

Comcast gets social to shake bad customer-service reputation

March 24 2015, by Tali Arbel

Comcast is adding more social media representatives as it tries to work on its reputation for inefficient, unresponsive or just plain rude customer service.

It is tripling the size of its social media team to 60, and could add more. That's just a tiny percentage of the thousands of customer service people it has. But answering people faster on Twitter and Facebook is part of an overall push to improve customer service.

The country's biggest cable provider is promoting its customer service efforts as regulators weigh whether to allow Comcast to buy the No. 2 cable company, Time Warner Cable, in a \$45 billion deal that would create an Internet and cable giant. The combined company would serve nearly 30 percent of cable TV subscribers and more than half of high-speed Internet subscribers.

That's raised an outcry from consumer advocates who say the combined company would have too much control over the country's Internet access.

And the company's reputation for treating customers badly—calling them names, making it difficult to cancel service, requiring multiple visits, calls and emails to fix problems, tacking on fees, passing customers from call center employee to employee—hasn't helped it sell the deal to the public.

The company has a "multiyear road map" to fix its problems, and "still has a lot of work left to do," said Tom Karinshak, the senior vice president of customer service for Comcast Cable.

Comcast's spending on customer service has increased in the past few years, rising about 5 percent in both 2013 and 2014, to \$2.21 billion last year.

Comcast Corp., which is based in Philadelphia, announced its social media push on Monday. It aims to answer complaints on Facebook, Twitter and possibly other forums in 30 minutes. It now often takes far longer than that—more than a week for many recent answers to customer complaints with its @ComcastCares service account. DirecTV, a satellite TV competitor, and other big cable companies Charter and Time Warner Cable have recent replies on Twitter that come within a day or just hours of a complaint.

As for other improvements, Karinshak said Comcast has added more appointment hours in evenings and weekends, let customers return equipment at UPS stores and been able to reduce the number of times technicians have to make multiple service trips to fix problems.

For customers on the phone, Comcast said a change in its computer systems lets employees spend less time on data entry.

The company is also testing an app that lets people know how far away a technician is and shows a picture of the technician. It is also working on redesigning its bills and simplifying promotional packages—the cheaper prices you pay for a limited time after signing up.

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