



WHITEPAPER

How to turn your ad's comment section into your secret weapon

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Comment moderation, what is it?

Comment moderation is the process of reviewing and responding to comments¹ from users that are posted on your business' online content. This includes, but is not limited to, your social media posts, ads, blogs, videos, and podcasts. Comment sections are a great way to gauge the general sentiment regarding your content but they are frequently overlooked on ads as a useful tool for improving brand loyalty and increasing sales.

By actively encouraging commenting on your active ads, audiences will become more engaged and higher engagement on your business' social media ads can lead to a(n):

- Increase in brand loyalty.
- Increase in conversion rates.
- Increase in organic reach.
- Lower CPM.
- Lower CPC.
- Lower CPA.
- Establishment of your brand's presence online.

Neglecting comments or leaving sporadic responses will not only lead to less involved audiences and poor engagement, but could also mean missed opportunities to resolve issues within the community, convert customers, and humanize your brand.

¹ Comments are defined as the "views on a story submitted by users" (Veglis 2020).

When you receive positive comments on your ads, yes, they are a great way improving brand sentiment of other readers - but they can also be used as valuable testimonials that you can share on your website, social media, packaging, and even in future ads (Kalner Williams 2020). "91% of 18-34 year old consumers trust [comments] as much as personal recommendations" (Murphy 2018). These positive comments are 100% authentic and should not be overlooked as simply a comment. The values of a positive comment do not stop there either. It is unfortunate that positive comments rarely receive a response due to fact that they are seen as unproblematic. Truth is, 21% of consumers have reported that they are more likely to purchase from a company that responds to online reviews and comments (Chen 2020). This is because "Responding to customers [indicates] stronger brand loyalty among customers" to potential consumers (Chen 2020).

While engaging and responding to positive comments has clear benefits, ignoring negative comments on your ads can be even more problematic.

According to Edelman's Trust Barometer 2018 report 47% of consumers believe that, if no action is taken to hide or correct, negative points of view on or in close proximity a brand's ad are a true reflection of the brand and their values ("Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands And Social Media" 2018). Even just the act of hiding negative comments that can be seen as a distraction to potential customers can lead to a "269% increase in positive user sentiment" (Murphy 2018). This increase in positive sentiment translates into more successful ads by driving conversions up and lowering cost per conversion (Cha 2018).

If ignored, negative comments will reflect "a devil-may-care advertiser" or act as "negative social proof [that] will overshadow any brand awareness or call to action you tried to achieve in your ad" (Kalner Williams 2020).

If left unresolved, negative comments could also reduce the amount of conversions on your ads by up to 40% and create hesitations in the minds of up to 86% of potential customers (Shrestha 2020).

Today, social media is where the majority of consumers choose to interact with a brand. Now, 34.5% of consumers contact brands using social media which outweighs the 24.7% who use live chats, the 19.4% who like email, and the 16.1% that prefer phone calls ("3 Reasons Why Social Media Moderation Is Important - Ensuite Media" 2019). It is unfortunate, therefore, that 90% of messages and comments sent to businesses over social media go unanswered with Facebook having the lowest average response rate of all at 9% ("3 Reasons Why Social Media Moderation Is Important - Ensuite Media" 2019). Despite this low response rate, commenters continue to expect a response to

their posts. 42% of those who leave negative comments regarding their experience, in fact, expect a response from the company within one hour (Brennan 2019).

From the consumer perspective, how you respond and whether your company chooses to respond or not says a lot about the brand and their product/service. “44% of people think that brand conversations² are more persuasive than what a brand says in its advertising materials” (“Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands And Social Media” 2018) and 89% of consumers read the responses companies leave to comments on their page (Eckstein 2020). This is why it is incredibly important to respond to comments whether they are positive, negative, or questions and to remove harmful comments that could distract potential customers and be used as negative social proof.

What are the best practices for comment mod?

Below are the key policies to keep in mind when responding to comments on your business’ page and ads.

Timeliness:

- Consistently monitor conversations. Comments should be monitored frequently to address questions and concerns as they arise.
- Give information that is timely and relevant to what they are saying.

Content:

- Know the appropriate times to respond, leave a comment be, hide the comment, delete the comment, and/or block the user.
- Personalize responses so that the commenter knows they are not receiving generic replies.
- Check spelling and grammar prior to posting any response. People can be quick to disregard your expertise, credibility, and/or authority if errors are present.
- Give accurate information and do your research when you do not know an answer.
- Respond clearly and check your reply for anything that could be misinterpreted or misunderstood.
- Take responsibility for the actions of the company and show your commitment to right any wrongs.

² Brand Conversations are defined as “what a brand says in direct communication over email, direct messaging, or in response to a comment posted” (“Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands And Social Media” 2018)

- Provide assistance to the best of your ability when issues arise. If you do not have the tools or power to resolve an issue, seek help from someone who does.
- Proactively provide solutions when expectations are not being met. When someone has a negative response to or experience with your product/service, get more information and problem solve from there.
- Drive conversion through education about the product/service. Take every opportunity you can to educate. Your response may be the answer to the next person's question.

Tone:

- Be patient and kind at all times.
- Reciprocate joy and excitement. People who are enthusiastic about your product or service can be your best ambassadors.
- Be genuine in your responses. People can sniff out when something is just a sales pitch. Being genuinely interested in your customers and how they are responding to your product/service improves brand loyalty.
- Make commenters feel that their input is valued and appreciated. Thank everyone for their feedback - even if it is negative.
- Be empathetic towards the person who you are speaking with. Cooling someone's hot temper can often be accomplished by making sure they know that you understand their challenges and that you want to help.
- Build lasting relationships through conversation. People want to know that you are not a robot, so allow yourself to be human.
- Never lose your temper. When dealing with a particularly difficult comment, remember that this is not a one-on-one conversation and that there are many eyes on you. Even if you can't make this person see things your way, your grace with dealing with an unruly customer may positively sway the opinions of others towards your company.

How to deal with negativity

Whenever possible negative comments should always be met with at least a response and preferably an apology. 45% of people who leave negative comments would prefer an apology and only 23% are seeking some form of compensation (Meyer 2020). As an added bonus, a study has shown that customers who have their negative comment responded to within five minutes are likely to spend up to \$20.00 more on future purchases from the brand (Meyer 2020). Following making the decision to respond or not, there are three courses of action that you may take: leave the comment in plain sight, hide the comment, or delete the comment.

Leaving a negative comment for others to see

Believe it or not, leaving a negative comment in plain sight is actually the preferred option. Of course, when you choose this option it is imperative that you respond to the comment. 95% of consumers expect to see negative comments when looking into comment sections and if they do not see any it can lead to suspicions of censorship (Meyer 2020). “When visitors to your social platforms see both negative and positive comments posted, the positive comments will be that much more credible, lifting your brand’s authenticity” which translates to an increase in conversions of up to 85% (Meyer 2020).

By leaving negative comments for others to see, readers can see their own concerns being addressed and, if the negativity is addressed by the brand in a courteous and helpful manner, can sway readers towards a more positive brand sentiment.

Hiding a negative comment

When hidden, a comment will still appear on the post for the commenter and everyone on their friend’s list to see, but will not appear for any others. Hiding comments can also be acceptable under certain circumstances. The first circumstance is when a certain negative comment arises multiple times on one post. In this case, it is understandable to leave one or two comments visible so that others can read your responses but hide all the repeating comments. It should be noted that all comments must still be responded to out of courtesy of the repeat commenters. The second circumstance can be seen as a grey zone, as it is up to the discretion of the comment moderator. Negative comments can contain extremely damaging information - especially if it is false. Under your discretion you must determine whether it is too harmful to have a comment visible for others. This can be a tricky situation as it is easy to want to hide all negative comments in order to maintain or improve your brand’s image. Remember, however, that your consumers understand that not everyone is going to love your product/service and are expecting to see both positive and negative reviews.

A helpful trick when deciding whether or not to hide a comment is this:

- I. Does your response to this comment answer a frequently asked question?
- II. Does the response to this comment address misinformation or a misunderstanding?
- III. Is this comment a review that, while ultimately not being positive, reflects some of the limitations of your product/service that would be useful for a potential customer?

- IV. Does the comment provide the opportunity for your company to showcase their willingness to go above and beyond for their unsatisfied customers?
- V. Would you be able to hide this comment without feeling that you are “hiding” anything or being dishonest?

If the answer to any of the above questions is “yes”, let that comment shine and do not hide. If, however, the comment does not fall into any of these categories or it is a comment that you have addressed publicly multiple times already you can hide the comment.

Deleting a negative comment

Deleting comments is a last resort. As deleting comments can be seen as censorship and can cause the commenter to lash out across other platforms, comments should only be deleted with ample justification.

Justifications include, but are not limited to:

- Inappropriate language
- Nudity or suggestive comments
- Violent threats or actions
- Hate speech
- Spam

Handling a negative comment

When responding to a negative comment, an easy-to-follow and successful structure can be broken into the following steps:

- I. Acknowledge the complaint
- II. Inform the customer that you are taking action
- III. Record and categorize the customer complaint
- IV. Resolve the complaint according to company policy
- V. Follow up with the customer to make sure they are satisfied (MacDonald 2020)

Types of negative customers:

 **The Meek Customer** – Is mild in temperament and does not wish to be problematic. When dealing with meek customers, make sure you are asking questions to discover the root of the problem as they might be hesitant to offer it right away in an effort to remain polite (Meyer 2020).

 **The Aggressive Customer** – The opposite to a meet customer, the aggressive customer will not shy away from offering up every detail of where their experience did not meet their expectations. When responding to this type, reassure them that they are being heard and that the problem is resolved or being taken care of currently. Be respectful, but remain firm on your company's policies and stance on whatever the situation is at hand (Meyer 2020).

 **The High-Roller Customer** – This type of customer is usually either a repeat customer or was planning on making an expensive purchase before their negative experience dissuaded them. They expect compensation or to have the red carpet rolled out for them. When conversing with a high-roller customer, listen closely and ask questions to explore the root of the issue (Meyer 2020).

 **The Rip-Off Customer** – These customers will never be happy until their unrealistic expectations are met. If what they are requesting is not possible, remain firm, confident, and polite in your answer and provide reasonable, honest reasons why you are unable to fulfill their request and offer alternatives (Meyer 2020).

 **The Chronic Complainer Customer** – Similar to the rip-off customer, they will also never be satisfied with your response. Remain patient when responding and offer as many alternatives as possible. Once options are exhausted, remain firm and offer to revisit any of your previous alternatives. “Satisfied chronic complainers tend to repeat purchases and share their positive experiences” (Meyer 2020).

Steps to proper moderation

1. Determine who is moderating comments

Based on the volume of incoming comments, the size of your team, and the size of your budget, there are a few options for who moderates your comments.

If the amount of incoming comments on your ads is manageable and at least one person on your team has the capacity to take on the moderation process, moderation can be done in-house. This would require adding this task to the existing duties of a team member (likely someone who already handles social media and/or customer service) or creating a new position within your company. A benefit of moderating your own company's comments is moderators already being knowledgeable about your brand, policies, and products/services. In addition to this benefit, costs could be

significantly lower than asking for help from a third party depending on how which software you choose to use and whether you need to hire additional team members.

If your current team does not have the capacity to moderate the level of incoming comments, you may choose to seek help from a third party. For those who use the help of an agency for creating and running their ads, a natural progression would be to add a comment moderation service to your existing contract. If this service is not offer through your current agency or you are not currently using an agency or a third party to manage your social media, there are many platforms to be found online that offer a complete comment moderation suite on a monthly or annual contract.

Benefits of using the assistance of a third party are decreased labour costs and the ability to sit back as the weight of performing this task is now out of your hands.

A third choice for comment moderation is to use a set of rules on your account to automatically hide or delete unfavourable comments on your ads. This process is known as auto-moderation. This process may look attractive for those who are being mindful of their budget and who tend to not have problematic comment sections, however, even if the rules you set succeed in eliminating negative content, the opportunities to resolve problems and generate additional sales is lost.

2. Determine how you want to moderate comments.

Techniques for comment moderation are pre-moderation, post-moderation, and automated moderation (Veglis 2020). While each method of comment moderation has its advantages and disadvantages, the most common approach is a combination of 2 or more methods (Veglis 2020).

Pre-Moderation - This type of moderation includes reviewing all comments prior to them appearing for the public. Though this means that no negative comments will be viewable without a response, the control can be seen as restrictive by users and can decrease the amount of comments by up to 50% (Veglis 2020).

Post-Moderation - Comments are posted immediately and moderators review comments and take a reactive approach. Conversations between commenters online provide instant gratification and will occur in real time, but it opens a window of time where damaging comments without an official company response will be left in plain sight (Veglis 2020).

Automated Moderation - The human element is removed from the process in automated moderation and comments are trusted to be properly addressed using rules and filters. This can include functions to hide or delete comments containing key words and the ability to send automated responses to comments and/or messages containing other key words. The main criticism of this method is that it is not always accurate and comments may be incorrectly responded to or hidden. It also limits the ability to personalize responses and so readers may suspect the lack of a human's touch. On the other hand, it saves on labour costs as maintenance is low (Veglis 2020).

3. Research and teach all relevant information

As a comment moderator, you are a main point of contact between the company's consumers and the brand. This means that they are trusting that you have all the answers to their questions and all the solutions to their problems. Of course, new situations are arising every day and no matter how much time you spend with a company, having all the answers is nearly impossible. It is important that comment moderators are trained on the history of the company, details on the products/services, how problems have been solved in the past, company policies, and the correct tone of voice to use when representing the brand. Moderators should also have resources and team members to reach out to in cases where they are met with unique comments in order to provide accurate responses.

4. Choose a moderating platform

Choosing a moderation platform is a personal preference and it is recommended that you make a list of all the capabilities that you are looking for in a platform prior to starting your search. Most platforms offer product demonstrations and/or trial periods prior to your purchase. It is highly recommended that all team members weigh in on the purchase decision with their experiences with the trials as each platform offers small details that may make moderation of your social profiles quicker or more difficult that may not be noticed by management.

5. Screen comments

The screening process involves the first time a comment moderator is exposed to a comment and they must make the decisions to 1) respond to it or not and, 2) leave, hide, or delete the comment.

6. Respond to comments

If you have chosen to respond to the comment, see the “best practices” section on how to craft your response.

7. Hide comments

If the comment is negative in nature and does not meet any of the criteria laid out in “Hiding Negative Comments”, take the time after you have responded to the comment to hide it and keep it out of plain sight to prevent any additional harmful interactions.

8. Track comment content

In your Comment moderation software, take advantage of the tools that allow you to tag comments with key words so that you may track trends and create valuable reports. This can include anything that you deem valuable such as sentiment, suggestions for improved products/services, feedback on ads, comments to be used as future copy, etc.

9. Generate reports

Daily, weekly, monthly, or annually you can generate reports based on the metrics that you have chosen to track. Other helpful insights are conversions/revenue generated from comments, cost per post engagement, number of comments, and average response time.

10. Evaluate findings to make recommendations and adjustments

Use the findings generated from your reports to evaluate your performance and to make recommendations going forward that are taken directly from your customers - the best information you can find!

Summary

Though often overlooked, in the comment section of your ads lies keys to better ad performance and more sales. Comments give you a chance to listen in on real conversations between your customers and are loaded with useful information if you pay attention. Comment sections also provide benefits in the opposite direction. Whether you are thanking your customers, encouraging them to share content,

resolving a service failure, or answering questions your responses are being seen and can work greatly in your favour if done correctly.

For more information about comment moderation best practices or to inquire about Pilothouse services, contact Maia@pilothouse.co

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