

Facebook Brings Companies, Customers Closer

By Quentin Fottrell, December 21, 2011

Facebook is quietly testing a new feature which would allow businesses to exchange private messages with their customers. But some consumer advocates fear that rather than foster more open discussion, the technology could help companies brush formerly public complaints under the rug.

Currently, all communication on companies' Facebook pages is conducted in the open, but under the system being piloted in Asia, businesses will be able to conduct private exchanges with users who "like" them, making the site a customer-service clearing house. A Facebook spokeswoman confirmed the feature is being tested.

It's unclear if this feature will be more a boon to customers or companies, experts say. "Companies would love to have griping customers stop posting complaints on their public Facebook pages, and consumers might miss out on the leverage they get by complaining so everyone can see it," says Edgar Dworsky, founder of ConsumerWorld.org. "In part, it is that public complaint that motivates some companies to take swift action to satisfy the customer."

There are other potential downsides to customers buddying up with businesses, advocates say. Facebook is bringing a casual social aspect to the relationship between companies and customers, which experts say could lead to over-sharing of personal information by users. "There could be more concerns over privacy," says Mike Lubansky, senior financial analyst at Sageworks, a financial information company.

Still, opening the lines of private communication between Facebook business pages and consumers provides consumers with one more avenue to have their concerns heard, Dworsky says, "so it should not be discounted." Plus, according to the new system, users can opt out of the service entirely by adjusting their personal settings.

For the full story featuring Sageworks' analysis please visit [SmartMoney - Facebook Brings Companies, Customers Closer.](#)

