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# Is Obama killing small business in America or is social media customer feedback?

The answer may surprise you.

By Martin Baird  
Chief Feedback Officer

We've had the housing collapse, bank failures, high unemployment, European debt crisis and political gridlock. But have those been the problems plaguing small businesses? "It's easy for the media and talking heads to lament about taxes, spending and healthcare as 'the reason(s)' for small business struggles and failures," says Martin R. Baird, Chief Feedback Officer for South Office, a Boise, Idaho-based company. But they may not be right.

"It's a presidential election year and the economy is soft at best and the government debt is out of control" Baird says. It's easy to throw stones at the President and say that it's all his fault.

But, if you look closer, social media has created a "butterfly effect" that could be the tsunami that wipes out many small businesses. "Social media could devastate businesses. Customers now have amazing power at their finger tips," Baird comments. Facebook, Yelp and Twitter have created a tectonic shift. Customers now have the power to crush a business without the business ever being the wiser.

"It's very simple, the customer feedback loop has been destroyed. Customers no longer share directly with the business they share with the universe" Baird says. "This means that businesses may never know about a comment or rant that is causing them serious harm." Places like Yelp give people anonymity so they can rant and blast businesses for little or no reason. Most small businesses don't have the time and money to ferret out every comment or Tweet.

Research out of Forrester Research says we have entered the Age of the Customer. Through technology customers now have new power. Baird says, "This is true. Customers have more power than ever before. In the old days a person told the business when they had a problem or maybe a few people at work. Now they all want to be Woodward and Bernstein breaking the story of the soggy burger."

Facebook and Twitter make it easier to share with the universe than it is to share with the business. Who wants to fill out a comment card, talk to a manager or go online after they get home to share their comments? The reality is only the "lovers" and "haters," those that represent the extreme ends of the spectrum, are likely to take the time to do any of those things.

Until businesses embrace a fast and easy way to allow their customers to share feedback directly this shift will continue. "Customers will do what is easy. They vote with their wallet and rant with their phone," notes Baird.



The technology shift and tough economy have left many businesses stuck between a rock and hard place. They need repeat business and more referrals to survive, but may have no idea that a person just posted comments that are very negative about them on Facebook. At no time in history has the consumer had more power than they do today.

This could have an impact on the United States for generations. According to the Small Business Administration, small firms have generated 64 percent of net new jobs over the past 15 years. "Consider this," Baird says, "If one out of three micro businesses – companies with less than four employees – in the United States would need to layoff one person, the unemployment rate would double."

"The Internet has made it easy to share experiences with the world, but we want customers to share that valuable information with the business owners directly so the owners know exactly what customers want changed and improved," Baird says. "Businesses should understand that comment cards don't work because customer feedback needs to be handled in real time not days or weeks later. And for the business itself, obtaining feedback needs to be fast, easy, and actionable."

South Office offers <http://www.feedbackrevolutionqr.com> [Feedback Revolution QR], a free real time customer feedback service to help businesses add value to the customers experience and improve business practices. Feedback Revolution QR weds the technology of smartphones with extensive customer experience research published by Harvard, making this service a game changer in customer feedback.

Because the service is quick and easy, people are more likely to participate and provide valuable customer feedback. The customer scans a custom QR code with their smartphone. The customer types or uses speech to text to share their comments on the phone and then transmits their feedback by touching a "submit" button. It takes less than 60 seconds to provide feedback. Customers can also participate on their computer or any other device that has an Internet connection, using a URL for the customer survey. Their responses are anonymous, so they can be honest about their customer feedback without guilt.

South Office LLC helps businesses measure and manage the quality of their customer experience and make improvements to their internal operations to enhance business performance and increase revenue. The company focuses on providing tools that create real time customer dialog.

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