Chapter 4

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW SOCIAL CONSUMER

ORGANIZATIONS THAT GRASP THE CHANGING NATURE of consumers possess both the motivation and the insight to become Big Social Mobile. They know they can no longer interact with consumers the way they did in the past, recognizing that individuals have become much more diverse and much more powerful. Just as important, they realize how the consumer has changed and acknowledge the need for a more holistic, integrated approach that communicates with them more effectively.

Yet understanding the new social consumer is not as easy as it sounds. While every organizational leader understands that social communities and mobile technology have changed the essential nature of their markets and that new analytics offer tools to learn far more about these markets than previously possible, these leaders may still not “get it.” They may not have the time or incentive to understand the true nature of this new social consumer. As a result, they see no reason or opportunity to embrace the integrated approach.

Recognizing how dramatically consumers have changed, however, can serve as the much-needed wake-up call.

REDEFINING THE CONSUMER

Today’s consumers are smarter than they have ever been, utilizing social media and mobile technology as part of their decision-making process, and doing so
in a way that gives them the most options at the lowest price. But these are only the superficial changes. The underlying evolution in consumer behavior is having a more significant impact upon how organizations structure and utilize the people, processes, information, and technologies that touch the consumer.

In the past, companies were able to identify who they cared about as either a customer or a prospect. Anyone that did not fall into one of these two categories was considered secondary or tangential; the broader market beyond these two groups was relatively unimportant to most companies.

Not anymore. Now almost anyone can affect a company’s brand—positively and negatively.

As a result, organizations must cater to and care about a much broader group than just those individuals who generate revenue. This new definition of “customer” will certainly include traditional customers and prospects, but might also include social activists, organizational allies, suppliers, consultants, financial analysts, influential bloggers, and other social influencers in any corner of the world. Executives must think of their customer as any stakeholder who can influence the brand. Because this definition is broad, companies must now be concerned with two things:

- Creating a way to identify and communicate effectively and consistently with individual consumers.
- Creating a consistent way of interacting with the entire market that defines and reflects the company’s attitude, opinions, and value proposition, and meets the expectations of all social consumers.

While this is a difficult task for companies who reflexively talk to customers from the narrow perspective of “what can I sell them,” Big Social Mobile enterprises are motivated to understand today’s consumer not only so that they can convert consumers to customers but also so that they can create an influential community attached to their brand—a community that will multiply its reach and influence and generate additional sales opportunities. The new social consumers are happy to do these things for brands they love and especially for companies that practice an integrated approach. These are organizations that can speak the language of the new consumer and speak it expertly across a diverse range of communication channels: social, mobile, and traditional