



## Best Buy - Twelpforce

Jay Chiat Strategic Excellence Awards

Gold, Creative Technologies, 2010



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Title: **Best Buy - Twelpforce**  
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### **SUMMARY**

Best Buy's legendary expertise available anytime. Anywhere. To anyone. For free. That was the simple and powerful idea behind the launch of The Twelpforce, the online army of knowledgeable and passionate Best Buy employees, standing ready on Twitter.

Tapping into Best Buy's greatest asset – its employees – has always required a physical trip to the store. Today's world doesn't operate on normal business hours. People live in an always-on, digitally connected world. They depend on their electronics and they require instant access to information and support.

We leveraged the rapidly expanding, micro-blogging service, Twitter, to create a platform for customers to interact directly with Best Buy Blueshirts and Geek Squad Geeks. The Twelpforce has helped thousands of people and positioned Best Buy as a leader that's redefining customer service for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **THE UNDISPUTED CATEGORY LEADER**

As the electronics category experienced exponential growth over the past three decades, customers have turned to Best Buy for guidance and a trusted perspective.

Best Buy became the largest electronics retailer in the country with a business model built on the expertise of its people.

They leapfrogged the competition time and again by differentiating their service offering and in-store experience.

First to make its salespeople non-commission

First to create experiential stores with interactive displays

First to offer 24-hour computer support services with the acquisition of Geek Squad



## **A CHANGING RETAIL ENVIRONMENT**

When we took over the account in early 2009, a fundamental shift in the category was well underway.

The No. 2 electronics retailer in the country, Circuit City, had recently filed for bankruptcy.

Best Buy was now facing stiff competition from new and different competitors like WalMart, Target, Costco and Amazon, who sell everything from books to toilet paper, in addition to electronics.

## **MASS RETAILERS EXPAND ASSORTMENT**

These competitors had amplified their electronics offering and shifted perceptions by carrying top tier brands. Proof of how quickly they were catching up – you could now buy your Apple iPod at WalMart.

Customer attitudes and behavior were starting to signal that the name on the box meant more than the name on the front of the store.

In addition, their business model bet customers would be willing to sacrifice advice and knowledge for low price and convenience.

## **THE COMMODITIZATION OF ELECTRONICS**

And for a growing number of people, they were right.

You could now buy technology everywhere.

In addition, The Great Recession had arrived. Frugality and finding the best deal was the new status symbol.

Best Buy's competitors had them beat on price perception and were starting to become a real threat.

## **AN UNCERTAIN DESTINY**

Increasingly customers didn't seem to need Best Buy's expertise. The foundation of their business model was eroding.

Best Buy needed to make changes in order to avoid the fate of Circuit City.

## **CULTURE OF BUYING ELECTRONICS**

We set out to understand how the culture of buying and owning electronics had shifted.

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Customers told us they had dreams of what they wanted to do with their technology but no idea how to make them happen.

Electronics were hard to set up and even harder to integrate. Manufacturers had competing visions and restricted customers with proprietary solutions. Despite its ubiquity, technology was not easy to navigate.

The stress in buying electronics required making a bet about the future – which version was better, which format would win, which closed system was right?

## **CULTURE OF OWNING ELECTRONICS**

In addition, technology was no longer a luxury. It was a necessity. People relied on electronics in every facet of their lives.

Customers lived in an always-on, digitally connected world, which raised the stakes of staying plugged in.

Their world didn't operate on normal business hours. People required instant access to information and support 24/7.

This meant that the need for support extended well beyond the transaction.

## **HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT**

And yet accessing the expertise of Best Buy's Blueshirts and Geeks required a trip to the store between 10am and 9pm.

The four walls of our stores confined our biggest brand asset.

That's when it dawned on us. It wasn't that people didn't need Best Buy's expertise. It was that we were offering analog support in a digital world.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

Strategically, it wasn't as simple as making our people available 24 hours a day. Best Buy – and many of our competitors – have had 1-800 hotlines for years.

In reality, the very notion of customer service was outdated. Old-fashioned. The way things "used to be."

The real challenge – and our big opportunity – was to change culture and make customer service relevant again.

How could we help Best Buy redefine customer service for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **THE TWELPFORCE**

Our solution: The Twelforce. An online army of thousands of Blueshirts and Geeks standing ready on Twitter.



## THE TWELPFORCE

Every day, this digital armada proactively scours the net searching for tech-related tweets, and provides the answers and advice people need.

And anyone who has a specific question can tweet @twelforce directly. And get an answer. Directly. Which made Best Buy's legendary expertise available anytime. Anywhere. To anyone. For free.

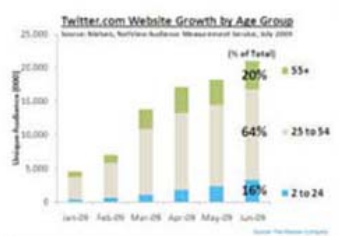


## WHY TWITTER?

*"It's hard to argue that 2009 wasn't the year of Twitter."*

—Stan Shroeder, Mashable

Twitter's popularity skyrocketed in early 2009. It was going mainstream, but unlike conventional early adopter models. Audits, not teens, were driving the growth.



Source: Mashable.com, How Twitter Conquered the World in 2009, 12/25/09.

NYTimes.com, Who's Driving Twitter's Popularity? Not Teens, 8/25/09.

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## THE MEDIUM WAS ALSO THE MESSAGE

Twitter was real-time and 24/7. Customers could access Blueshirt and Geek expertise whenever and wherever, from the comfort of their own computer or mobile device.

And it was transparent. In contrast to the absent or outsourced customer service culture of our category, we facilitated direct interactions with real Best Buy employees, not some dude in Bangalore.

Twelforce wasn't about *talking about or promising* 21<sup>st</sup> century customer service, it was about *doing* 21<sup>st</sup> century customer service.

## CAMPAIGN ROLLOUT

Television spots brought the service to life and showed just how great it was to have an expert army of Blueshirts and Geeks ready to answer any question. And at the same time, the spots promoted key back-to-school products.

Banner ads and in-store messaging reminded customers that Best Buy was there for them, even if they weren't actually in the store.



## THE TWELPFORCE LAUNCH

The Twelforce came online and questions came streaming in. Early tweets wereserious and amusing:

- twelforce notebooks/computers (which is best for me?)
- twelforce I need to project from 1 computer to 2 projectors how can I make that happen?
- twelforce how can I find a girlfriend?
- twelforce is it true you can answer my tech questions for free?
- twelforce I need some help building a laser beam
- twelforce my toshiba satellite laptop needs new motherboard (A30D-S648, PSAH0U-00Q009) Is this the right part?  
<http://tinyurl.com/ycylyvj>

And nearly 2,000 Blueshirts and Geeks rushed to provide answers to every single one.

## CULTURAL SHIFT

The Twelforce changed the way Best Buy listens to and speaks with customers – redefining customer service for the 21<sup>st</sup>

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century.



## RESULTS TO DATE

Responded to over 29,000 questions and counting

Over 2,600 Blueshirts and Geeks engaging with customers

26,837 followers on Twitter and counting

Back-to-school laptop sales beat forecast by 40%

Customer complaints down over 20% in year one

Best Buy ranked #22 in Social Brands of 2009

2009 Marketer of the Year (Direct Marketing Association)

2010 Titanium Grand Prix (Cannes Lions Advertising Festival)

## #THANK\_YOU

If you have any more questions about how this works, send a tweet to @twelforce and someone will be happy to explain.

Read more on this [Twitter strategy](#) from Sara Brito of Crispin Porter + Bogusky.

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