

5 Stages of a Social Media Customer

Consumers search the internet for everything from doctors to cars. They not only look for blogs and websites, but Facebook Pages, Yelp reviews, and YouTube videos.

When they start their search, they're like window shoppers on Main Street. The difference between online window shoppers and those on Main Street is they have the option to "follow" or stay in touch with the companies they like way before the sale.

This has thrown a wrench in many local businesses marketing. How do you attract and keep online window shoppers interested in your products or services when you don't know who they are or how to contact them?

Just like the shop owners on Main Street, business owners today need to build relationships with their customers from day one. By understanding the needs of their customers at different levels, business owners can build a strong foundation for their business.

We've come up with profiles for five stages of a social media customer. Each has different needs. Included are some suggestions business can use when looking at their social media marketing plans.

The Five Stages of a Social Media Customer:

1. **Fan** – a window shopper who likes what they saw and wants to stay informed. Fans are casual. They don't want to be spammed. Businesses should interact with their Fans. Interactions can include replying to comments on a blog or a social networking site, answering questions, etc. This begins to build the relationship between the business and Fan.
2. **Subscriber** – this is a Fan who signs up for more information. Typically it's free offering (newsletter, video, article, podcast). Subscribers like to know they have an edge over the general public such as advanced notice of an event or a special discount coupon.
3. **New Purchaser** – this is a Subscriber who purchases for the first time. New Purchasers are a little nervous. Follow up is essential for a New Purchaser. Businesses with consistent, genuine, follow up and strong customer service will build customers for life.
4. **Repeat customer**- this is a New Purchaser who buys up. They've been happy with the products/services and want to repeat the experience. Businesses can't take Repeat Customers for granted in the age of social media. If they don't have a consistent experience, it's likely they'll share it on the internet.
5. **Business Advocate** – this is a repeat customer who tells all their friends about the company. Typically they continue to buy at the top level without being sold. Like Fans they don't like to be spammed. They want to be treated special, almost as part of an inner circle. Does your business have a rewards program for your loyal Business Advocates?

Today business success is determined by the customer. Knowing the Five Stages of a Social Media Customer and integrating them into a marketing strategy will drive success in 2011.