

In the digital age, managers can't ignore #angrycustomers

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In a digital age where dissatisfied consumers vent their concerns through biting viral videos, nasty blog posts or negative online comments, managers need to develop strategies to soothe angry customers in person as well as online, according to a new study in the latest edition of the *Journal of Service Research*.

In a study that explores the changing ways in which customers express their emotions, the researchers found that anger can quickly fuel negative word-of-mouth commentary to fellow consumers, family and friends, as well as to a global audience via the Internet. Regardless of whether angry customers express their emotions to [managers](#) face-to-face or take to online and social media forums, the effects can badly damage a business or brand.

In order to minimize the [negative consequences](#), managers must act quickly and be receptive to customers' emotions, according to Professors Yuliya Strizhakova and Julie A. Ruth of Rutgers University and Yelena Tsarenko, of Australia's Monash University.

"When customers can vent their frustrations directly to employees of the firm, the channel of communication between the service provider and consumer becomes much stronger, allowing for a more open conversation where both parties can create and mutually agree upon possible solutions," said Strizhakova. "This direct relationship also allows service personnel to provide the empathy and [emotional support](#) that customers are looking for."

[Early intervention](#) and emotional intelligence training are essential to avoid customers' obsessive rumination over the event and the subsequent spread of negative word-of-mouth commentary. Managers represent the first, best option to take [customer complaints](#) directly, a challenging task but one that can blunt the long-

term consequences of upset clients who allow their feelings to simmer internally or immediately begin relaying their discontent to friends and family.

To encourage active problem resolution by customers and to minimize the chance for customer rumination, managers should consider offering a complementary service, substituting, rescheduling, or upgrading the service in order to help the customer reconsider the situation in a more positive light.

Online, it isn't enough to give angry customers a place to lodge a complaint. As a more preventative measure, managers should consider employing customer service personnel to answer online questions, so as to add a human aspect to their consumers' online experiences, the researchers recommend.

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook are extremely powerful outlets for viral world-of-mouth and can pose a serious threat to managers who do not control service failures quickly. To avoid becoming the focus of a top-ranked trend on the micro blogging site Twitter or to prevent an erosion of customer loyalty, managers must actively promote a private environment where consumers can vent emotionally.

"In such cases, direct and meaningful engagement between both parties is crucial," said Boston College Professor Katherine Lemon, editor of the *Journal of [Service Research](#)*. "The plethora of public forums providing a far-reaching voice to disgruntled consumers necessitates quick, sincere and personal attention from managers,"

Provided by Boston College

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