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Why Measure Social Media?

David Taber

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Social Media is sort of a misnomer. If you compare the definition with print media or broadcast media, it's not really parallel. Of course, if you *own* a social media property (YouTube, Facebook, etc.), you're highly concerned with the valuation of the medium. But those folks aren't the readership of this newsletter.

For those of us trying to leverage Social Media channels, the medium isn't the core focus. It's the content *going through the medium that matters*. I know, I know: McKlue said the medium is the message. That's like saying "the cauldron is the soup." I don't buy it anymore.

Vendors are concerned with the quantity and quality of the content being generated by the Social Media community, and they're looking to measure and direct the flow for optimum effect with their target markets.

The key to measuring Social Media is to keep your eye on the prize: the relevant community's interest, level of participation, and positive regard for you. If you're just starting out, this can simply be a regular (weekly?) scan of forums, search engines, and blog aggregators to identify flashpoints. Look for keywords relevant to your company or product. Also, check out "complaint sites" (such as Business Reporter.org, Yelp, Angie's List, Travel Advisor, Complaintsboard.com, Complaints.com, PissedConsumer.com, XOMreviews, RipoffReport, and of course the BBB). If there's a firestorm brewing, participate directly (but carefully!) in the social media channel that's festering. Do what you can to keep it from spilling over into other channels. While this is a purely defensive "measurement" of social media, it only takes a little time and the tools are free.

You'll soon outgrow that, and will want to move on to leveraging the community interaction in a more proactive and positive way. The first step of course, is to set interest: it can be as simple as a Yahoo or LinkedIn group, but it's better if it's a **two-way** forum content informative: nobody wants to read a sales pitch or bloviation against a competitor. Ov

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OK to focus on visibility (raw numbers), but over the long run you must **focus on credibility**. Social Media impact (in descending order of priority) are the absolute numbers and growth rate:

1. References ("I'd buy this...") or score in the product ratings sites ("4.7 out of 5")
2. Positive posts
3. Conversion rate of people in your community
4. Uploads of content
5. Willingness to forward your content ("virality")
6. Posts in your community
7. Mentions outside of your community
8. "Span of influence" of your community members (e.g., how many friends, on average, members have)
9. Downloads / reads of content
10. Registrants in your community

The Heavier Lifting

The first step is to **seriously listen** to the community, in whatever Social Media channels they course, you can look at metrics about buzz and awareness (sites and tools such as Bitlrbx, Tweetscan, Twingly, Technorati, Blogpulse, Steprep, Brand's eye, Boardtracker, Blogpulse, or advanced tools) but far more valuable is listening for the sentiment of what's being said. Despite about Twitter and Facebook, some of the most interesting content for B2B marketers to review forums, discussion boards, and even lowly majordomo lists. Unfortunately, to really understand in those free-form streams requires a lexical analysis engine or human eyeballs. Both are expensive necessary before you go any further.

Document what you hear in your CRM system. If you know who the source is, attach the so to her Contact record. If you at least know what company she works for, put it in the notes for If you don't know anything about the source, put the social media content in the Documents of your CRM system. At some point, this will become automated in the CRM tools, but I don't know mainstream vendor that has done this level of Social Media integration yet.

Get serious about measuring. Right now, there are myriad tools with highly specialized way presenting the dynamism of your community. There are tools to ID the "speakers" of conversations, analyze and measure trends, determine geo locations of the activity, estimate demographics, sentiment, understand competitive sentiment, and identify the key opinion leader / influencer. It is point-product-city: no way is there a "one size fits all" solution. Here are firms to look at: Ra SM2, Infegy SocialRadar, Biz360, BazaarVoice, BuzzLogic, Trackur, Scoutlabs, Visible Tech, Cymfony, Comscore, Nielsen Buzzmetrics, Reputation Defender, Sentiment Metrics, Brandwatch, Lexicon, Monitter, WhoLinksToMe.com, Twendz, Collective Intellect, Spark, and TruCast. Also [source movement](#) for measuring social media (who knows...). Unfortunately, precious of these serious attempt at automatically measuring sentiment.

Encourage people to contribute content. The key to Social Media effectiveness is User-Generated Content. Sure, your content will be in the mix too...but the community will believe its members more than yours. Content stimulus can be done with contests, provocative challenges to the community, or other incentives. You want to design and measure these incentives so the right kind of content is being produced with typically, as part of a larger program).

Engage your audience, continuously measuring their response. While there are some early avatars for your engagement with the audience, they seem to be focused on consumer marketing. They have personal knowledge of how well they work. *If you have direct experience with these audience systems, please email me.* For most of my readers, proper audience engagement is a human process. The feedback loop is to simply to take time-series measurements comparing audience/community engagement vs after the posting, commenting, or other community engagement.

It's Still Early Days

As I mentioned in the wisdom of crowds, there is an amazing amount of hokum in the internet Social Media **definitely can work**, but so much of the environment is in flux that it's hard to last for more than a few quarters.

However, I think there are three lasting characteristics of social media:

- The measurement that really matters is "referencability and customers' willingness to i
- Although tools and techniques may apply generally, the preferences, customs, and be audience are different. Expect a learning curve with every new audience segment. Give attention the first few weeks, before you turn it over to any kind of routine or automatic
- The vendor is not in control. It's like surfing: your skill will cause obvious shifts in the o direction and velocity of your journey is dictated by the tides of economics and the win

David Taber is CEO of [SalesLogistix Corporation](#) and author of Prentice Hall's "[Salesforce.co Success](#)." This article first appeared in [The Taber Report](#). Contents copyright 2010 by DOTne all rights reserved.

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