

Customers Are Talking: Can You Hear Them?

Using Social Media: A Practical Guide to Finding Out What They Really Think



Market **Brief**

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Executive Snapshot

If you don't believe that your customers, prospects, partners and influencers are talking about things that matter to you on-line, think again. A recent survey from Forrester Research found that 77% of business technology decision-makers engage with social media on the job.

If you aren't dialing into those conversations, you're missing out. And you're not alone. Even companies with robust marketing programs admit they're not keeping pace with social media, and are far from truly protecting their online reputations.

Just listening to these conversations gives you unprecedented insight into the questions you need to answer today:

- Where are my customers, prospects and influencers online?
- How are they using online channels to get what they need?
- What are they discussing? And why?
- What conversations are most relevant to my business?
- How can I take action based on what's happening online?

There's every reason to get started. More and more B2B buyers see the social web as a way to voice their opinions, engage with peers and get smarter about doing their jobs. You can use social media to gain unprecedented access into what these customers and prospects really want. Like any venture, success begins with a first step: Listening.

This brief offers a practical guideline to using social media to listen and learn what customers and prospects really want. It covers:

-  How social media audits make marketing's job easier
-  3 steps to quick and effective listening
-  Impact on sales and support

Everything Old is New Again

“Social media audits” are nothing new. It’s much like what you’ve done at trade shows and analyst briefings, but easier and faster. You use social media –from broad-based watering holes like Twitter to high-profile blogs and discrete user forums on LinkedIn and elsewhere – to find out where your customers are, who’s talking about you and your competition, and the themes that keep bubbling up.

With a smartly designed listening strategy, you’ll get the intelligence you need to stay ahead.

Impact on Sales and Support

These online conversations consistently deliver timely information that often has a direct impact on:

- Sales: immediate intervention into conversations among prospects and customers, often with a direct impact on future purchases
- Customer experience: discover front-of-mind issues around usability, performance and training –as well as customer support
- Product development: hear what customers say they want, and which gaps should be addressed in the next rollout

3 Steps to Successful Listening

In B2B, we use these simple steps to kick-start a social media-based listening program that works:

Step 1: Know What You Want

You don’t have the time or the resources to listen to all the chatter that’s out there. Link your listening campaign to a specific objective and you’re much more likely to get the results you need, quickly and cost-effectively.

If you’re launching a new product, look for user groups on LinkedIn to monitor the feedback post-launch. If you’re looking for insight into what’s the hottest area innovation, watch bloggers in your space –they’re most likely to have their finger on the pulse of what’s new.

The bottom line: Where you listen can be defined by what you want to know. You may only need to hone in on a few channels, for a short time.

Step 2: Choose the Right Conversation

Not everyone who blogs, posts or Tweets in your universe matters. Look at the conversations in each channel and ask yourself:

- Is there a consistent level of activity?
- Is the content relevant to my business and what I want to achieve?
- Are there a lot of followers or members?
- Are they people I want to reach or who have influence?
- Are the participants engaged in a 2-way dialogue? Use these questions as a filter to evaluate how useful the conversations taking place in these channels will be to your campaign.

Bottom line: If the answer is “yes” to every single question, you’ve probably found a valuable resource for insight. If not, don’t waste your time adding the source to your list of “must-listens.”

Listening at Launch Pays Off

When, FlightView announced the launch of its real-time flight information app for Blackberry users – who were generally new to the app-buying world – creating a great experience from day 1 was a top priority. Using social media, we:

- Found the Blackberry user forum where most users shared experiences and exchanged tips
- Uncovered possible pitfalls and got the issues to the development team for quick resolution
- Posted advice and recommendations on using the new app that integrated lessons learned from any glitches

The result: This highly focused listening effort made FlightView’s Blackberry app a consistent top choice by users.

Step 3: Make it Part of Your Routine

It’s quite likely you’ll find something every time you listen. You’ll hear from more people than you’ll meet at a trade show, and with less effort.

Although there’s a lot of hype about the new wave of ‘listening tools,’ you can do a lot with free tools, which are becoming more capable every quarter. Here are some of the most effective we’ve found so far:

- Readers like Netvibes aggregate RSS feeds and deliver updated content, organized into a single page
- Social Mention searches and delivers the latest topical Twitter, YouTube, blog, and forum posts
- Google Alerts flag, and deliver the content that's most relevant for you

Bottom line: Make listening part of your weekly routine. You can get real-time visibility into what your customers, prospects and partners care about; what your competition is doing and where the next sales opportunity lies.

The Last Word: Just Do It.

Our clients are often surprised by what's being said about them on-line and how relevant the content is to sales, and to their business.

Capturing this fast-moving information is much easier than you might think –and it's definitely better than not knowing what's out there.

Listening is the perfect place to start.

We're actively engaged in finding the most relevant and influential conversations in our domains through social media, and ready to help you pinpoint and interact with your customers effectively online.

Corporate Ink helps ambitious technology companies create markets and drive high-value exits.

Our PR programs tie directly to your most important business goals. Highly focused and integrated campaigns put smart content at the core – positioning you as experts, building your brand and driving leads. The result: Market leaders. Successful exits. Long-lasting brands.

We're glad to talk more about what this means for you – and how we'll use smart PR to move your business forward.

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