

Community eBook

Social Media Listening, Measuring, and Engagement Primer

JUNE 2010 ISSUE



START

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CHAPTER 1:

Your Resource for Getting Started in Social Media

Imagine: Your boss has come to you asking what all this social media stuff is about. He's heard of Facebook and Twitter, some of his family members have accounts on these networks, he knows that there are a pile of brands using these networks for business purposes, and he's wondering if maybe it's time your company hopped on board the social media train. Next thing you know you're in charge of pulling together and executing a comprehensive social media program for your organization.

Where do you start? You've heard the buzzwords – listening, engagement, community, authenticity – but what does it all mean? How does any of this apply in the context of *your* organization?

How do you capitalize on these new communication channels in ways that make sense for your company?

If you're asking yourself these questions, or your team is confronted with getting started on the social web, this is your primer. We'll help you create a strategy that covers everything from the very beginning pieces of listening to what's being said about you on the web to more advanced social media involvement like engaging with your industry peers in expanded online discussions.

At the end of this eBook, you'll find a grid of social media resources from the Radian6 content archives, bucketed into listening, measurement, and engagement categories for your brand, competitors, and industry. Keep in mind that while this primer takes a corporate focus, its content is applicable in agency and non-profit contexts as well. We hope you can use this as a reference point for finding your organization's bearings on the social web, and refer back to it when you're ready to move on to the next level.

Now, are you ready to get started? First up: Listening.



CHAPTER 2:

Listening to the Social Web

What is Listening?

The social web is a fast-moving, constantly changing network of information. If you're involved in social media as a business, it's important to understand the potential impact all of that information could have on your work.

Listening – or social media monitoring – is the notion of searching for the key words and phrases being used online to hear what's being talked about. It's about homing in on the data, conversations, dialogue, and other bits of information that are relevant to your business. From the people talking specifically about YOU, to

people talking about your broader industry or even your competitors, listening is about harnessing the conversations that matter to your business, and extracting the information that helps you decide how, where, and when to engage with your community.



Listening: The Ws

Why Listening is Important:

A sound listening strategy forms the cornerstone of a sustainable, scalable social media strategy. It helps you understand what's being said, where it's happening, what kind of volume you're dealing with, and where on the social media presence curve you sit as a company. Consider this the initial research phase of your work to get a lay of the land, and an ongoing temperature gauge that helps you adjust your continued activities.

What to listen for:

As you start with a monitoring program, the potential can be overwhelming. So much information, so many sites, and all of it moving by at the speed of light.

Start with a tiered system that takes you from brand-centered listening, to competitive listening, to industry-wide listening (some more specifics on these are below). Within those categories, you can organize and prioritize those conversations by classifying them into relevant buckets, like:

- Complaints
- Compliments
- Questions
- Leads and Inquiries
- Opportunity Conversations

Need some more detail? Check out some resources we've put together on the [Top 10](#) and [Next 10](#) reasons to be listening in social media.

Where to listen:

The answer to this question is different for every company.

The important place to start is casting the net wide, using a tool or set of tools that will help you sweep the entirety of the social web to help you find the conversations that matter to you. As you sort through the posts and discussions you find, you'll be able to sort out where the relevant discussions are happening, and what media types you need to pay attention to.

Social media isn't just about Twitter and Facebook. It's about the *function* of social communication online, which is to more easily share, create, and contribute to content. That means that for some industries, it's still forums and message boards. For some, it's LinkedIn or niche online communities. For some, it's blogs.

The searches you undertake as part of your listening program will help you focus your efforts, uncover the concentrations of discussion and dialogue, and help you understand where you should be spending your time and effort to engage the communities you care about.

Who should do it:

As you embark on a listening program, the first question is often "So, who's responsible for doing this?"



To answer that question, you need to ask yourself:

- What's the central focus of our social media participation? Customer service? Marketing? Product ideas?
- Do we have dedicated human resources for this, or does it have to be part of an existing role?
- Is there someone on our team already interested in this?

Front-line listening as part of a “listening grid” – a workflow and system of routing and sharing the intelligence gathered from a monitoring program – can be a dedicated role, or part of many. But at it's best, listening is wired into many roles and functions in an organization. Much like having a telephone on everyone's desk, equipping employees and departments with their own listening tools and stations means that they can integrate social media information and intelligence into the work they're already doing. They can use the tools in the ways that support *their* jobs, and treat social media as a new phone, a new line of communication from your business to the outside world and back again.

Listening: The How

So, brass tacks time. How, exactly, do we build listening programs in all of the right buckets? What do we search for?

Brand:

In the brand bucket, you'll want to concentrate your searches around terms, words, and phrases that **are directly related to your company and business**. You can go broad or narrow, but in general, you'll want to develop a stack of keywords and phrases that reflect:

- Your company name
- Your brands, business units, or product offerings
- Names of specialized services you offer
- Names or terms around specific campaigns
- Key stakeholders in your organization
- Nicknames, abbreviations, or misspellings of any of the above

The general thread here is that it's the terms that will help you understand whether people are talking about you or not. If they're not, that's [intelligence in itself](#). If they are, you'll want to know if it's positive, critical, or indifferent, as all of those things will help frame your future strategy.

Industry

Industry listening is proactive. It's intended to help you understand the larger landscape that surrounds your business, the conversations that are above and around your brand. It's not about you, but rather understanding how you might fit into the larger profile of your industry on the social web. Here, you might search for:

- Terms related to verticals you specialize in
- Phrases that define the markets you serve
- Larger industry keywords or categories
- Professional organizations you belong to or that fit your business profile
- Names of thought leaders in the industry you serve

This is where you can identify emerging trends and issues that you need to pay attention to, and what the larger community is saying about them. You can learn about overarching perceptions of your markets or your business purpose. And you can identify and locate conversations that aren't about your company, but where you can engage and communicate expertise, meet new people, and establish your online presence as a resource and authority without a focus on sales or marketing.

Competitors

Competitive intelligence used to be limited to expensive, paid reports from business intelligence companies, or whatever information you could glean through your network of acquaintances, friends, and contacts. The social web has brought a new dimension to competitive analysis, and put a wealth of information out there to find. You can look for:

- Names of competitive companies, brands, products, and services
- Stakeholders in those companies
- Buzz around competitive campaigns or promotions
- Nicknames, misspellings, or the like of any of these

What can you learn here? If folks are talking online, they're sharing information about your competition. Who they're hiring, who's recently left. What new product they're coming out with. They're communicating what your competition isn't doing, which presents all sorts of opportunities for you. And it can pinpoint emerging crises or buzz swells that you might want to be aware of for your own purposes. The same unfiltered, fast moving and open information that's out there about YOU is out there about THEM. It can be awfully worthwhile to pay attention.

Your listening program will set the tone for the rest of your social media activities, so it's imperative you take the time to fine tune each piece of it to ensure you're listening in the places that are most relevant to your business and to the conversations that have the most potential impact. Once you've got this part of your strategy solidified, it's time to tackle measurement.

CHAPTER 3:

Measuring Your Progress on the Social Web

What is Measurement?

To get where you're going, you need to know where you've been and where you want to be, and that requires drawing a roadmap that defines the objectives/key performance metrics that will show you if you're really making the most of the social web (as it relates to your goals, of course).

For a complete run-down of how to establish relevant metrics, take a look at our [Social Media Measurement & Analysis eBook](#), but for now, this section will help you jump-start the creation of your social media measurement roadmap.



Measurement: The Ws

Why Measurement is Important:

Measuring the progress of your social media program isn't an option – it's a business necessity. Social media is a business channel just like direct mail and other traditional communication and marketing channels, but unlike many traditional methods, social media unlocks the door to instantaneous, two-way dialog, creating a new level of necessary measurement.

While traditional metrics still matter, it's essential that you select highly relevant and measurable objectives specific to your social media program to make sure your efforts are indeed providing strategic and financial value.

What to Measure:

Familiar with the phrase, “*You are what you eat*”? This holds true with social media: Define your KPIs carefully here, because you will become what you measure. Understand what your organization wants to accomplish and what market you want to target to determine what metrics are actually relevant to YOU. It's important you establish both qualitative and quantitative measurements for your goals, too, because both matter in providing a holistic view of the progress of your social media program.

And while you're at it, don't settle for measuring only outputs and outtakes, either. Impact, especially in terms of ROI, is determined by measuring outcomes (the quantifiable changes in attitude, behavior and opinion). If you only measure superficial results such as number of followers or fans, your social media and engagement strategy will also remain at that level.

Here are some metrics to help you brainstorm what you might want to measure and why:

Revenue and Business Development

- Speed of Sales Cycle
- Number Percent of Repeat Business
- % Customer Retention
- Transaction Value
- Referrals
- Net New Leads
- Cost Per Lead
- Conversions from Community



Activity and Engagement

- Members
- Posts/Threads
- Comments or Ideas
- Inbound Links
- Tags, Votes, Bookmarks
- Active Profiles
- Referrals
- Post Frequency/Density

Cost Savings

- Issue Resolution Time
- % of Issues Resolved Online
- Account Turnover
- Employee Turnover
- Hiring/Recruiting
- Training Costs
- New Product Ideas
- Development Cycle Time
- Product/Service Adoption Rate

Value Awareness and Influence

- Brand Loyalty/Affinity
- Media Placements
- Share of Conversation
- Sentiment of Posts
- Net Promoter Score
- Interaction with Content
- Employee Social Graphs



Measurement: The How

Go beyond measuring traditional web analytics that provide data about channel use and begin layering onto those metrics those that explore audience behavior and engagement found within social media analytics. Having a hypothesis to start from will help you pinpoint which beyond-the-traditional metrics you should be tracking. For instance, “We think that an increase in blog subscribers over six months will correlate with an increase in sales,” or, “Post activity on our help forum will decrease call center costs,” are strong hypotheses to get started measuring and benchmarking.

Build your goals and objectives based on these hypotheses, and measure against them to see if you’re on the right track. The beauty about setting a baseline with your hypotheses is that you have a roadmap to follow to keep you on track; you’ll know exactly where you stand at all times, and can course correct in real-time as you track changes in the level of content and customer engagement.

Brand

Measuring engagement around your brand can help you understand if your messages are resonating with your intended community, or whether there’s a disconnect between how your company is presenting itself and how your community is perceiving you.

To gain insight on just how well your brand is being reflected on the social web, begin measuring:

- **Reverberation:** The total volume of inbound linking and generations of retweeting of a post.
- **Repetition:** The average times per month a source inbound links/retweets your content.
- **Activation:** The monthly total of new sources that have shared your positive content.
- **Engagement:** The amount of repeat commenting and length of those comments.

Industry

Keep your finger on the pulse of your industry to spot emerging trends and topics of interest that help you drive content creation or product and service improvements and ideas. By tracking the trends of your industry you’ll also be able to find out who key players are and get early insights into the new voices in the industry, and you can apply all these insights to help mold your outreach, engagement, and future business strategies.

To see which sorts of topics and issues are gaining traction in your industry, begin measuring:

- **Exuberance:** The monthly count of twestimonials and positive posts.
- **Attention Span:** The average span of time a post is commented on and retweeted.
- **Resonance:** The total volume of “in sync” conversation around an idea.
- **Potential:** The monthly comparison of declared need and estimated revenue from closed deals.

Competitors

Competitive intelligence can clue you in to rumors and insights about your competitors’ business moves, how their customers and prospects are perceiving *them*, and help you identify unmet needs of the crowds. That information will also help you establish if you’re ahead of the social media game, behind the curve, or somewhere in the middle. Benchmarking your competition on the social web can help you clarify how your social strategy should emerge and evolve, too.

To get a handle on how you’re comparing in the competitive landscape, begin measuring:

- **Conversation:** The total monthly relative share of conversation versus competitors.
- **Infatuation:** The score of the relative direction of inbound and outbound links/tweets between sources.
- **Bucket Volume:** The monthly count comparison of post types (i.e., complaints, referrals, etc.).

Measurement as a practice should already be wired into your organization – if it’s not, take the time to figure out why that’s the case and how you can remedy that situation before embarking on your journey into social media.

The most important truth to keep in mind about measuring any business initiative, be it social media or a traditional marketing/customer service/sales program, is that the metrics you select to track your progress must relate directly to your goals; there is no template best way to measure anything, but the information we’ve shared here should get you started brainstorming which metrics make the most sense for tracking your social media program.

Ready for the last piece? Let’s move on to engagement.

CHAPTER 4:

Engaging on the Social Web

What is Engagement?

Engagement is often seen as the “holy grail” result of a listening and monitoring program.

For many companies, it’s a natural evolution, but for some, it can be a bit more complicated. Engagement has become a hot-button term for something that really is more fundamental in its marketing need: Gaining and holding the attention of customers and prospects through regular business-to-community interaction.

According to Dictionary.com, to engage is: “To occupy the attention or efforts of (a person or persons)”. In the context of social media, engagement usually means talking directly with your target audience, but the method and depth of engagement is individual for each company. Engagement becomes a bit less fluffy when you remove the “buzz” aspect of the term and remember that this is what you, as a

business, have been aiming for all along: If you get someone engaged with the messages you’re putting out there, they’ll buy what you’re selling, and, if you’ve done it right, come back for more.



Engagement: The Ws

Why Engagement is Important:

The social web has made it easy for people to share their opinions about everything on a mass scale, making it harder for brands to break through those opinions and stand on their own two feet. In the best cases of online sharing, brands are being stewarded by their loyal fans and long-time customers; in the worst cases, brands are losing business because people are sharing negative opinions that are deterring possible prospects from taking that next step and buying.

Most of those negative cases can be turned positive if the brands would only take steps to show they care about their customers’ and prospects’ experiences with them. That can be done through direct interaction, acting on customer feedback collected either passively or actively, or making sure the purchasing cycle for people is as easy and positive as possible.

What to say:

“What do we say?” is often the hardest question to answer, largely due to the fear that letting people speak on behalf of your brand could create problems like mixed messages, the spreading of inaccurate information, or even legal issues.

There are basic comments you can make, though, to reassure people you're listening to them without causing problems for your brand, including:

- We're sorry.
- Thank you.
- How can we help?
- We're listening and we hear you.

Despite common fears about responding to negative comments, [addressing those mentions openly](#) with an eye to calming the issue can turn a potentially sour situation into an opportunity to create a loyal brand fan, much like what your support team members do on a daily basis, but via social channels.

Where to engage:

Figuring out where you should be engaging starts with looking at where your audience currently exists. Your audience will appear in a few places to start, or perhaps many if your business is inherently social, and you'll be able to identify exactly where that audience is through your listening strategy.

Keep in mind that you shouldn't put effort or resources into interacting on big social networks if that's not where your audience happens to be. Software companies, for example, are often mentioned on support forums or communities, thus showing a much larger portion of customer activity than, say, Facebook. Just because certain social networks are more popular than others –

or even more popular than other types of media – doesn't mean your market is there. Do your research before you commit to engaging on a particular network.

Who (internally) should engage and who you should engage with:

There's a good chance some of your workforce is already out there on the social web talking with your customers. Identify these folks, not to make examples of their behavior, but to bring them into the fold and gain an understanding of



how and why they choose to interact online. Embrace their passion, feedback, and buy-in, and work with them to create a more structured and effective engagement strategy.

Depending on your goals for social media involvement, you might want to engage with a few different types of people, including:

- Customers in need of product support
- Brand evangelists
- Brand detractors
- Industry veterans and influencers

You might want to start interacting with just one group to gauge what kind of time and resources your engagement strategy will require to succeed, and add more groups when you feel you're ready and able.

Engagement: The How

So, how do we build a solid engagement strategy? How do we start talking?

Brand:

When it comes to speaking on behalf of your brand, the possibilities for engagement are seemingly endless. From saying thank you for a positive mention to calming down an angry customer who's thinking of switching brands, the one thing to remember is there is no right, industry-standard way to engage – the “right” type of engagement for you is defined by the goals you set for your social media program.

Don't leave your team hanging, though. Establish guidelines for engagement that give those engaging on the frontlines enough freedom to be themselves while still properly representing your brand.

Industry

Getting involved in the conversation surrounding your industry and the verticals you serve is essential for establishing your business as not only a thought leader but also as a helpful business



that truly cares about its community. At the end of the day, you're providing a service or product that solves a deep human problem, and sharing your knowledge about how to solve that problem – outside of selling your product or service – will create trust in your customers.

You'll want to spend a certain amount of time being reactive to your community first, catching up with their direct mentions of you before delving into industry discussions. But when you're ready, creating and adding to conversation threads will provide a wealth of perspective to both your organization and community. Some conversations you might want to get involved in include:

- General questions about a category of products or services you provide.
- Requests for opinions on a subject matter your business can share expertise in.
- Detracting commentary about why a category of products or services you provide aren't useful.
- Conversations about specific professional roles, where team members can grow their own educations.

Competitors

Competitive engagement isn't about interjecting yourself into conversations about your competitors carte blanche. It can be useful to help you highlight points of differentiation, though, and it allows you to reach out to people interested in similar products and services when it naturally makes sense.

Competitive engagement can also be used to stay on top of industry happenings like mergers and acquisitions, as well as help protect and build your brand through ongoing interaction with people who mention you as well as your competitors.

Many would say that engagement is the most important aspect of a social media strategy – it gives you the chance to get involved with your customers, prospects, and greater industry community in ways that weren't previously available via traditional business communication channels. From market research to community assistance, engagement gets you tuned into what your market really needs from a business like yours, and allows you to build relationships that carry into repeat business and referrals, and those are the ultimate successes.

CHAPTER 5:**Wrap-Up**

The social media landscape is so fast paced that it can be overwhelming to jump into if you're not prepared. To survive the tide of information coming at you, and make sense of it nonetheless, you need to create a strategy that covers all the bases of listening, measurement, and engagement and gives you the confidence to use all that's out there to your benefit.

Whether it's just getting an idea of what's being said about you, or getting involved in proactively reaching out to your community, use this resource, as well as the additional pieces we've provided at the end, to work through this, and please get in touch with us if you've got questions or concerns that you think we can help with.

We practice what we've "preached" here, and are happy to talk with you about what level you're at in the social media game and discuss how you can get on board at any stage.

Find us on the web: <http://www.radian6.com>

Follow us on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/radian6>

Read the Blog: <http://www.radian6.com/blog>

	Your Brand	Your Competitors	Your Industry
Listen	<p>Making the Case for Listening</p> <p>Top 10 Reasons Brands Should Listen to Social Media</p> <p>The Practice of Conversational Listening</p>	<p>Foundations of Listening and Engagement</p> <p>Listening When No One's Talking</p>	<p>Does Everyone Have on Their Listening Ears?</p> <p>5 Steps to a Better Social Media Monitoring</p> <p>Listen and Engage at the Point of Need</p>
Measure	<p>Why Measurement Makes the Case</p> <p>10 Key Awareness Metrics to Track</p> <p>10 Key Engagement Metrics to Track</p>	<p>Social Media Measurement Isn't Hard if You Know the Right Steps</p> <p>The Value of Growing Your Share of Conversation</p>	<p>Social Media Measurement & Analysis eBook</p>
Engage	<p>The How and Why of Social Media</p> <p>10 Ways to Show Your Community Love</p> <p>Building and Sustaining Brand Communities</p> <p>12 Step Program to Place Your Community First</p>	<p>Do We Have to be Everywhere in Social Media?</p>	<p>How Engagement Sets Expectations</p> <p>10 Ways to Share Helpful Content</p>