

Customer Service on Twitter: How Top Brands Respond

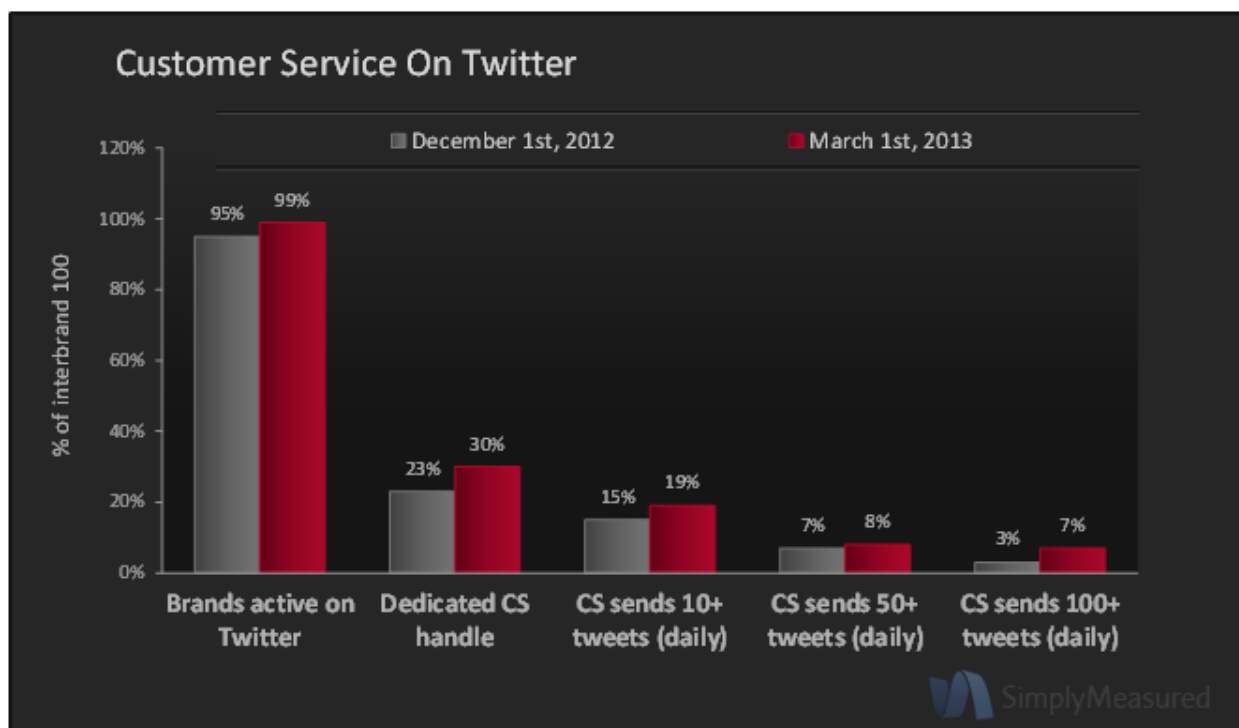
A Study of the Interbrand Top 100 Brands on Twitter

Over the past several years, Twitter has evolved in some very interesting ways. What was once a casual microblogging network is now an entire ecosystem with its own cultures, internal communities, and brands trying to interact with users.

As the level of engagement on Twitter continues to grow, the top brands in the world are taking major steps to protect their brand identity and keep customers happy in this very public space.

This quarterly study looks at the Interbrand Top 100 Brands in the world and how they're using Twitter for customer service, how they've interacted with their customers over the last three months, and how it's impacting their brand throughout the network. This analysis will focus on the brands from the Interbrand list with dedicated customer service handles. The data and analysis come from Simply Measured's [industry-leading social media analytics and reporting platform](#). Simply Measured is a Twitter Certified Product that helps marketers report on their own social media analytics and engagement in context with competitors and through all their social channels.

Adoption: How Brands are Using Twitter for Customer Service



Over the last quarter, we've identified and tracked seven additional customer service handles from the Interbrand list, bringing our total to 30 dedicated accounts. While 99% of the top brands now have an active Twitter account, these 30 brands have gone above and beyond to protect their brand identity by directing customer service inquiries away from their branding platform. Managing the negative impact of a disgruntled customer can be crucial in a viral atmosphere like Twitter, where negative PR can spread like wildfire. This demand has continued to increase: For the 23 brands in our December study, demand from consumers has grown by 25%.

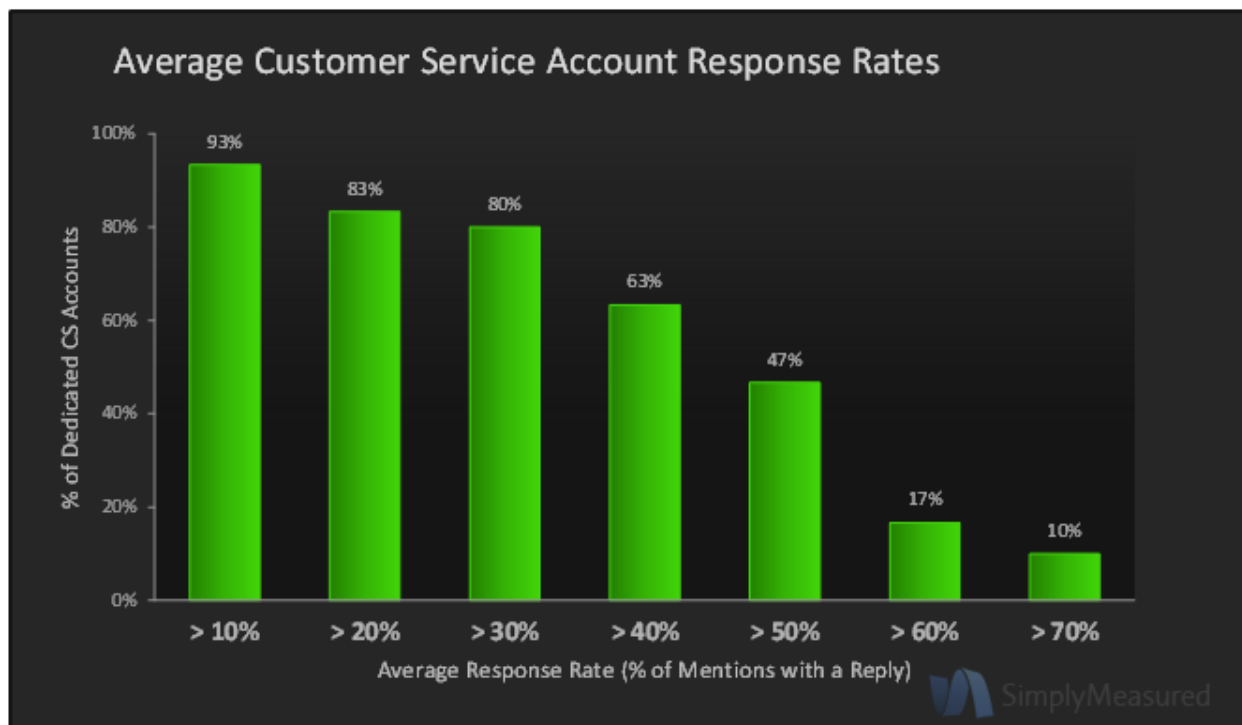
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More and more brands are realizing that the added presence of a dedicated customer service handle allows the flexibility of responding to complaints, questions, and issues without compromising their brand voice.

More than just activating their account, several brands are focusing on enriching their interactions. Four additional brands – Microsoft, AMEX, Nokia and UPS – have started Tweeting over 100 times a day, joining Samsung, Nike and Ford as the only brands on the list to do so. This level of engagement suggests a dedicated team working with customers to resolve issues and take conversations out of the public eye.

How Many Tweets Actually Get Responses?



When thinking about response rates, the most important thing to consider is that not every customer support mention merits a response. Whether that means not responding to users who simply badmouth your brand, or saying “you’re welcome” to every “thank you” that’s received for providing a great customer experience.

Brands shouldn’t necessarily be seeking to reach a 100% response rate, but most of them could stand to get a whole lot closer. The average response rate to all customer service mentions was 42%, while the best response rate for an account was 75%. Only 5 of the dedicated support accounts maintained response rates greater than 60%.

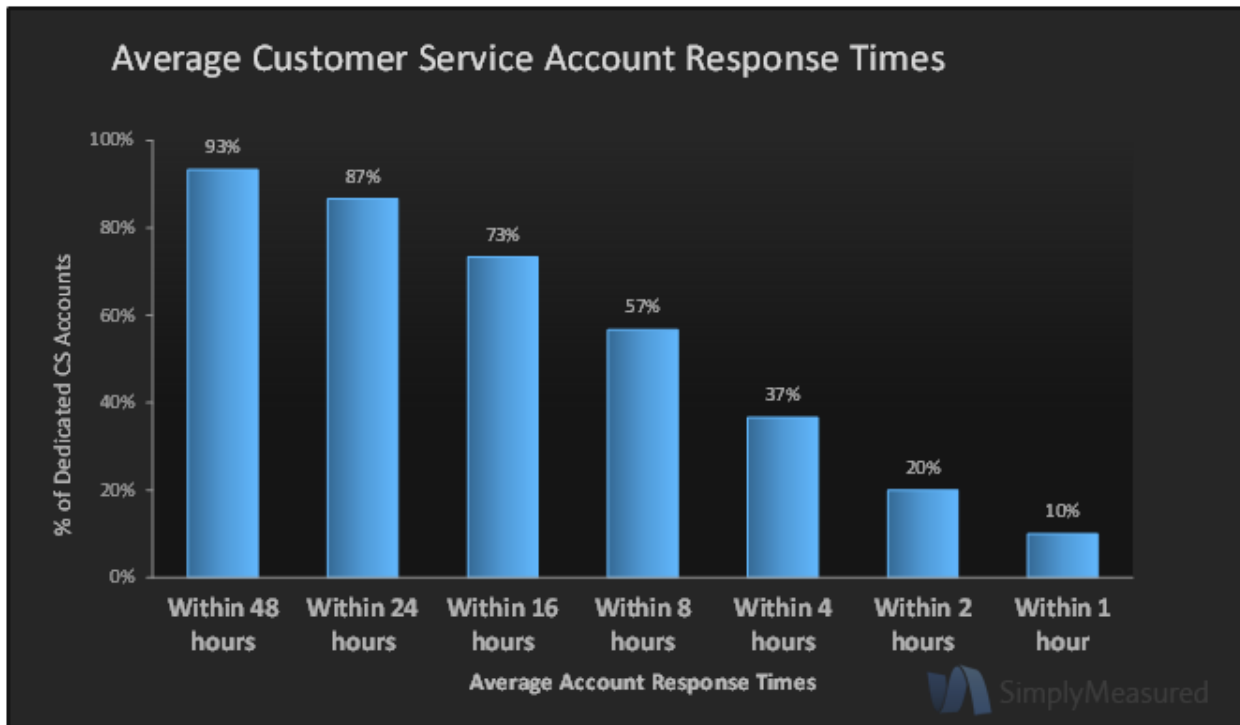
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Brands that are not adequately resourced to respond to user requests on Twitter find that not only do their response rates fall below what they should be, but that their average response times are also impacted. The average response time for a customer support mentions over the last 3 months was 5.1 hours. On Twitter, 5.1 hours is a very long time; even the fastest average response time of .7 hours (42 minutes) doesn't live up to everyone's expectations.

Great Expectations: How Do Top Brands Measure Up?



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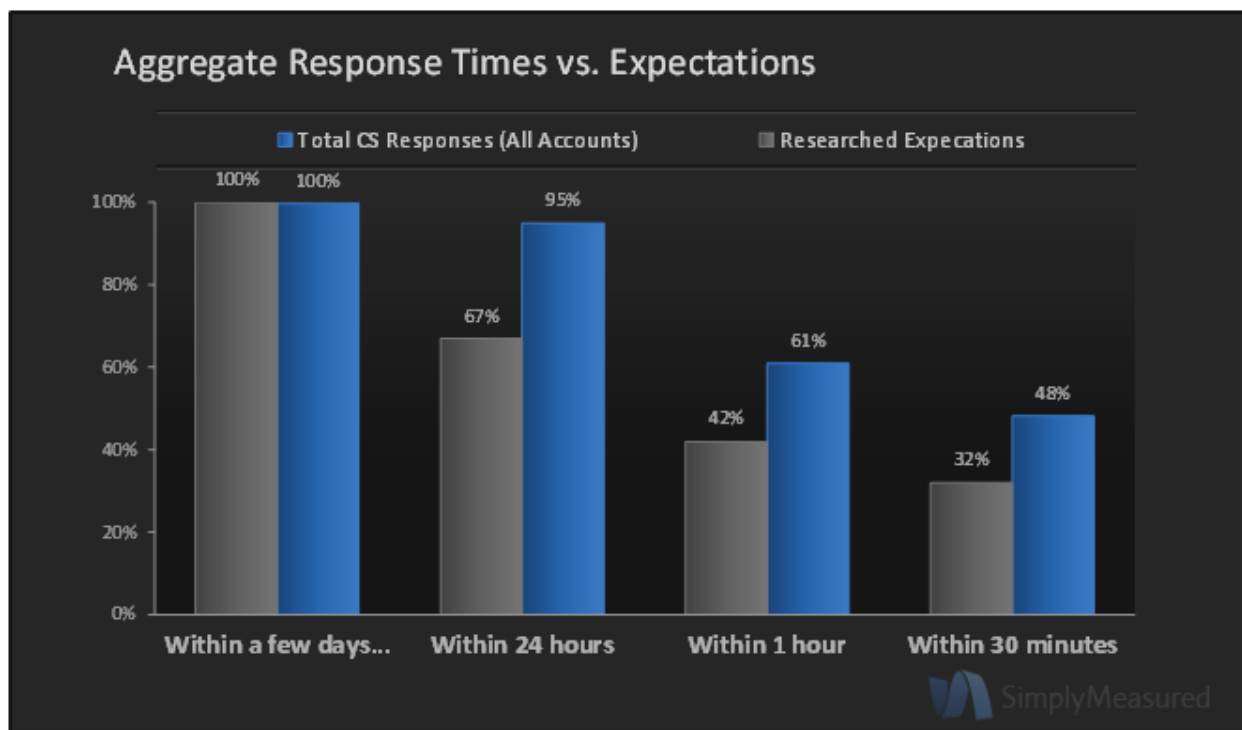
When users reach out for customer service on Twitter, they do so with high expectations. According to survey data from market research firm [The Social Habit](#), 42% of social media users expect to receive a customer support response within the hour. As we noted in back in December, the average response times of dedicated customer support accounts are falling short of this.

Only 10% of dedicated accounts have an average response time of less than an hour, and not one maintains a response time less than 30 minutes.

This is because with a torrent of user tweets, some fall between the cracks, especially those that are received during hours where customer service resources are thin, or absent altogether. When these tweets are finally answered, they can dramatically increase a brand's average response time.

To demonstrate the impact that delayed responses can have on a brand's average response time, we analyzed the times for all customer service responses and plotted them against user expectations.

Winning The Race: Top Brands Respond Quickly to Requests



What we find is that although only 10% of brands are able to maintain an average response time of 1 hour, 61% of all customer service responses are sent within an hour of the initial user mentions, far exceeding user expectations.

The disparity between brands' average response times and time it takes them to handle the bulk of their customer requests stems from the fact that, brands are going back and answering missed customer support requests, in some cases, days after the initial user tweets.

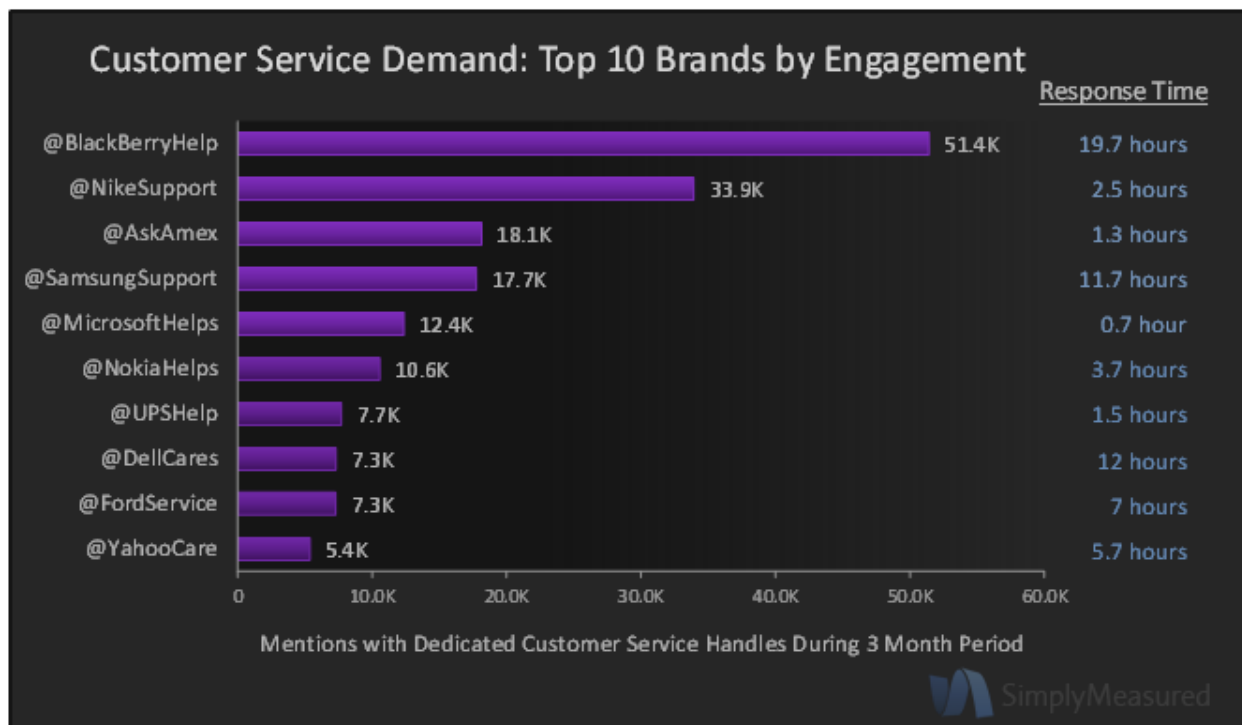
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This should raise two questions for customer service managers:

- 1) Does your account have the resources it needs to handle the influx of customer requests around the clock?
- 2) What is the value in dedicating resources to respond to users expecting real-time support, days after the fact?

Customer Support Demand: How Well Are Top Brands Responding?



Each of the top 10 brands by mentions averaged response times less than 24 hours. Microsoft, American Express and UPS were fastest brands to respond to customers, replying to mentions in under two hours.

Today, the top 10 dedicated handles account for 59% of total customer mentions. Customer service demand for these accounts means that they have a large responsibility to customers, but also an opportunity to exceed expectations and benefit the brand.

Since December 1st, demand for the top 10 handles has increased 20%. These accounts responded by increasing the number of tweets they send by 39%.

The number of tweets sent includes not only responses to customer tweets, but also tweets to all followers, and is a strong indicator that brands are devoting more resources to customer service.

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Top 10 Brands: The Break Down

Twitter Account Details: 3 Month Totals								
Customer Support Handle	Mentions	Q/Q Mentions	Sent Tweets	Q/Q Sent	Average Response Time	Q/Q Response Time	Average Response Rate	Q/Q Reponse Rate
@BlackBerryHelp	51,415	17%	4,251	28%	19.7	58%	4%	26%
@NikeSupport	33,923	39%	33,048	32%	2.5	-9%	73%	-1%
@AskAmex	18,140	-15%	12,265	42%	1.3	-29%	53%	89%
@SamsungSupport	17,743	15%	14,685	20%	11.7	20%	40%	17%
@MicrosoftHelps	12,372	58%	10,885	72%	0.7	-73%	68%	7%
@NokiaHelps	10,571	88%	9,029	148%	3.7	19%	72%	39%
@UPSHelp	7,708	41%	11,479	32%	1.5	33%	32%	-19%
@DellCares	7,316	-27%	4,978	5%	12.0	9%	34%	324%
@FordService	7,293	25%	13,676	28%	7.0	6%	75%	10%
@YahooCare	5,364	81%	3,615	104%	5.7	77%	46%	2%

More sent tweets led to improved response rates for 8 of the top 10 brands. Ford and Nokia were among the brands to strengthen their response rates, joining Nike as the only three accounts with response rates greater than 70%.

Brands are prioritizing response rate, i.e. getting responses to more users, rather than focusing on the speed of response as they seek to improve customer satisfaction.

While most brands improved their response rates, Nike, American Express, and Microsoft were the only accounts to reduce their *response times* this quarter, all are now within 3 hours.

Microsoft has made a clear effort in this regard, dropping their average response time to under an hour. As the only brand in the top ten list to do so, they've improved their response time by 73% over last quarter.

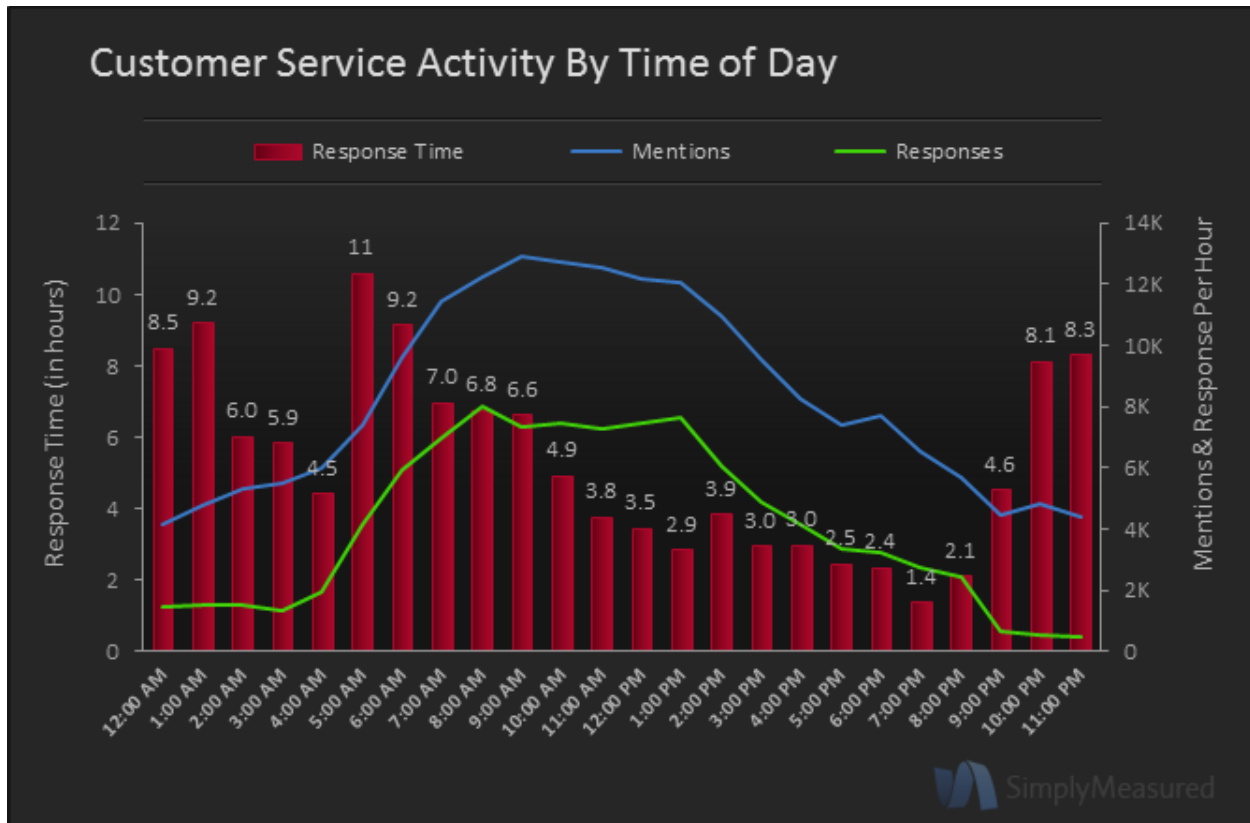
Nike is far and away the leader when it comes to "Tweets Sent", sending out nearly 3X the volume of the next closest brand giving it a 73% response rate, with an average time of 2.5 hours.

The top performing customer support brands are those in high demand, who are able to maintain both high response rates, while providing timely customer support.

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Response Around The Clock



Customer mentions don't stop after business hours. As we addressed last time, this requires brands to take a look at their individual activity by time of day to make sure they are adequately resourced. Global brands can certainly expect to receive customer service mentions at all hours of the day.

For consumers, the best time to reach out is in the late afternoon when a prompt response is more likely.

Conclusion:

The top dedicated customer support accounts have responded to increased demand by devoting more resources to customer support. These brands are prioritizing response rate, seeking to respond to a greater number of customers. Those resourced to successfully meet the demand of their customers are then able to strive to improve the speed at which they handle requests, and boost the overall level of satisfaction they are able to provide on Twitter.

As more consumers realize that Twitter is an option for receiving customer support, the demand for response will increase. Brands will have to be dynamic, allocating resources to ensure their ability to exceed customer expectations.