

# THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

It has been predicted that the influence of social media will greatly improve corporate customer service because of its direct, real-time connection between customers and companies. An early example of CRM took place in February 2010 when Kevin Smith, film writer/director, was kicked off a Southwest plane at Oakland International Airport, allegedly because the captain deemed Smith's obesity a "safety risk" to other passengers. After Mr. Smith was declined a place on the plane, he decided to talk to Southwest directly on Twitter.



At the time of the incident, Kevin Smith had 1.6 million Twitter followers and quite a substantial blog. The conversation started politely:

*Dear @SouthwestAir - I know I'm fat, but was Captain Leysath really justified in throwing me off a flight for which I was already seated?*

This soon turned into direct offense directed at Southwest:

*(1/2)Hey @SouthwestAir! I've landed in Burbank. Don't worry, wall of the plane was opened & I was*

*airlifted out while Richard Simmons supervised.*

*(2/2)Hey @SouthwestAir? [!@#\$\$] making it right for me just 'cause I have a platform. I sat next to a big girl who was chastised for not buy-(2/2) ing an extra ticket because "all passengers deserve their space." [!@#\$\$%^&\*] flight wasn't even full! [!@#\$\$] your size-ist policy. Rude...*

Southwest, which launched its Twitter account in 2007, was quick to reply to the incident: Southwest said in a statement that airline officials had called Smith to offer their "heartfelt apologies,"

I've read the tweets all night from  
[@thatkevinsmith](#) - He'll be getting a call  
at home from our Customer Relations  
VP tonight.

about 14 hours ago from TweetDeck  
Retweeted by 49 people

Reply Retweet



[@ThatKevinSmith](#) Ok, I'll be sure to check it out. Hopefully you received our voicemail earlier this evening.

about 11 hours ago from TweetDeck in reply to ThatKevinSmith

[@ThatKevinSmith](#) Again, I'm very sorry for the experience you had tonight. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do.

about 11 hours ago from TweetDeck in reply to ThatKevinSmith

but also stated his removal was for the "safety and comfort of all customers." *People Magazine* also published that Mr. Smith was given a \$100 voucher upon his arrival to his destination on a later flight.

While the online debate was not easily solved as both sides had their supporters and opponents, Kevin Smith's Twitter did not receive further publicity and the incident became yesterday's news. However, this case would probably have had a completely different outcome if Southwest did not contact Mr. Smith the same day. This case clearly demonstrates the opportunities and benefits of monitoring and managing the online presence.

**Lesson Learned:** Monitoring and managing online presence is a crucial ingredient for excellent customer service. Why do you need it? It will serve as a shield in critical times.