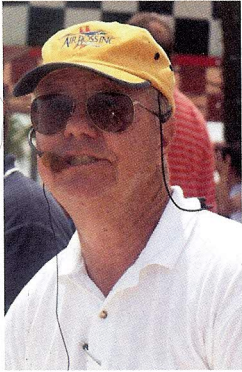




Down In Front



Today's social media is a very useful tool for any business. It serves as an effective promotional technique and can grow your customer base with surprising speed. I know of no other method that can disseminate information as fast. Many businesses, from neighborhood mom & pop's to international mega corporations, find Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter effective. Many actually have personnel dedicated to monitoring, perusing additional sales, and spinning their image within this phenomenon.

Airshows and performers have also found social media to be a cost effective way to promote their events and services. Do a search for "airshow" on Facebook and it will return hundreds of pages of related material and thousands of comments about airshows.

But as effective a promotional tool as social media can be, it can quickly turn into a negative. The story of "United Breaks Guitars" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YGc4zOqozo) is a perfect example. In this situation, United Airlines assumed Dave Carroll was "statistically insignificant" and ignored his complaint. Dave countered with a YouTube video that went viral (over 12 million hits and counting) and it soon had United begging for relief. Carroll turned this incident into a second career and, in addition to his music, speaks on the subject of positive customer service and quickly resolving complaints. (www.bigbreaksolutions.com/)

I've never claimed to be the brightest bulb in the box, but I made a succe\$\$ in my full service car wash business by listening to customers – and, as painful as it was, also listening to customer complaints.

None of us likes to be criticized. That's human nature. But for a business-person, customer complaints are golden. They are opportunities to correct a negative experience with that one customer and possibly also correct systemic problems with your business processes.

As a student of all thing airshow, I monitor Facebook for reports on events. Not the fluff pieces you read in industry magazines, but the ranting and ravings of disgruntled airshow customers.

Disney University teaches a course entitled "What Time is the

Five o'clock Parade?" Students learn that no question is too outlandish and no complaint too trivial to be ignored. To maintain the level of guest service demanded by Disney, the associate must determine the real issue. In the case of the five o'clock parade, the real question could be, "Where is the five o'clock parade?"

So the point of this essay is to listen to your customer or guest. Unfortunately, that is something we do rather poorly in the airshow business.

Here's a case in point. There was a string on Facebook this past summer relating how a show charged the customer \$25 admission, and then covered a reputed 75% of the crowd line with tents and chalets. The show then used the last 25% to park performer aircraft and cars, thereby blocking the view of the customers who had paid their \$25.

If true (and they had pictures and videos to prove their point), it was very poor planning on the part of the airshow producers, and the abuse heaped on the show was justified. If untrue (or there were mitigating circumstances), no defense was offered. The bottom line was the show had been painted with a big negative that was seen by thousands of Facebook "friends."

This Facebook string then brought forth complaints of blocked views at other airshows, giving me the impression that we, as an industry, are not paying attention to our customers' needs. Corrective action may be necessary.

Our younger fan base is very comfortable with social media. They communicate at a pace unimagined five years ago and do not hesitate to praise or chastise at the speed of light. Social media has become the preferred method of communication to the point that a young Air Force Public Affairs Officer asked me if I could "tweet" to the show's "followers" during the airshow! That's what she did – instant updates going worldwide concurrent with the event.

With the speed and wide dissemination capabilities of social media, no comment is "statistically insignificant" anymore. It behooves the entire industry to be aware of social media and make an effort to establish and maintain a positive image on those platforms.

United Airlines learned the hard way not to ignore customer complaints, and hopefully the referenced airshow learns "down in front" can go worldwide in a microsecond.