work flexibly across all contact centre communications channels and services.

The team of 10 work 24/7 in three shifts based in the main contact centre, and part of their job is customer service on social media.

The Oyster feed (www.twitter.com/TfLOyster) is run from TfL's customer contact centre.

The content is a mix of standard updates, responses to individual queries, and pro-active tips. For example, on the day of the Jay-Z concert at O2, TfL tweets alerted followers to potential traffic issues.

Communication metrics

In aggregate, TfL's Twitter suite has over 1 million followers, with over 750,000 following real-time information. This grew from 13,000 in Jan 2012, to 300,000 in Jan 2013 to 1 million in Jan 2014.

The content tweet-ed is a mix of standard updates, responses to individual queries, and pro-active tips. Interaction is encouraged.

The TfL tweet about a Jay-Z concert, for instance, was re-tweeted 610 times, marked as a "favourite" 238 times and drew 150 responses.

Daily volumes of service information tweets vary, depending on circumstances; they can range from 4-5 to 12-15 per feed. TfL customer contact staff also tweet to announce they have come on duty in order to humanise the service where possible.

TfL's Facebook pages have 275,000 likes. Facebook posts include product information and tips. Visual elements are mixed with text.

TfL also uses Pinterest, Instagram, Google+ and YouTube for news and marketing campaigns.

Other metrics

TfL measures customer satisfaction of its different communication channels, using a mixture of online surveys and mystery shopping.

It also measures time and cost of response, as well as impact on reputation.

Results

Social media for tube, bus and traffic achieved a 73% satisfaction score, and the Oyster feed recorded a 71% score. There are, as yet, no comparatives, but TfL regards this as satisfactory given that the feeds often pass on 'bad news' - for instance, updates about delays and disruption.

It believes the effect of its use of social media as a communication and response channel on its reputation has been largely positive.

Two thirds of social media followers have said that following TfL on Twitter has had a positive impact on their impression of TfL. However, TfL has yet to measure the impact of this on its overall satisfaction score.

TfL's reputation figures have been increasing since the organisation started measuring it in July 2012. The main contributor to this is whether TfL is considered to care about its customers. This score has improved by over 10 percentage points between July 2012 and January 2014. A soft benefit of the use of social media has been greater integration across the organisation and more consistent messaging. It has also provided a channel for customers to commend staff members and give positive feedback about service and/or investments TfL has made i.e. new trains. On one occasion Twitter was even used to rescue someone locked in a toilet at one of TfL's stations.

ROI

TfL has yet to calculate a full ROI on its activities. To date, it has measured the potential cost saving of answering customer queries on social, the satisfaction of followers and whether following TfL feeds has had a positive impact on followers' impressions of TfL.

The main financial benefit to TfL from the campaign is in the time saved answering queries by Facebook and Twitter, and the consequent increase in productivity this brings, as well as the positive impact it has on TfL's reputation.

Key learnings

- Putting a human face on customer services matters. Initial attempts at automated updates were discontinued because commuters did not value them.
- Co-ordination of messages across all departments is vital.
- Using staff trained in customer service and adopting user-friendly language have proven very valuable.
- TfL says it needs to do more to complete the 360-degree feedback loop; after listening to and acting

The Steering Group

Stephen Maher	MBA (Chair)	Nigel Gwilliam	IPA
Prof. Paddy Barwise	London Business School (academic advisor)	Jed Hallam	Mindshare
Jenny Burns	RSA	Janet Hull	IPA
Fran Cassidy	Cassidy Media P'ship	Chris MacLeod	TfL
James Devon	MBA	Peter Markey	RSA
Simeon Duckworth	Mindshare	Matt Taylor	Twitter
Mark Earls	Herdmeister	Christian Walsh	MRS
Jane Frost	MRS	Christopher Wellbelove	BT
Gemma Greaves	The Marketing Society	Lucy Whitehead	TfL
Keith Gulliver	RSA	Sarah Woodley	The Marketing Society

More information

For the first time, the IPA, The Marketing Society and MRS have joined together to launch a cross-industry initiative.

#IPASocialWorks, with sponsorship from Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, will identify good practice in social media effectiveness and measurement.

Visit

www.ipa.co.uk/effectiveness

www.marsoc.co/IPAsocialworks

www.mrs.org.uk/social

-See case studies from BT, Fridge Raiders, O2, TfL, Iceland Tourism and others that have passed review.

Contact us

We want to hear from you - whether you want to submit case studies, collaborate on a wiki, or share your/your company's expertise in another way.

Contact

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