

## National Complaints Day: The need for 'honest listening' and re-inventing corporations.

Notes by Guy Stephens, Senior Consultant, Foviance

This isn't a well-crafted summary of the event, but simply records based on my notes what people said, along with my occasional thoughts and observations. What I may at times miss in accuracy, I hope you will forgive in the hope that at least the sentiment of what was said is captured.

A video and audio recording of the event will be published in due course, and this will give a true picture of what took place. Further articles will be published today and over the coming weeks from the content of this discussion, so do please contact me for the links or copies to these.

sm = social media

---

### Session one: Welcome, seating and opening thoughts

**Guy Stephens (GS)**  
Senior Consultant  
Foviance

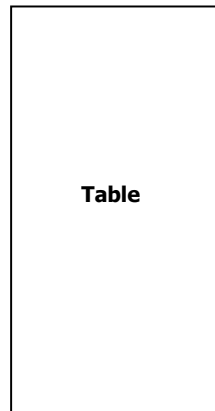
**Warren Buckley (WB)**  
MD, Customer Service  
BT

**Jake Hird (JH)**  
Reporter  
Econsultancy

**Zheco Dobrev (ZD)**  
Consultant  
Beyond Philosophy

**Qaalfa Dibeehi (QD)**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Beyond Philosophy

**Rob Skinner (RS)**  
Head of PR  
PayPal UK



**Michael Hill (MH)**  
ComplaintsRGreat  
Founder

**Neil Davey (ND)**  
Reporter  
MyCustomer.com

**Sullivan McIntyre (SM)**  
Professional Services Manager  
6Consulting

**Kevin Rousell (KR)**  
Head of Complaints Management Regulations  
Ministry of Justice

**Heather Taylor (HT)**  
Social Media and Community Manager  
PayPal UK

**Rebecca Miranda (RM)**  
Head of Media  
Beyond Philosophy  
Doing the filming for the event

**WB:** SM sponsor at BT.

**SM:** Doing work on sm in call centres.

**KR:** Public sector, regulator, but also deal with complaints ; concerned with conduct of the business ; telephone is a primary channel, and they don't want to lose that, but need to explore other ways for customers to contact them, get the info they need.

**HT:** SM manager, communities.

**MH:** Founder of 'ComplaintsRGreat'; getting through the chitter-chatter.

[GS: Apt name for a company on NCD, and it causes a general round of laughter from everyone]

**RS:** Ex-First Direct; also responsible for sm at PayPal ; important to be doing it yourself ; sm is one of the best things to happen.

**QD:** Experimenting; using sm as an 'earpiece'; honesty of the experiment.

**ZD:** Carried out research on complaints, outcome vs handling as it relates to loyalty.

---

## Session Two: Setting the scene

**MH:** Crisis; is it about reputation; do you respond to everything? ; the rise of community: danger of becoming another silo within a company.

**WB:** Measure three things: first contact, process – get it right first time, stop subsequent complaint ; customer service is the biggest interface with the customer, has a role at the frontline ; sm belongs to customer service; marketing can set-up Facebook pages, but as soon as any customer responds it comes through customer service.

[GS: Do businesses understand unhappiness, annoyance, frustration? Businesses are set up to resolve and close tickets]

**WB:** Language and approach is different, it has changed, but structure/framework it takes place in, stayed the same; biggest change – it is now a two-way engagement.

**RS:** Conversations at the bar; not a plaster – too complex, too authentic; sm is a fast track into an organisation, but how do you organise the organisation?

**WB:** Corporations not made the necessary investment in customer service; you have to bear the cost somewhere.

**QD:** Only a few enlightened companies exist ; definition of complaints changing.

**WB:** One contact only, deal with the issue without transferring it, no admin queue; no repeat contact within 28 days ; if customers get back in touch within 28 days, did BT think around the issue at the time of the original complaint which may have avoided this repeat contact ; important that whatever channel the complaint started in, that is the channel it finishes in, even if it passes through email or telephone along the way.

**ZD:** Read recent report looking at the 'effort' to resolve, and indications are that this may result in higher customer loyalty. [GS: not sure, but this might be a recent Harvard Business Review paper?]

**MH:** Closing the loop off in the same channel ensures that the issue is not left open.

**WB:** Companies need to go to where their customers are ; complaints via Google Maps, a friend told him about complaints about BT Tower on Google Maps, found both positive and negative feedback.

**GS:** Thomas Cook using Facebook to provide customer support, sceptical about it, but had a look and realised that it is simply a platform for Q&A; need to redefine definition of customer service.

**RS:** SM is not one homogeneous thing.

**HT:** Blanket approach – doesn't work; even if you didn't resolve the issue, customers are still positive because they feel that they have been listened to, their problem has been acknowledged

**WB:** SM environment policing itself; rules being established now.

**MH:** Language of dissatisfaction; cost of not getting it right first time.

**KR:** From a public sector perspective, also understanding the importance of social demographics, understand who is using or not using sm, how they are using it.

**RS:** It will not be an option not to use sm.

---

### **Session Three: Do customers really want companies to be empathetic?**

**RS:** People fundamentally don't want to complain, they have better things to do ; companies have to be careful not to assume people want to have conversations with them ; important to take someone's complaint seriously, and not treat it with a false sense of empathy.

**WB:** People in companies have BlackBerries and smartphones, if they don't respond to your complaint, it means that they choose not to respond; ultimately when someone complains, what it translates into is that we, the company have let you down, and it is our responsibility to take you seriously.

**QD:** How the complaint is handled is potentially more important than the outcome itself, and results in a greater level of loyalty.

[GS: QD backed this up with statistics from a recent survey Beyond Philosophy had conducted].

**GS:** During Carphone Warehouse days this was certainly the case, on numerous occasions we didn't manage to resolve the issue, but because we handled the process well, the customer left a fan, and in some instances wrote positive blogs about it.

**ZD:** Some companies are now even segmenting on personality-types i.e. Thinkers.

**WB:** Just because it is sm doesn't mean we forget the fundamentals about customer service.

**HT:** You can't sugar-coat it; by doing so you raise expectations ; often customers simply don't receive enough information about what's happening.

**WB:** It's about being open and transparent.

**QD:** Definition of what a complaint is, as it relates to empathy, is changing.

**WB:** Need to be careful not to turn complaints into campaigns.

**GS:** Are customers expecting too much?

**WB:** Yes, but so what?! Companies have to respond to customers. Current economic climate is making us all the more sensitive, we want more for less.

**QD:** In some senses, companies are creating their own problems. Companies boast about being customer-centric, yet don't deliver on it. Customers are simply saying: don't just talk about it, do it.

**WB:** Skill base changing. Key to sm is finding people who are brilliant with people, but they may not be the best technically.

**RS:** First Direct hired people who were first and foremost good with people, were empathetic. The skill-based training came later.

**WB:** Customers may want something, but may not be prepared to carry the cost of the product. However, where complaints are concerned, it needs to be dealt with differently.

**RS:** Speed, sm is making things happen much faster; sm telescopes the interaction into a much smaller space of time.

**HT:** Companies have to react in real time; smartphone is a game-changer. PayPal offers 24 hours Twitter coverage.

**WB:** Anything via the internet is driving real time. It's difficult, but companies have got to deal with it. Companies need to reflect customers' needs. BT offers 24 hour Twitter coverage.

[GS: Reminds me of something Paul Hopkins, Customer Services and Operations Director Thomas Cook, said at a recent conference, that the busiest time for booking tickets was a Sunday night? What call centre is opened on a Sunday night?]

**QD:** Companies are set up in different ways. Traditionally, command and control, but this is moving to community and culture, behaviour and bonding; EQ.

**GS:** Are regulations a barrier to sm?

**RS:** It's about striking a balance; important not to use regulations as a reason not to do sm ; it's a mindset ; it's about responding to customers in the spirit of doing the right thing for your customers.

**WB:** Companies must think sm through ; it's important to make sure you keep your customers updated and informed when you are dealing with their complaints ; have to be sensitive to peoples' concerns.

**MH:** Don't forget that the regulations are the minimum standards a company has to observe.

**QD:** Pharmacy model. When you go to a pharmacy to pick up a prescription you give out a certain amount of information to prove who you are.

**HT:** There's also a responsibility on customers not to post sensitive information like bank details or phone numbers.

**WB:** Likewise, companies have a responsibility to inform about sensitive information, and sometimes BT has had to intervene and ask a customer to delete sensitive information from their Tweet.

---

#### **Session Four: What's the ROI?**

**GS:** No session on social media would be complete without some reference to ROI.

**WB:** Any company that waits to build a case for ROI will miss out ; there is an element of belief ; Lilly Allen 2.2 million followers, I don't need ROI to tell me if she complains I need to respond ; currently building ROI case based on 'direct cost' vs 'indirect cost' ; indirect cost based on advocacy and loyalty, and involves working with marketing team ; direct cost, which takes into account whether it is agent-based or self-service, centres around customer service – volume x productivity (how many customers do I manage in an hour) x unit cost ; it is about understanding the effectiveness of the channel vs resolution ; is a channel more or less expensive than a phone call ; at present sm slightly more expensive than a call.

**QD:** Are expectations met or not? Complaint handling vs outcome and effect on defection (which if you turn around and look at it another way is loyalty).

**RS:** PayPal does not need a business case, the discussion has moved on and is about the detail.

**HT:** It's about building a community, so understanding sentiment and brand advocacy is important; how much positivity does PayPal have in the financial industry, and can we grow that.

**QD:** The evidence is there that sm is making a difference; it's about taking small steps.

**HT:** What many companies are still not doing is thinking about what their objectives are, then building a strategy and tactics round that ; go in small and fast, and be confident ; look at the issues and respond accordingly.

**WB:** Use of the name – BTCare - took a few months to decide. I wanted something to represent where I wanted to take the organisation; requires someone to show some level of leadership; if you believe it, do it ; the companies who don't, will pay the penalty.

**QD:** Listen with 'honest ears' ; difference between being there and listening ; many companies are there, but don't really listen.

**RS:** A lot of internal education needs to be done ; need to explain the rules ; cultural change ; re-inventing the corporation.

**WB:** I am dictatorial when it comes to sm ; I don't put a phone in my office so that I can let just anyone answer it.

**HT:** Need to educate your company, go round and sit down with each time and explain what sm is.

---

#### **Session Five: Final thoughts**

**WB:** Got to a point in our sm journey and was wondering 'where next?' ; but today I'll be looking more into the idea of culture and community ; looking to see how the public sector

responds to sm, and I suspect it will come up with a different approach ; and for an insight into the future, look at Club Penguin, and see what five year olds are doing online.

**ND:** Great to see that these discussions, which we've had today, are really going on ; insight into how organisations like BT are measuring sm.

**SM:** Measuring across departments ; it is measurable ; understanding marketing and its softer metrics, and customer service with its harder metrics ; and one further interesting area, which has not really been touched on today is enterprise 2.0 and how it is engaging with customers.

**KR:** At a time when resources are tight, my department will need to do things differently, and listening to the various discussions today, sm might be part of that need to do things differently.

**HT:** Been very interesting to see how other companies are investing.

**MH:** It is still important to get the basics right ; going back to the channel that the complaint started in to finish off the conversation.

**RS:** Hearing about it working in large organisations such as BT ; someone is going to write a text book or a how-to type book about corporations in a social media world ; looking after the customer is still number one ; leaders must do it and thereby understand it instinctively.

**QD:** It is affirming that we all agree more or less ; evolving, not overnight changes ; companies are like a paraglider that is being pulled along by sm ; experimenting ; same revolution or evolution taking place whether it's the public sector or any other sector ; some great case studies today in BT and PayPal.

**JH:** Re-affirmed customer service is going into digital ; customer service is reaching a tipping point as a discipline ; meeting customer expectations.

**GS:** There have been huge changes over the last 18 months, and although we talk about sm and complaints, fundamentally it is about business change ; whatever we think about social media, our children are growing up with it, and they will be the employers and employees of the future, this will be one of the ways they communicate with each other, and for that reason alone companies need to be preparing for that now.

-----  
If you would like to be notified when the audio and video are available from this event, or for more information about the impact of social media on complaints or customer service, please feel free to contact Guy Stephens by email at [info@foviance.com](mailto:info@foviance.com) or on 0845 054 6500.