

View Point



Social Networking in Customer Care Centers

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Abstract

Social Networking can be adopted by a Customer Care Center to facilitate collaboration. By capitalizing on Social Networking, the Customer Care Center can be transformed into an informal learning platform that enables traditional training and informative sessions. Team members can benefit from knowledge sharing and collaboration leading to increased levels of efficiency at the Customer Care Center.

Addressing Challenges of Customer Care Centers

Companies are focusing on customer service to differentiate themselves, ensure customer loyalty and retention, compete effectively and remain profitable. As products and services become more complex and sophisticated, providing customer support becomes challenging. For instance, resolving a problem for IPTV service, a next generation television service offered by telecom companies, is far more complex than resolving an Internet service issue.

Companies must innovate and launch new products or services faster to ensure consistent revenue and growth. As the shelf life of these products and services reduce, Customer Care Centers have to re-train their staff more frequently to handle new services. Since these Customer Care Centers are located in multiple geographies, the cost and logistics associated with training is daunting.

In a majority of industries, a technology monopoly is redundant. The gap between the market leader and the followers is slim because technologies/skills are easily adopted. Consequently, companies have to find a distinctive value proposition to sell their products. Packaging extended warranties and selling premium after-sales services with a product have now become a common practice. Customers, who buy these additional services, demand that their problems are resolved promptly and efficiently. Customer Care Centers need to innovate to address these challenges.

Bridging Social Networking with the Customer Care Center

Social Networking and Customer Care Center are very different concepts.

Social Networking is becoming increasingly popular because it is associated with individual lifestyles and caters to the individual's personal activities. It works in a relaxed environment with no real deliverables or accountability.

In contrast, a Customer Care Center is a highly reactive and time-bound environment – the clock starts to tick as soon as a customer calls and stops when the customer ends the conversation. The efficiency of a Customer Care Center operation is constantly evaluated and enhanced using a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). To meet these goals, Customer Care Centers comply with pre-defined standardized processes for their day-to-day operations.

In a Customer Care Center, human capital is a critical resource – agents/advisors, team leaders and floor walkers work towards a common goal. Human capital can be empowered by applying the underlying concepts of Social Networking such as forming teams or groups to share experiences. For example, when an advisor discusses with his/her peers how they handled an irate customer, it offers options to manage similar situations in the future.

Such a collaboration at an advisor level helps improve the overall skill level of its staff and creates a more informed and empowered organization. In addition to the formal training and awareness sessions, collaboration enables knowledge sharing obtained through hands-on experience, which will otherwise remain confined with the individual. When collaboration gathers momentum and attains critical mass, it can become a rich repository of data which can be analyzed to identify the areas of improvement or emerging trends.

For advisors, it provides an opportunity to transcend routine case handling and encourages them to take ownership in their work. It offers a platform to showcase their work and helps them build a repertoire of case handling skills that is not always imparted in training. As clients and counterparts are located in different geographies and have different ways of talking and writing, a forum to view anecdotes of advisors is useful to understand the nuances, conversational styles and cultural cues embedded in a conversation. Such skills cannot be imparted in classroom training or through documentation.

Integrating Social Networking into the Customer Care Center

A Customer Care Center works in a gated mode – advisors have access only to a pre-defined set of resources (tools, people, applications, etc). The mode of operations is defined by factors such as the business model, data protection, operational efficiency, etc. These factors must be taken into consideration when introducing concepts of Social Networking in a Customer Care Center.

System Generated User Modified Content (SGUMC)

A fault, case or ticket is the entity around which the whole Customer Care Center operates. When a customer calls the Customer Care Center to resolve a problem, it begins with the creation of a 'fault', a 'case' or a 'ticket' by the CRM application. In its lifetime, the fault is attended to by various people with a sole objective – close it at the earliest. Once a fault is closed, for all practical purposes, it just becomes a quantitative parameter in the different metrics generated by the Customer Care Center. Invariably, the qualitative aspects are not captured anywhere.

The System Generated User Modified Content (SGUMC) is an entity envisaged to capture the qualitative aspects when an advisor at the Customer Care Center works on a case. The SGUMC entity will have its origin in a system generated fault, case or ticket that can be modified by advisors at the Customer Care Center to record their observations, analysis, comments and anecdotes. Once created, SGUMCs can be shared and exchanged among advisors.

Advisors and Budadvisors

Any agent or advisor at the Customer Care Center can participate in such a collaborative environment. Just as in any social networking environment, advisors can form groups and communities. A budadvisor is an advisor who shares a special relationship with another advisor. For example, if Ted is a budadvisor of Pal, Ted can comment/update Pal's SGUMC. Advisors select which advisor can become their budadvisor.

Public Sharing Space

Every SGUMC created in the Customer Care Center will be stored in a Public Sharing Space. The SGUMCs created by advisors are a good source of information for anyone involved with the Customer Care Center. For example, new recruits can use it to get up to speed on their work. Similarly, training teams can use it to examine any area which requires attention.

SGUMC in Action

Let us evaluate three potential SGUMCs and how they interact with different actors:

1. DreamCase
2. NightmareCase
3. Case2Watch

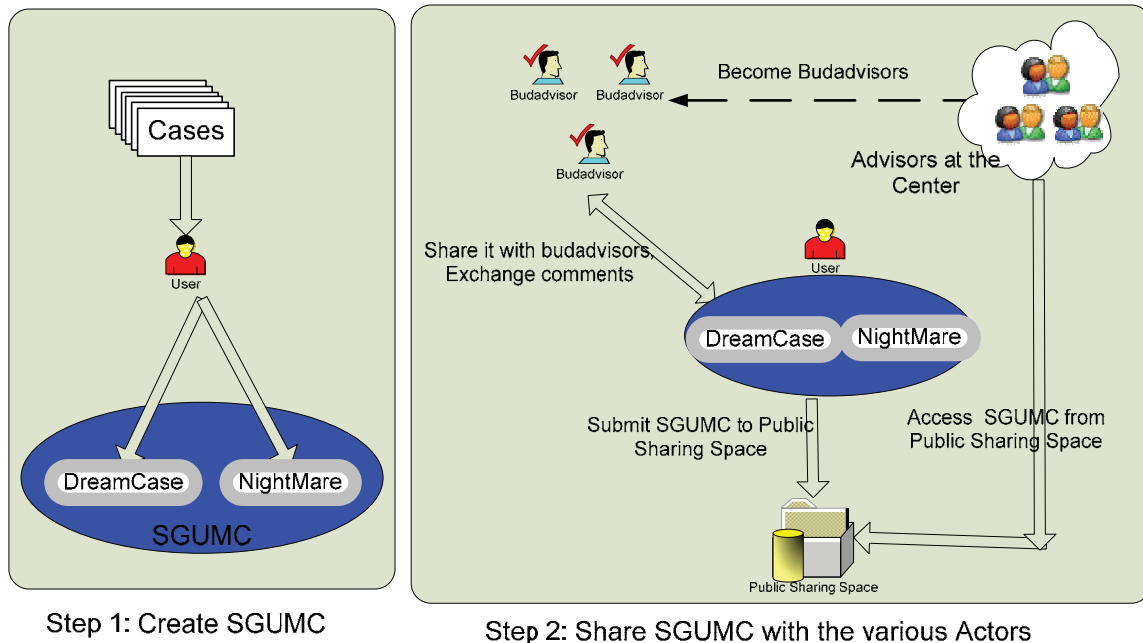


Figure 1: Creating and Sharing DreamCase and NightmareCase SGUMCs

DreamCase

Every advisor will have cases that worked perfectly. These cases can be self-motivating and provide a 'feel-good' factor when one looks back at the work. If an advisor feels that the case proceeded well, it may be worthwhile sharing it with buddies. The benefits are two-fold: 1- More people get to see a case handling they probably can emulate and 2- It validates the advisor's case handling with his/her peers. It can also lead to 'bragging' in Social Networking parlance.

An advisor can selectively build his/hers DreamCase SGUMC and share it with the adv community. When a DreamCase is created, it can lead to different situations:

- The advisor can share it with his/her existing budadvisor. The budadv on the cases or begin discussions around it. One interesting use of the DreamCase can be to use it in training or team huddles where the participants can use it as a case study and discuss it.
- The DreamCase SGUMC can also be directed to a Public Sharing Space. Every registered user can access the Public Sharing Space and view the DreamCase. Based on the DreamCases, advisors may want to become a budadvisor to the author of a particular DreamCase. For example, if a Advisor-Z is handling a particular customer and sees another Advisor-Y having a lot of DreamCases around that customer, Advisor-Z can become Advisor-Y's budadvisor.

NightmareCase

On the one hand, advisors work on DreamCases, on the other, they have NightmareCases. While most people wish to forget a nightmare experience, these cases provide important lessons for the individual and the Customer Care Center. It is important to share these experiences with peers. They may relate to behavioral skills in handling a particular customer or a complicated technical issue that made the case very difficult.

In fact, NightmareCases will attract more discussion and comments than a DreamCase.

Case2Watch

Today, services delivered to the end user are complex and involve multiple organizations and applications. Typically, services have numerous components and a long supply chain spanning different geographies linked together by business and service level agreements.

For an advisor who is one of the links in the supply chain, the ability to know the status of the case after it had been handed over to another organization can be helpful. It can be particularly useful for advisors who are closest to the end customer to ensure that the case is acted upon and not parked somewhere. In addition, it expands the horizon of the advisor to understand and appreciate the challenges of other organizations that are all part of the supply chain.

The above situation can be resolved by Case2Watch, the SGUMC created by an advisor which will be updated as the case progresses. Another advisor who is interested in a particular case can subscribe to a Case2Watch for updates or to participate in a discussion around that Case2Watch.

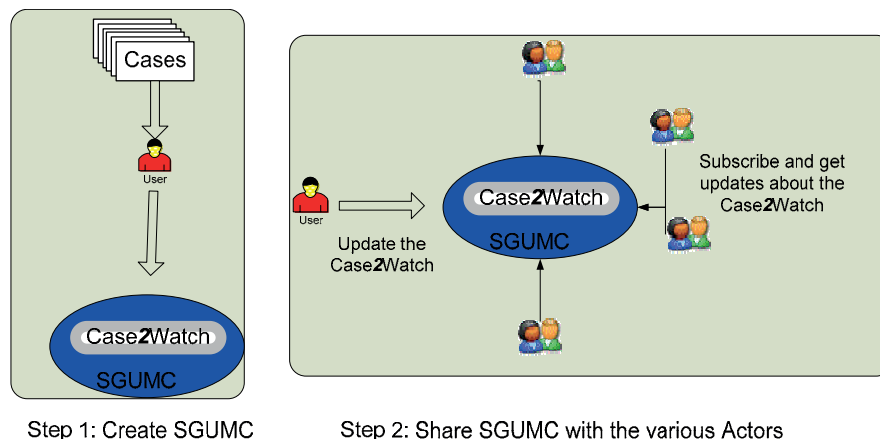


Figure 2 Case2Watch

Social Networking in a Customer Care Center can facilitate collaboration in a highly reactive environment. For the Customer Care Center, it is an informal learning platform that enables traditional training and informative sessions

The challenges presented by the nature of Social Networking and Customer Care Center must be considered before building an application to realize collaboration. For example, productivity and handling times are some of the key KPIs of a Customer Care Center that are not relevant in the context of Social Networking.

Social Networking in a Customer Care Center environment offers several benefits, both in the short-term and long-term:

In the short-term, social networking enables:

- Sharing problem solving or customer handling skills gained through hands-on experience to a wider audience within the Customer Care Center
- The SGUMC to be a good source of data that can provide insights into a number of parameters from an advisor's perspective. Quality teams can use it for analysis related to productivity and efficiency.
- A platform for a new entrant at the Customer Care Center to assimilate skills and get connected with peers

In the long-term, social networking facilitates:

- A collaborating and sharing environment to build a well-informed team and improve the competitiveness and efficiency of the Customer Care Center

About the Author

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