Social Media Customer Inquiries

Audit Report

Report Number
MS-AR-17-006

May 8, 2017

SOCIAL
Media

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Highlights

SMOC staff members respond to select inquiries made through the Postal Service's Facebook and Twitter accounts Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST. Collectively, these accounts received over 390,000 posts in FY 2016.

Background

Social media has revolutionized the world of communication and commerce. It is increasingly used by billions of people around the globe to interact with each other, access information, and recommend products and services. It is now a common practice for companies and organizations to use social media to not only market products and services, but also to build relationships and exchange feedback with customers.

Customers are increasingly turning to the U.S. Postal Service's social media platforms — including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram — to contact the Postal Service. Customers might use social media to comment on a particular retail experience or to seek Postal Service responses to complaints, questions, or other information.

The Corporate Communications group oversees the Postal Service's social media strategy, including monitoring customers' postings to its social media platforms at the Social Media Operations Center (SMOC). SMOC staff members respond to select inquiries made through the Postal Service's Facebook and Twitter accounts Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST. Collectively, these accounts received over 390,000 posts in fiscal year (FY) 2016.

A variety of research has been conducted identifying leading practices for responding to customer inquiries over social media. This research highlights that social media users expect responses to all of their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts within one hour, seven days a week. Social media research also suggests that leading organizations are striving toward an "omnichannel" customer service approach — one that integrates customer interactions across various channels such as voice, email, text, internet, mobile, and social media — to provide a consistent customer experience.

Our objective was to determine how effectively the Postal Service responds to customer inquiries that are submitted through social media.

What the OIG Found

The Postal Service did not effectively respond to customer inquiries submitted through social media. First, the Postal Service did not respond to all actionable customer inquiries. For example, the Postal Service:

- Did not consistently respond to Facebook inquiries.

- Did not respond to inquiries on Instagram.

- Closed 23 percent of actionable Facebook and Twitter inquiries as not actionable.

- Automatically "flushed" (i.e., deleted) Facebook and Twitter posts from the SMOC response dashboard prior to being reviewed by an agent within 48 hours. Thirty-five percent of posts in the SMOC were flushed in FY 2016 and 68 percent were flushed on December 23, 2016 — one of the busiest mailing days of the holiday season.

Second, when the Postal Service did respond, it did not do so in a timely manner — taking 16 hours on average to respond to customers' initial posts. Only 43 percent of responses occurred within the Postal Service's 6 hour target.

In August 2013, we reported concerns about the Postal Service's use of social media, recommending areas of improvement like enhancing customer engagement, identifying subject matter experts, linking social media sites for easier navigation, sharing analytical reports, and evaluating how social media can be used within a comprehensive customer care program.

While the Postal Service did take some corrective action, we are concerned about the lack of sufficient progress aligning the SMOC response operations with those of the customer care program — a separate organization that handles the majority of telephone or website customer inquiries.

We found that coordination between these groups remains problematic. Staff do not share information due to the continued segmentation of their responsibilities — shortcomings that hamper efforts to move to an integrated customer service platform advocated by many leading organizations.

Management attributed the lack of responsiveness to the program still being in an informal pilot phase and related shortcomings in resources and staff. Nevertheless, the current approach and performance conflict with leading industry practices and consumer expectations. In addition, the Postal Service's continued inability to effectively respond to social media inquiries could create frustrating experiences for customers, increase customer complaints and customer care costs, and ultimately harm the Postal Service's brand and revenue.

What the OIG Recommended

We recommended management develop immediate strategies to address resources and staffing shortfalls to respond to all actionable customer inquiries posted on Postal Service hosted social media platforms within the Postal Service's six-hour target; and enhance the coordination between the SMOC and customer care program.

Transc: Transmittal Letter

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

May 8, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: JANICE D. WALKER
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

CLIFF RUCKER
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, SALES AND
CUSTOMER RELATIONS

E-Signed by Janet Sorensen
VERIFY authenticity with eSign Deskto

FROM: Janet M. Sorensen
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Retail, Delivery and Marketing

SUBJECT: Social Media Customer Inquiries
(Report Number MS-AR-17-006)

This report presents the results of our audit of Social Media Customer Inquiries (Project Number 17RG002MS000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Joe Wolski, Director, Retail, Marketing and International, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Corporate Audit and Response Management

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Findings

Introduction

This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of Social Media Customer Inquiries (Project Number 17RG002MS000). Our objective was to determine how effectively the U.S. Postal Service responds to customer inquiries that are submitted through social media. See Appendix A for additional information about this audit.

Social media has revolutionized the world of communication and commerce. It is increasingly used by billions of people around the world to interact with each other, access information, and recommend products and services. It is now a common practice for companies and organizations to use social media to not only market products and services, but also build relationships and exchange feedback with customers. The Postal Service started using Facebook and many other social media sites in 2009, mainly to market postal products. Table 1 shows the current number of followers the Postal Service has to its three major social media platforms — Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Table 1. Postal Service Followers, March 2017

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
552,317	109,800	14,900
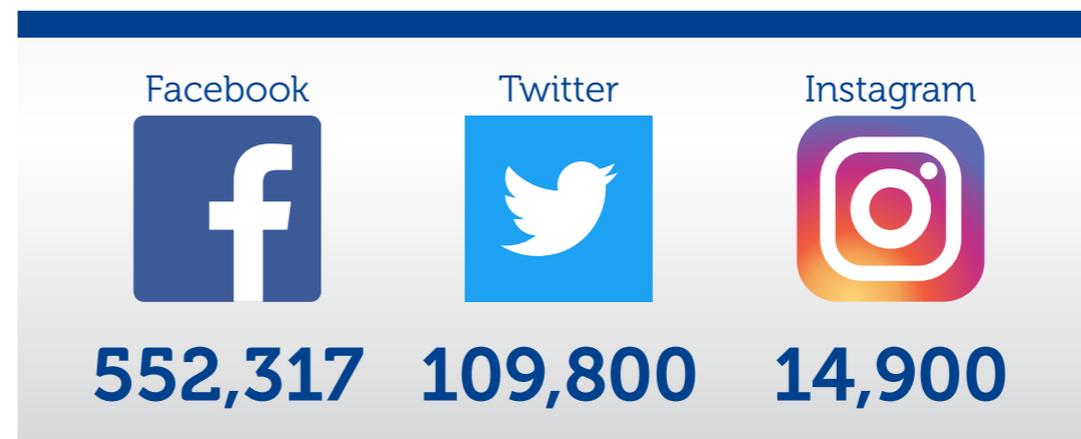
Source: The Postal Service's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram websites.

Customers are increasingly turning to the Postal Service's social media platforms as a way to contact the Postal Service. Customers might use social media to comment on a particular retail experience or to seek Postal Service responses to complaints, questions, or other requests for information.

The Postal Service piloted the Social Media Operations Center (SMOC) in 2014 to monitor and respond[1] to inquiries made to its social media platforms. SMOC agents generally review each posting and determine if a response is required. For "actionable" inquiries that necessitate a response, the Postal Service responds directly to the customer and may attempt to resolve the inquiry in a private message. The SMOC currently operates Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST, and focuses on postings made to Twitter. The SMOC is located at Postal Service Headquarters (see Figure 1), has a staff of postal employees detailed from other departments and contractors, and is managed by Corporate Communications.

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1   We use the word "respond" to mean an acknowledgment of the customer that made the inquiry, which differs from resolution. We did not evaluate the resolution of inquiries.

Figure 1. Social Media Operations Center

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) photo taken at the SMOC on July 12, 2016, at 11 a.m. SMOC employees were not photographed.

A variety of social media research has identified leading practices for responding to customer inquiries over social media, and has found that responding effectively is key to retaining customers and increasing revenue.[2] This research highlights that social media users expect responses to all of their postings within one hour, seven days a week. It also indicates that leading organizations are striving toward an omnichannel customer service approach — one that integrates customer interactions across various channels such as voice, email, text, internet, mobile, or social media — to provide a consistent customer experience.[3]

Summary

The Postal Service did not effectively respond to customer inquiries submitted through social media. First, the Postal Service did not respond to all actionable customer inquiries. For example, the Postal Service:

- Did not consistently respond to Facebook inquiries.

- Did not respond to inquiries on Instagram.

- Closed 23 percent of actionable Facebook and Twitter inquiries as not actionable.

- Automatically "flushed"[4] (i.e., deleted) Facebook and Twitter posts from the SMOC response dashboard prior to being reviewed by an agent within 48 hours. Thirty-five percent of posts in the SMOC were flushed in FY 2016 and 68 percent were flushed on December 23, 2016 — one of the busiest mailing days of the holiday season.

Second, when the Postal Service did respond, it did not do so in a timely manner — it took, on average, 16 hours to respond to customers' initial posts, and only 43 percent of responses occurred within the Postal Service's six hour target.

The Postal Service did not effectively respond to customer inquiries submitted through social media.

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2   "How to Provide Great Customer Service via Social," *Brandwatch Blog*, dated February 25, 2015.
3   "The New Customer Service is Here, There & Everywhere," *Business News Daily*, dated August 6, 2014.
4   Posts that are flushed are automatically deleted from the SMOC response dashboard if they are not reviewed by an agent within 48 hours.

We also remain concerned about the lack of sufficient progress in response to our 2013[5] report that advocated more closely aligning the SMOC response operations with those of the customer care program — a separate organization that handles the majority of telephone and website customer inquiries. We found that coordination between these groups remains problematic as staff do not share information due to the continued segmentation of these responsibilities — shortcomings that hamper efforts to move to an omnichannel customer service platform advocated by many leading organizations.

Management recognizes these issues and attributed the lack of responsiveness to the program still being in an informal pilot phase and related shortcomings in resources and staff. While we acknowledge these factors, the current approach and performance conflict with leading industry practices. In addition, the Postal Service's continued inability to effectively respond to social media inquiries could create frustrating experiences for customers, increase customer complaints and customer care costs, and ultimately harm the Postal Service's image and brand.

The Postal Service's current program does not (1) respond to all actionable inquiries, (2) respond to inquiries in a timely manner, and (3) effectively coordinate with the customer care program.

Social Media Customer Inquiries

The Postal Service did not effectively respond to customer inquiries submitted via social media. Specifically, the Postal Service's current program does not (1) respond to all actionable inquiries, (2) respond to inquiries in a timely manner, and (3) effectively coordinate with the customer care program.

Management recognizes these issues and attributed the lack of responsiveness to the program still being in an informal pilot phase and related shortcomings in resources and staff. The Postal Service's continued inability to effectively respond to social media inquiries could create frustrating experiences for customers, increase customer complaints and customer care costs, and ultimately harm the Postal Service's image and brand.

Responses - Number

The Postal Service did not respond to all actionable customer inquiries. We specifically found the Postal Service's SMOC:

- Did not consistently respond to inquiries on its largest social media platform — Facebook.[6] For example, the Postal Service intermittently turned off the SMOC Facebook response tool as a way to manage the workload of available staff. Figure 2 is an example of several unanswered Facebook customer inquiries.

- Did not respond to inquiries on Instagram.

- Closed 23 percent of actionable Facebook and Twitter inquiries as not actionable. We specifically reviewed a random statistical sample of 205 inquiries that were closed by a social media response agent because they were considered not actionable. We used the guidance provided to social media agents and determined that 48 inquiries (23 percent) were actionable including complaints, requests for help, and compliments.

Figure 2. Examples of Unanswered Postal Service Facebook Page Inquiries

Source: OIG screenshot of Postal Service Facebook Page on February 8, 2017.

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5 *The Postal Service's Use of Social Media* (Report Number MS-MA-13-003, dated August 1, 2013).
6 The Postal Service tracked only 73,484 Facebook inquiries in FY 2016.

- Automatically flushed significant portions of Facebook and Twitter posts from the SMOC response dashboard prior to being reviewed by an agent within 48 hours. Thirty-five percent of posts in the SMOC were flushed in FY 2016 and 68 percent[7] were flushed on December 23, 2016 — one of the busiest mailing days of the holiday season.

The current approach and performance conflict with leading practices that emphasize the importance of responding to all actionable inquiries across all major social media platforms, particularly Facebook (see Table 2).

Table 2. Industries Social Media Response Activity

| Response Activity	UPS	FedEx	comcast	Walmart
Hours/Days of Availability	24/7	24/7	24/7	24/7
Social Media Response Channels	f ✕ ◎	f ✕	f ✕	f ✕ ◎

Source: OIG analysis of leading industry websites during October 2016.

Responses - Timeliness

When SMOC staff did respond, they did not do so in a timely manner. We found that it took the Postal Service, on average, 16 hours to respond to customers' initial posts, and only 43 percent of responses occurred within the Postal Service's six-hour target. Figure 3 illustrates the number of hours it took SMOC agents to respond to social media inquiries.

Ten percent of posts were closed because too much time had passed and they no longer warranted responses.[8] Figure 4 shows a Twitter user who was upset he did not receive a timely response to his inquiry.

Figure 3. FY 2016 Time Taken to Respond to Social Media Inquiries
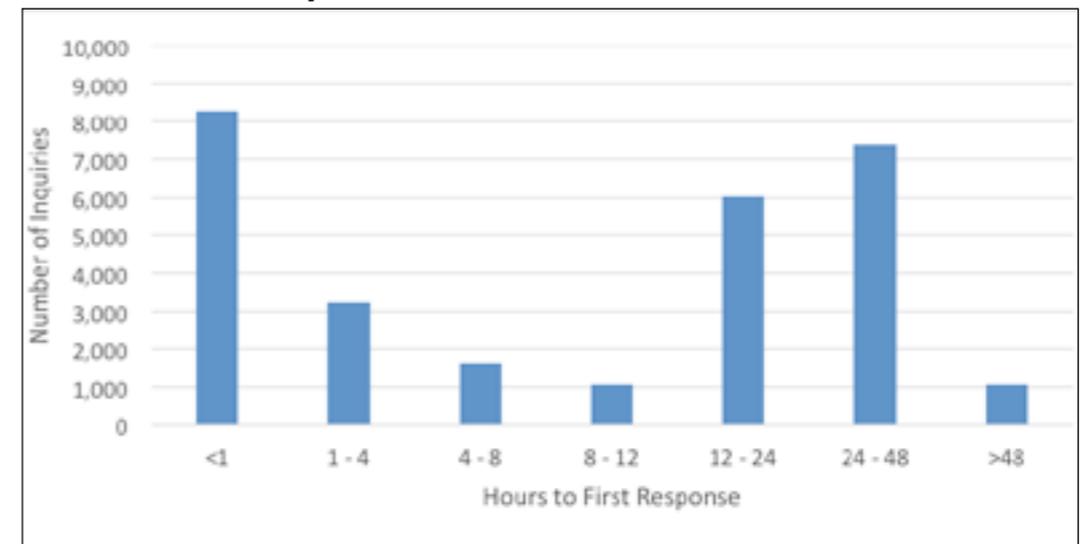
Source: OIG analysis of SMOC database.

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7 The SMOC was closed on December 24 because it was a Saturday. Additional staff were not brought on board until mid-January 2017 and the number of flushed posts increased before an agent reviewed them.

8 SMOC data showed that 7.77 percent of posts were categorized as "Closed – Did not Address Within 48 Hours" and 3.1 percent of posts were categorized as "Closed – Irrelevant" in FY 2016.

Figure 4. Example of Twitter Post Not Answered Timely
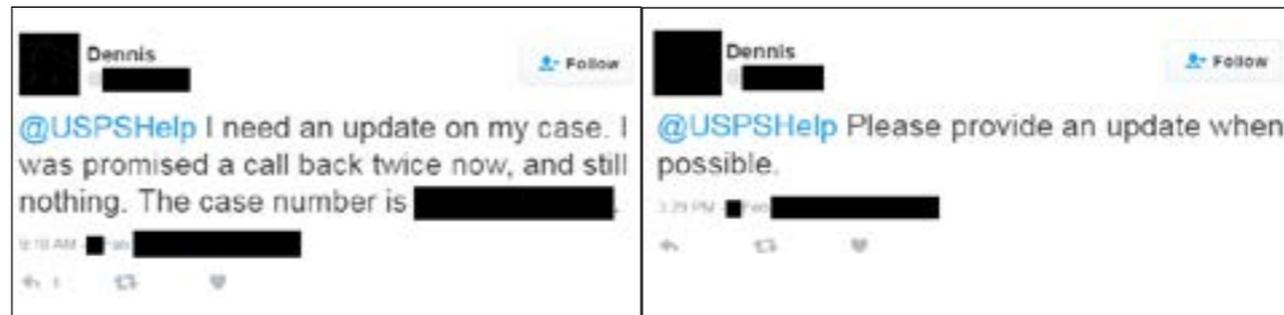
Source: OIG screenshot of Postal Service Twitter handle on February 17, 2017.

Further, the SMOC's hours of operation are limited as it operates Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST. Figure 5 shows the number of incoming posts by the hour of day. Thirty-one percent of incoming posts occurred outside of the SMOC's normal hours and 17 percent of posts occurred between 6-10 p.m.

Figure 5. Incoming Posts by Hour of Day
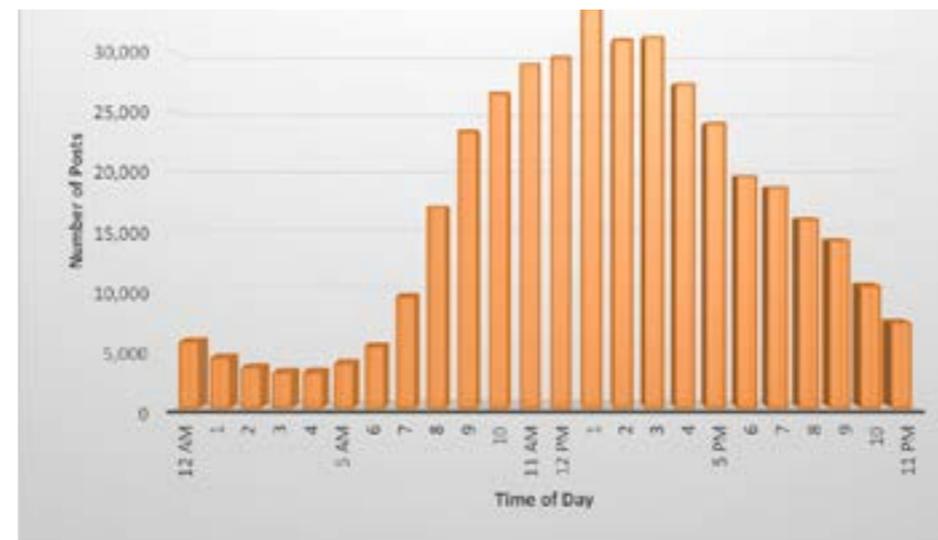
Source: OIG analysis of SMOC database.

The current approach and performance conflict with leading social media practices that advocate the importance of responding to inquiries within one hour and having extended hours of operations, particularly for Pacific time zone customers and during busy holiday seasons (see Table 3).

Table 3. Industry Response Time on Social Media

Response Activity	UPS	FedEx	Comcast	Walmart
Response Time	Within 1 hour	Within 1 hour	Within 4 hours	Within 6 hours

Source: OIG analysis of leading industry websites during February 2017.

We remain concerned regarding the lack of coordination between the SMOC and the customer care group, noting each manages their own independently operated system due to the continued segmentation of their responsibilities.

Coordination

We previously reported concerns about the Postal Service use of social media in 2013, recommending that the Postal Service incorporate social media within the customer care program — a separate organization within the Postal Service that handles the majority of telephone or website customer inquiries.[9] Although the Postal Service agreed with the recommendation and to implement it by September 2014, little progress has been made and there is no current intent to transition to a more comprehensive customer care program.

We remain concerned regarding the lack of coordination between the two groups, noting each manages their own independently operated system due to the continued segmentation of their responsibilities. These shortcomings may not only drive inefficient customer response strategies — as the Postal Service may be handling the same customer across various channels and spend time collecting key information multiple times — they will also hamper efforts to move to an omnichannel customer service platform advocated by many leading organizations. Management recognizes the need to coordinate and has recently provided SMOC agents with read-only access to the Customer Care Center (CCC) database; however, CCC staff does not have access to social media inquiries or data.

As noted in an April 2014 report,[10] solving more customer complaints over social media can help the Postal Service project a better public image and brand, reduce complaints by sharing solutions with all customers, and reduce customer care costs.

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9   We remain concerned regarding the lack of coordination between the SMOC and the customer care group, noting each manages their own independently operated system due to the continued segmentation of their responsibilities.

10   *Like, Share, Tweet: Social Media and the Postal Service* (Report Number RARC-WP-14-010, dated April 21, 2014).

Recommendations

We recommend management develop immediate strategies to address resources and staffing shortfalls to respond to actionable customer inquiries posted on Postal Service hosted social media; and enhance coordination between the SMOC and customer care program.

We recommend the vice president, Corporate Communications, develop strategies to address resources and staffing shortfalls to:

1. Respond to all actionable customer inquiries posted on Postal Service hosted social media platforms within the Postal Service's six-hour target.

We recommend the vice president, Corporate Communications, and senior vice president, Sales and Customer Relations:

2. Develop strategies for enhancing the coordination between the Social Media Operations Center and the customer care program.

Management's Comments

Management partially agreed with the findings and recommendation 1, and disagreed with recommendation 2.

Management disagreed that the Postal Service did not consistently respond to Facebook and Instagram inquiries, and stated it focused its limited resources on the platform that it believed could help the most customers—Twitter. Management stated that Facebook is generally not a preferred customer service platform and that Instagram provides a different user experience. Management restated that its social media response program was in an informal pilot model and had very limited resources. Management also asked for further clarification regarding the difference between "actionable" and "non-actionable" inquiries as noted in our report, and stated that the limited team of social customer responders selected inquiries that could be solved quickly and efficiently, rather than those that may have been complex and difficult to solve.

Management agreed the Postal Service did not respond to inquiries in a timely manner, and clarified as such in subsequent correspondence. Management stated that due to limited resources, they were unable to keep up with the amount of posts coming into the SMOC, which at times exceeded 1,000 per day. Management stated the response team worked diligently to solve as many customers' issues as they possibly could during the hours of operation.

Regarding recommendation 1, management disagreed that it should respond to all actionable inquiries posted on the Postal Service's social media platforms, but agreed that actionable inquiries should be answered within the six-hour target on select platforms. Management also disagreed with the approach and methodologies used as baselines in the report, asserting that it would have been more appropriate to compare the Postal Service's pilot program to another company or organization that was in a pilot stage or to other federal agencies. Management stated that responding to all actionable customer inquiries on specific Postal Service-hosted social media platforms within this target was included in its strategic plan. Management also stated it will decide which platform(s) to respond to in accordance with their experience and industry standards. The target implementation date is September 30, 2017.

Management disagreed with recommendation 2, and raised significant privacy and security concerns, stating that personally identifiable information has become more at risk in today's online environment. In addition, management stated the most common inquiry received by the SMOC is "Where is my Package?", and it does not believe that integrating these inquiries into the CCC would be the most effective and efficient way of addressing these inquiries. Instead, management proposed using new technology such as a chat bot to respond to these types of inquiries and directing customers to the more secure CCC for issues the social media team cannot resolve quickly or easily.

See Appendix B for management's comments in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's partial agreement to recommendation 1 to be responsive and their disagreement with recommendation 2 to be non-responsive.

Regarding management's disagreement that it did not consistently respond to Facebook and Instagram inquiries due to limited resources in its pilot program, we remain concerned that the program is still considered a pilot, particularly as we originally identified concerns with the Postal Service's social media program back in August 2013. We continue to believe these limitations conflict with leading practices of key competitors such as FedEx and UPS and the overall expectations of its customers, particularly as these customers may have no knowledge that the Postal Service's social media program is still in a pilot phase or of its limited resources.

Regarding management's disagreement and question regarding our methodology in determining that the Postal Service closed 23 percent of actionable Facebook and Twitter inquiries as non-actionable, we have updated our report to reflect that we used the same methodology in conducting our analysis that the Postal Service provided to its social media agents. More specifically, when reviewing these inquiries, we disagreed with how the Postal Service applied their methodology to close these inquiries as non-actionable, as we found them to meet the Postal Service's criteria for being actionable.

Regarding management's partial agreement with recommendation 1, we continue to believe that the Postal Service should be responding to actionable customer inquiries on all of its hosted social media platforms within a six-hour target — not just Twitter inquiries on Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST and sporadic Facebook inquiries. We continue to advocate a strategy that would include all Postal Service hosted social media platforms. OIG considers management's proposed action — to reassess which platform(s) they will respond to — to be responsive, as it meets the intent of our recommendation. This action should help resolve the issues identified in this report.

Regarding management's concern about our approach and methodology for baseline performance, we specifically chose UPS and FedEx as they are key competitors in the mailing and shipping market, and Comcast and Walmart have large, nationwide customer service networks.

Regarding management's disagreement with recommendation 2, we acknowledge management's privacy and security concerns and the potential program enhancements including the use of a chat bot or directing more complex or time consuming inquiries to the Customer Care Center. We remain concerned, however, about the lack of progress in this area since our previous social media report issued in 2013. We believe that strategies can be developed in a manner to mitigate potential risks, and that improvements are needed as these shortcomings may drive inefficient customer response strategies — the Postal Service may be handling the same customer across various channels and spend time collecting key information multiple times. We view the disagreements on this recommendation as unresolved and do not plan to pursue it through the formal audit resolution process. We will close this recommendation as not implemented with the issuance of this report.

Recommendation 1 requires OIG concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendation 1 should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendation can be closed. We will continue to evaluate the coordination between the SMOC and the customer care program in future audit work.

Appendices

Background

Customers are increasingly turning to social media to contact businesses, social networks, and friends and family. The Internet has 3.17 billion users, with 2.3 billion active social media users and Internet users have an average of 5.54 social media accounts.[11] Ninety-one percent of retail brands use two or more social media channels as over 1 million new active mobile social users are added every day — 12 each second. Table 4 shows the number of users per social media channel.

Table 4. Users per Social Media Channel

Social Media Channel	Number of Users
Facebook	1.71 billion
Wechat	1.12 billion
YouTube	Over 1 billion
WhatsApp	900 million
Weibo	600 million
LinkedIn	450 million
Instagram	400 million
Twitter	320 million
Google+	300 million
Pinterest	100 million
Snapchat	100 million

Source: "96 Amazing Social Media Statistics and Facts," *Brandwatch*, dated March 7, 2016.

Customers are using the Postal Service's social media platforms — including Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram — as a way to contact with the Postal Service, particularly to share complaints, ask questions, or request information. The Postal Service's ability to effectively respond to customer inquiries is key to retaining customers and increasing revenue.

The Postal Service uses social media for three distinct purposes: to market and promote postal services and products, to listen to customers' feedback, and to help customers who contact the Postal Service via social media. The Postal Service relies on several different contractors to assist it in its social media strategy and related activities and analytics.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to determine how effectively the Postal Service responds to customer inquiries that are submitted through social media. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Researched and reviewed the Postal Service's policies, procedures, and strategies related to accepting, reviewing, assessing, and responding to customer inquiries made through its various social media platforms.

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11 Brandwatch, *96 Amazing Social Media Statistics and Facts*, March 7, 2016.

- Researched and reviewed the Postal Service's current social media initiatives and responsibilities related to responding to customer inquiries and the status and performance of these initiatives.

- Researched and reviewed the various social media platforms the Postal Service uses to capture customer inquiries and sentiments. These platforms included Postal Service-managed platforms (such as its Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts) and included other social media platforms (such as Yelp and Google+).

- Researched and reviewed the tools and resources the Postal Service uses for social media data analytics related to customer inquiries.

- Researched and reviewed the Postal Service's data analytics tools and resources related to customer inquiries submitted through its social media platforms. This included reviewing any reports (e.g., by Lithium, Postal Service Social Media Operations Center contractor), and how that data is shared with, or available, to other Postal Service staff and management.

- Interviewed Postal Service officials on their policies, procedures, social media strategy, Ready Now ->Future Ready initiative, and performance related to social media inquiries and social media platforms.

- Researched and identified leading practices related to managing and responding to customer inquiries submitted through the Postal Service's social media. We reviewed articles, research, and specific companies such as major competitors FedEx and UPS, and large companies like Comcast and Walmart. We also researched and identified leading practices from public organizations, including the Transportation Security Administration, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, and Philly311, and interviewed officials from these leading organizations as available.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2016 through May 2017 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on March 28, 2017, and included their comments where appropriate.

We assessed the reliability of the Postal Service SMOC data by confirming the accuracy of the data with subject matter experts. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
Mobile Opportunities: Smart Services for Connected Consumers	To identify ways the Postal Service could strengthen its existing mobile presence. The OIG identified five features the Postal Service could incorporate into the USPS Mobile app as well as five new app ideas, which could allow the Postal Service to provide a better customer experience and generate additional revenue.	RARC-WP-15-015	8/31/2015	None
Like, Share, Tweet: Social Media and the Postal Service	This paper will expand the analysis of the social media environment in which the Postal Service operates and provide additional suggestions on how it could increase the effectiveness of its social media strategy. The OIG found the Postal Service should use social media as a valuable data source and as a way to improve brand image.	RARC-WP-14-010	4/21/2014	None
The Postal Service's Use of Social Media	To evaluate the Postal Service's social media use and identify opportunities to improve this critical communication tool. The OIG found the Postal Service could use social media to identify systemic issues by summarizing and analyzing customer comments and complaints.	MS-MA-13-003	8/1/2013	None

UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE

April 18, 2017

LORI LAU DILLARD
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Social Media Customer Inquiries (Report Number [MS-AR-17-DRAFT])

The U.S. Postal Service disagrees with several of the points brought up in the Office of Inspector General's ("OIG") findings from its draft audit report dated March 30, 2017 (the "Report").

The OIG found that the Postal Service did not consistently respond to Facebook and Instagram inquiries. As acknowledged in the Report, the Postal Service's social media response program was in an informal pilot model and resources were very limited. For much of the fiscal year, the Postal Service had no more than three to four full-time responders to reply to inquiries. Because the industry generally recognizes Twitter as a customer service platform, the Postal Service focused its limited resources on the platform that it believed could help the most customers. Based on our experience in the field, we believe that Facebook is generally not a preferred customer service platform and that many brands direct their Facebook customer service inquiries to Twitter or an email platform. With regard to Instagram, that platform is both newer than Facebook and Twitter and also provides a different user experience. As reflected in Table 2 of the Report, not all major companies with Instagram accounts choose to incorporate that platform into their social media response activities.

The OIG also found the Postal Service closed 23 percent of actionable Facebook and Twitter inquiries as non-actionable. We would appreciate clarification from the OIG on what criteria it used to determine which posts were "actionable" and which were "non-actionable". We would also appreciate additional information on who from the OIG made such determinations and the level of experience in social customer response that such individual, or individuals, had in drawing these conclusions. The Postal Service's limited team of social customer responders determined that the best process was to select inquiries that could be solved quickly and efficiently. Some actionable responses may have been complex and difficult to solve, whereas in this pilot stage, the responders were trying to help the greatest amount of customers.

The OIG found that the Postal Service did not respond in a timely manner – taking 16 hours on average to respond to customers' initial posts. As stated previously, the

Postal Service had limited resources, often no more than three to four full-time responders at any given time for most of the pilot, and was unable to keep up with the amount of posts coming in to the Social Media Operations Center (SMOC). An excess of 1,000 posts come to our @uspshelp Twitter handle alone on any given day. Our response team worked diligently to solve as many customers' issues as they possibly could during the hours of operation.

Recommendation #1:

Respond to all actionable customer inquiries posted on Postal Service social media platforms within the Postal Service's 6 hour target.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Response: The Corporate Communications organization does not agree with the recommendation that we should meet this target on all platforms, but agrees that actionable inquiries should be answered within a 6 hour target on select platforms.

The Postal Service's strategic plan, presented to the OIG, addressed the recommendation to respond to all actionable customer inquiries on specific Postal Service-hosted social media platforms within a 6 hour target. The Postal Service is evaluating the social media customer response/inquiry platforms as part of the overall pilot program. The Postal Service will decide which platform(s) to respond to in accordance with our experience and industry standards.

Furthermore, we disagree with the approach and methodologies that the OIG took to baseline the Postal Service's performance contained in the Report. The OIG compared the Postal Service's social media customer response pilot to publicly-traded private-sector companies. It would have been more appropriate for the OIG to compare the Postal Service's pilot program to another company or organization that was in a pilot stage or to other federal executive agencies with active social media accounts.

Target Implementation Date:
September 30, 2017

Responsible Officials:
William C. Rucker, Senior Vice-President, Sales and Customer Relations and
Janice D. Walker, Vice-President, Corporate Communications

Recommendation #2:

Develop strategies for enhancing the coordination between the Social Media Operations Center and the Customer Care Program.

Response: The USPS Sales & Customer Relations Organization does not agree with this recommendation for multiple reasons. We have significant Privacy and Security concerns with the integration and enhanced coordination of the social media response center and the Customer Care Program. Personally Identifiable Information (PII) has become more at risk in today's online environment with the constant threat of data breaches on other websites, nefarious state actors, etc. We do not want to encourage customers to divulge sensitive details of their usps.com account in an open social media channel. For example, customers often use their email address as their username, which is considered PII – this is not something that should be shared over social media. Similarly, Package Tracking numbers could be used by a fraudster in conjunction with the customer's publicly available social media account details to intercept and redirect the package to another address (known as social engineering). According to numerous studies, social engineering techniques have become very sophisticated and much more commonplace – this is something we should not facilitate by encouraging customers to share potentially sensitive details publicly.

Furthermore, the most common inquiry received by the social media response center is "Where is my package?" USPS does not believe integration with the Customer Care Center would be the most effective and efficient way of addressing these customer inquiries. Instead we recommend utilization of new technology such as a chat bot to respond to the most prevalent inquiries such as package tracking. For issues that the social media team cannot resolve quickly or easily, we would follow industry practices to direct the user to the Customer Care Center through a more secure channel.

William C. Rucker
Senior Vice President
Sales & Customer Relations
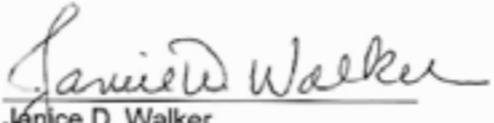
Janice D. Walker
Vice President
Corporate Communications

cc: Manager, Corporate Audit and Response Management

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