

Rex and Zappos Use Social Media to Improve Customer Service

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Social media helps to relay information, engage users, and create community. If company policies are too strict regarding the use of social media, a real community cannot build because membership is limited and not authentic. Customer service is about the ‘personal touch’ a company provides, and authenticity is a critical human element that propels good service to great service. Rex UNC Healthcare, a healthcare business, and Zappos, a retail business, are two different customer service industries that have chosen to be liberal with their social media policies. Rex and Zappos can improve their customer service by continuing to trust their staff through lenient policies and encouraging employees to participate in social media

#### **Rex UNC Healthcare Social Media Policy**

Rex Healthcare is a not-for-profit hospital organization that provides a variety of healthcare services. They have multiple locations in central North Carolina and recently partnered with UNC to further their impact on the community. Rex Healthcare employees over 5,400 staff members (Rex UNC Healthcare, n.d.), in positions ranging from doctors, nurses, marketing professionals, and accountants. Due to a large and diverse staff, Rex Healthcare must balance both customer service and clinical professionalism. One challenging aspect of this balancing act is the organization’s use of social media. Regarding their stance on the use of social media, Rex UNC Healthcare (2012) wrote:

We must be deeply and broadly engaged with the people of North Carolina and the nation to meet their healthcare challenges. . . . In order to meet those goals, we believe that the effective and responsible use of Social Media by Rex Healthcare and Rex Representatives is absolutely essential. (p. 1)

The above statement proves that Rex UNC Healthcare is choosing to embrace social media as a tool for improving patient satisfaction and expanding their reputation among the community.

Rex's acceptance and use of social media have a few limitations. Because hospitals fall under strict privacy regulations, Rex must make sure that staff's use of social media maintains an appropriate level of professionalism. Rex maintains an employee web page of all company policies. On this web page Rex identified two social media categories: the institutional use of social media, which includes management approved transactions, and personal use, which includes unapproved social media posts by Rex employees (Rex UNC Healthcare, 2012, p. 1). By defining these separate categories, Rex is better able to establish enforceable policies on the appropriate use of social media in the workplace.

Rex outlines two stipulations on their internal policy web page. First, that work-approved social media posts require a manager's approval and, second, that the personal use of social media must take place "during non-work time and in strict compliance with all other Rex Healthcare policies" (Rex UNC Healthcare, 2012, pp. 1-2). These guidelines are easy to understand and still allow freedom for staff members to promote their organization. As a result of these simple guidelines, many Rex coworkers share constructive and optimistic posts on their social media profiles.

People who oppose social media often do so because they are concerned about privacy. In the healthcare environment, the protection of patient and client privacy is of utmost importance and Rex's lenient social media policy is surprising. To protect the privacy of their customers, in relation to the use of social media, Rex UNC Healthcare (2012) listed all of the information that should never be disclosed:

- Confidential Rex Healthcare Information

- Patient Information
- Personnel Information
- Legal Information
- Materials That Belong to Someone Else (p. 3)

Any breach of the above stipulations can lead to disciplinary action or termination of employment which discourages staff from posting inappropriate information.

### **Zappos Social Media Policy**

In contrast to the regulated environment of a hospital setting, retail company Zappos is known for their outgoing and fun approach to customer service. Zappos uses social media as a tool for improving customer service and leading the way is their CEO, Tony Hsieh. In an interview, Gordhamer (2010) recorded Hsieh's statement regarding the Zappos policy on the use of social media:

We don't have a specific social media policy. In fact, we try to avoid policies about anything as much as possible, because usually policies are used to address the 1% of people causing a problem at the expense and inconvenience of the 99% of people that are not. (Question #7, para. 1)

The above statement sends a strong message of respect and trust to the Zappos staff, which is likely to inspire the appropriate use of social media in the workplace. Additionally, an unrestrictive social media policy or lack of one, gives the front line staff freedom to communicate with customers, in the way they see best fit. Finally, by allowing employees to use social media for discussing and promoting the company, Zappos gains the benefit of free product marketing.

### **Comparison of Rex UNC Healthcare and Zappos Social Media Policies**

Both Rex UNC Healthcare and Zappos find strategic value in providing excellent customer service, and both use social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs to improve their customer relationships. Additionally, each company has built mobile phone applications that are designed to provide further convenience to their clients. Rex has developed two applications, one to help cancer patients cope with their disease and another for their wellness center members, which provides interactive gym schedules and fitness tracking tools (MacDonald, 2013, p.1). Zappos's phone application makes shopping convenient, simple and fun while also providing convenient opportunities for customers to spread the word about Zappos over social media as they shop. These tools allow Rex and Zappos to communicate their service offerings, build community and market their brand, which further strengthens the relationship between the company and client.

With a variety of social media tools to manage, both companies benefit by having policies in place where employees have the freedom to contribute. Social media fails without a high volume of participants and repetitive use. The ability to gather quality information and post frequently is a daunting undertaking for a single department. By opening the channels of communication to their employees, Rex and Zappos have made the management of their social media simplistic and efficient.

Rex UNC Healthcare and Zappos are two companies that have lenient policies regarding their employees' use of social media. These policies are effective for both organizations because they prioritize customer service, which involves providing a 'personal touch' in every client interaction. With social media acting as a tool for users to track and share their interests, any service-oriented industry can benefit from building their social media presence.

### References

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