



The Case For Social Media: Listening

Grow Bigger Ears.

The social web is a vast, sweeping network of conversations. Many of them are important to you: they're about your brand, your clients, your competitors, or your industry. They're happening right now, on millions of sites, among millions of people.

You need to be armed with intelligence about your online brand presence and the things across the web that affect your brand. When you're first considering social media, a strong listening program can help you build the foundation for a strategy that's sustainable, scalable, and measurable.

Here are some thoughts to consider about why listening to the social web is super important to your business.

People Are Talking About Us.

One of the first things most companies want to know: is anyone talking about us, and is it good, bad or indifferent? Gauging the health of your brand online does several things at once, and can provide a great deal of business intelligence that you might not glean from other sources.

If there are conversations happening about your brand, what are they saying? Do they love you, are they frustrated by your customer service, is your new product a hit? And is the feedback you're hearing online lining up with how you're positioning and presenting your company to the public? If there's a disconnect, you can learn how to **better align your brand presentation** with the perceptions and needs of the people that drive your business.

Don't shy away from the criticism either. Negative feedback can be some of the best intelligence you can gather about what you can improve in your business. If customer service is a recurring issue, perhaps that's where you should be allocating resources. Is your online experience leaving website visitors short? Might be time to pay some attention to the website. If there are issues that concern your community, it's always best to be aware, responsive, and have the opportunity to determine a course correction.

Not hearing a lot of conversation about your company yet? That's okay. There's still lots more to learn through listening.

What Are Our Competitors Up To?

The social web is teeming with life, and with it, information about how your customers and prospects are viewing the competition. And you can **uncover amazing perspective about how your competitors are presenting themselves online**, how they're making use of social media, and where there might be unmet needs in the community that you can fill.



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Are your competitors getting ready to launch a new product or service offering? Sometimes the community will share some insider information that can tip you off. Perhaps the prospects you'd like to reach are expressing a need for a service or product that neither you or your competitor offer, but could. Having the advantage of listening means you might be able to be first to market with something new and compelling.

Watching how the competitive landscape changes and shifts over time is important, too. View mentions and engagement around your brand over a quarterly period, and do the same for your top competitors. Are you trending in the right direction? Where are the gaps and opportunities to raise awareness, or better connect with your customers?

Our Influencers Are Out There.

Influence is relative, and what matters most is that you are **finding the people who are the best potential advocates for your work**. That may not always be the people with the biggest audiences or reach, but the people who are most passionate about what you do.

Listening carefully means that you'll know not only where the most active conversations are about you, but who is the most vocal, connected, and enthusiastic about what you do. Or, you might find the squeakiest wheels about particular pain points that need attention (influence can be negative, too).

Monitoring for both your industry and your brand can uncover key information about what your influencers look like (demographically, psychographically, and all those other profiles), where they spend their time online, and how they prefer to share and spread information.

Perhaps you're spending time building a blog when your passionate advocates are active on discussion forums. There might be groups on Facebook for your industry that you haven't participated in, and could signal an opportunity for a presence there. And you might think you want to reach moms, but the dads are talking you up enthusiastically, too. Listening is the key to understanding who your best advocates are and where they spend their time.

People Need What We Provide.

Sales and social media in the same sentence often make advocates cringe. But there is massive opportunity for **business development, lead generation, and sales through social media** - but through a new lens and approach.

We call this the **Point of Need**: where people are expressing online what they're looking for, what they need, and when they're open to being contacted about it.

If you're paying close enough attention, you can search for phrases around your industry and offerings that uncover opportunities to engage with new prospects. If you're a realtor, for example, you might be listening for phrases like "realtor recommendations?" that can point you to folks seeking real estate



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guidance. Or if you're a software provider, you can monitor for posts that discuss the issues you're trying to solve with your product, and engage in discussion as a subject matter expert.

Prospecting through social media can work amazingly well if you practice listening before you speak, and understanding the expressed needs of the community so your participation is relevant, timed well, and appropriate in context and tone.

There Are Conversations About Our Industry.

Every company is seeking to fill a role within their industry, and provide expertise, leadership, and solutions that help their customers improve their lifestyles, do their jobs better, or make an impact on the world around them.

Resist the urge to always turn the listening towards your own brand, and listen a level above your brand to the **discussions happening in your industry**. Not only can you understand your share of conversation within the discussions you want to be part of, but you can learn valuable information about emerging trends, crises, or issues of interest to your community and prospects.

Broader discussions give engaged brands the opportunity to join the discussion and contribute their thought leadership and subject matter expertise without needing to "hard sell" what they're offering. They can establish your company as one that's interested, responsive, and connected with something bigger than the inside of your company walls. And in social media, being part of the global community is the ultimate in establishing a strong, trustworthy reputation.

Listening is a Lynchpin.

If you haven't already established a listening strategy, let that be your first step in social media. Understand how the tidal wave on the web is affecting your work, and where the opportunities are for you to participate as a company. They're out there. You need only to listen carefully.