



How to Leverage Social Media to
Monitor and Manage Your Brand Reputation

Part 1: Introduction

Consistent maintenance of a brand's reputation has long been one of the most integral components of effective public relations and marketing campaigns. Corporations, and their marketing personnel, long ago began to recognize and espouse the virtues of controlling and maintaining their brand's message in order to ensure that their product or service is consistently positioned for success.

Historically, marketers focused their efforts on preserving their brand's reputation by developing consistent messaging for all external communications; press releases, speaking engagements, media opportunities, job fairs, tradeshows, marketing collateral, etc. The ability to track how these messages were consumed and interpreted was, however, limited.

With the emergence of internet technologies and the relentless popularity of social media, marketers now have the unique ability to monitor and capture all of the ongoing, online conversations about their brand. Through the use of a variety of new media tools and applications (outlined in detail below), companies can monitor the buzz, noise, arguments, annoyances, and questions that impact their brand's online and (ultimately) offline reputation.

facebook

Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life.



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These capabilities open up a realm of new possibilities. In virtually real-time, marketers now have the ability to collectively scan all of the social networking sites, discussion forums, blogs, online communities, and news sites for mentions involving their brand's name or likeness. Analysis of this information can be invaluable to the health of the brand. What are members of the online and social media community saying about the brand? What are they saying about new products or services? What news trends and conversations is the brand being lumped into? What are the most common opinions from these communities? Complaints?

Even more significantly, the rise of social media has made it possible for brands to take a more active approach to managing (and maintaining) their reputation. Brands can engage directly with online users by offering their responses in the form of feedback, comments, or help. Problems can be solved, questions can be answered, and potentially damaging "noise," silenced. This access to the opinions, expressions, and frustrations of customers and/or potential prospects outside of the regular sales cycle, is unprecedented.

The recognition of social media as a vital channel for brand reputation monitoring and management dovetails directly with the emergence of social media marketing. In the same way that marketers can no longer solely rely on traditional outbound marketing techniques to propel their campaigns, they should embrace social media's online forums for a number of different benefits.

What is Twitter? What? Why? How?

Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: **What are you doing?**

[Get Started—Join!](#)

Part 2: Monitor Your Brand

Contrary to what you might believe, and what you are likely to encounter with other marketing initiatives, leveraging social media conversations to monitor your brand can be very cost-effective. In most instances, the process can be achieved through free services that leverage the popularity of search or certain social media channels (blogs and Twitter, for instance). These services can deliver real-time, hourly, daily, weekly or monthly reports about the frequency of a brand's inclusion in online conversations.

At the most basic level, marketers should have a keen understanding of the social media community, but should be particularly cognizant of the channels that are most likely to be utilized by their customers and prospects. Simple searches through Google or Facebook can provide an inordinate amount of personal detail about a brand ("fan" pages, blog posts, videos, etc.) that was never previously available to marketers. But by utilizing some of the free tools available to monitor for specific online mentions of your brand, it actually becomes possible to receive an up-to-the-minute understanding of how people are interacting with your brand. Is somebody bad mouthing your product on Twitter? Are they having problems with your service (cable, internet, etc)? Now marketers can have answers to these questions quickly. After that, it is up to you to decide if (and how) to address the situation.



Among the host of applications available to monitor news and brand mentions in real-time include:

Google news alerts: Google will scan all online sources, including blogs and news sites, to search for your brand's name or related terms. Google is, in essence, eliminating the need for regular searches by e-mailing a report of the brand mentions on an almost real-time basis.

Tweet Beep: Tracks all mentions of your brand on Twitter with hourly updates that can be texted to your cell phone.

TweetGrid: Monitors different search terms relating to your brand to identify mentions as soon as they occur.

Oftentimes, more detailed and more personal conversations are conducted in the blogosphere. Tools to identify how your brand is being discussed in these outlets include:

Google Blog Search: Scans the blogosphere for all mentions of your brand in similar fashion to a Google news search.

BackType: Monitors the comments sections of blogs for brand mentions. Often times, users are more opinionated when utilizing this forum.

For aggregation purposes, services that leverage RSS feeds to subscribe to a wider array of search engines may identify brands mentions that did not come up as readily in a Google search:

MonitorThis: Scans for mentions of specific search terms across sites that range from diverse social media communities like del.icio.us and flickr, to a standard search engine like Yahoo!

The sophistication of social media has also spawned an increased complexity in third party applications. On Twitter for instance, if a brand opts to create their own account (which can be a necessity for brand management as outlined below), certain tools offer in-depth analyses of the reach and influence of the brand's communications:

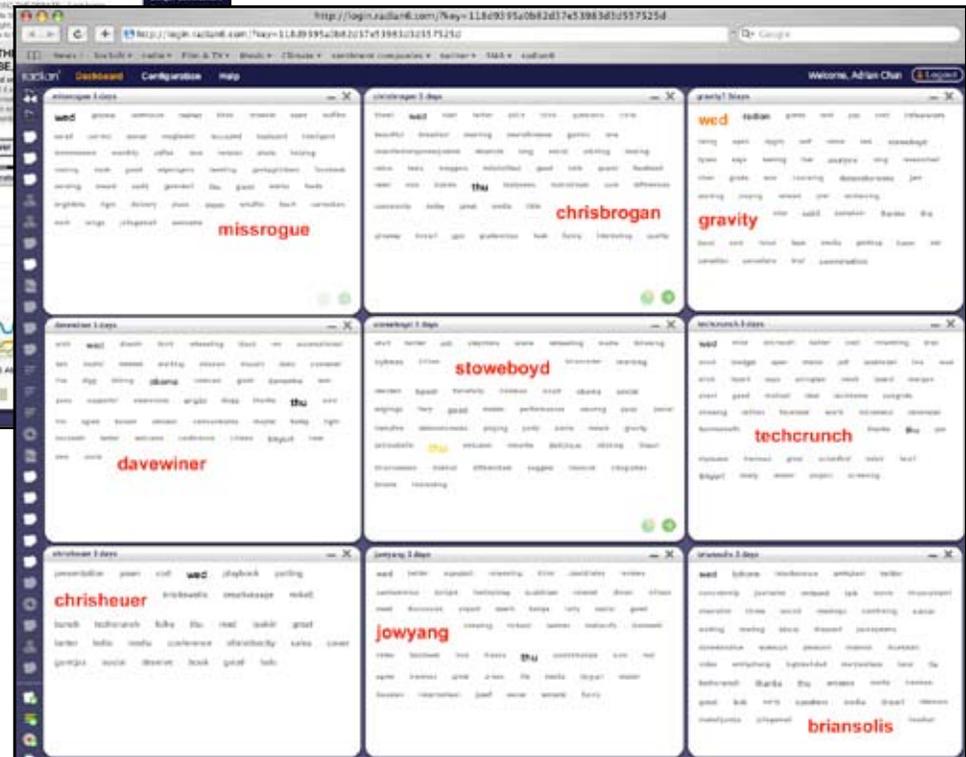
Twitalyzer: Evaluates the effectiveness of Twitter accounts by analyzing the activity level and generates reports that indicate the feed's overall success in fostering positive communications about the brand. The analyses account for data that espouses the brand's relative influence, signal-to-noise ratio, generosity, velocity, and clout.

Recognizing the emergence of social media as a tool for brand reputation monitoring, some vendors have developed profitable platforms with tools for more complete monitoring of brand mentions across all social media channels:

Radian6: Software that provides marketers with an aggregated "listening" platform to monitor mentions of their brand. The software scans blog posts, viral videos, forum reviews, photos, twitter updates, issues, competitor mentions and more. Formulas can be adjusted by marketers to analyze the specific mentions for relevance and influence.

Filtrbox: A more comprehensive media monitoring software that aggregates and provides trending data for all brand mentions that appear across news outlets, blogs, and social networks.

Regardless of the tools that are used, marketers have the ability to build online dashboards to monitor their brand's reputation from the start of the day, through close of business and beyond. On the social web, conversationalists have no deadline.



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Part 3: Managing Your Brand Through Analysis and Engagement

We have established that online communication enable communities of individuals to disseminate their voices to the masses through a variety of means on a consistent basis. Sometimes these voices merely echo brand content or credible media coverage. Sometimes these communications are more opinionated, with users utilizing social networks and others channels as their own personal “online soapboxes.” The key is to recognize the difference.

When analyzing online brand mentions, marketers should consider the type of communication that occurred, where it occurred, and if possible, who was responsible for it. This analysis directly effects if (and how) a brand should respond for the purposes of brand reputation management.

COMPLAINTS: One of the most common forms of online communication. Review forums like Yelp offer users the unique opportunity to rant about their bad brand experiences behind the mask of online identities. But complainers frequent all online social networks, and their comments should be addressed strategically.

Opportunity: On less formal social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook, complaints are communicated quite frequently. In some cases, users are merely venting, but more often then not, they may be seeking reassurances or answers. This opens the door for immediate direct follow-up from the brand. Sometimes this communication can be a simple “sorry,” or a quick offer of a refund or gift certificate. However, if there is a possibility of a resolution, brands can learn to be adept at providing immediate customer service solutions. In effect, these real-time complaints merit particular attention from brands, and often, direct engagement.

Caution: When the online communications are not occurring in real-time or directly between brands and users, brands need to be more prudent in their responses. Responding to negative comments on blog posts can sometimes be effective, but the comments can also be misconstrued as antagonistic. Without the opportunity for immediate follow-up, the customer service element is often lost.

PRAISE: Praise can come in many forms; full-length blog posts, Twitter updates, forum discussions, you name it.

Opportunity: When praise hits, the savvy marketer will recognize the importance of tracking, aggregating, and if possible, “following” (Twitter) or “friending” (Facebook, Myspace) the responsible parties. These individuals can be considered your social media brand ambassadors. If you interact with them online and recognize their presence, they are likely to continue to be complimentary of your brand.

Caution: The old saying goes, “any press is good press.” That’s not always the case. Further publicizing individuals that use your brand in inappropriate fashions online, even if they are praising it while doing so (i.e. underage drinking photos on Facebook), can jeopardize your brand’s reputation.

It is also important to understand the nature of the opportunities that are available for interaction with customers and prospects online. These include:

THE PERSONAL TOUCH: Online forums provide brands with an unprecedented opportunity to display their non-corporate side. In addition to being helpful, brands can add humor and other elements of humanity and personality to their interactions.

Opportunity: Associating a brand with non-profit and community service organizations and initiatives can be very beneficial. The social web is littered with opportunities to associate your brand with various causes. Offer to donate to a certain charity for every individual that signs up to be one of your social network friends or comments on your corporate blog. Or, merely interact with branded non-profits that are active online and offer your support. You can capture a greater online following (and their contact information for lead generation when they input their e-mail address), as well as demonstrate that there is a human element to your brand.

Caution: The social web is intended to be a place to share information and build relationships. Brands should be encouraged to connect with their followers about mutual interests that are unrelated to their brand, but should be prudent about maintaining a voice. Discuss sports or movies when appropriate with your Twitter followers, but do not offer to invoke controversy with your opinions.

GUERILLA OPPORTUNITIES: Staying abreast of industry trends and story angles is an obvious tool in every marketer and publicist's toolbox. However, as discussed, social media allows for the tracking of many relevant key words that relate to these trends, and your brand.

Opportunity: Keys words are ultimately found in larger conversations, including those about your competition, and depending on the online channel, marketers have the ability to join the discussion and offer their take on how their brand could be a more appropriate solution (proactive brand management).

Caution: It is important to always be upfront about your brand's online identity. Making up personas to act as brand ambassadors, and not the brand itself, is not worth the benefits if social media users are able to see through the disguise.

KEY OPINION LEADERS: Like with traditional media, social media's emergence has spawned a number of influential voices. Some are marketers with a unique expertise on how to leverage social media for business purposes, and others are bloggers who carry influence simply because of their valuable content. Marketers need to identify these leaders and respond to them differently than they would to the general social media population.

Opportunities: Providing worthy content through blogs, white papers, discussions and alliance-building on social networking sites is an effective way to garner the attention of these influencers. At the same time, harness the power of social media to initiate conversations with these individuals in unique ways that document your brand's social media expertise. Comment, share, follow, or connect with them on LinkedIn and ask them questions and demonstrate interest. Once they are in your corner, these individuals are the most influential of brand advocates.

Caution: Do not over flood the well. Too much content can be considered SPAM, and social media experts and influencers are generally much more receptive to individuals who represent brands, rather than brand extensions (social media "robots").

Part 4: Examples

SKITTLES: Ultimate Web 2.0

When Skittles recently re-launched their website, the candy maker instantly caught the attention of even the most passive of social media users. The site features an entirely interactive design, with the homepage devoted to their YouTube channel, and a tab that sends visitors to a Twitter feed that aggregated all conversations about the brand for visitors to view in real-time. The page, skittles.com/chat, is updated without any censorship.

In addition to the buzz generated by the unique design and Web 2.0 implementation, the Twitter feed provided potential customers with a unique inlet into how current customers were engaging with their brand. Twitter users were eating skittles. Enjoying skittles. Buying more.

And when they were in fact complaining about the product, Skittles had the added incentive to respond to their customers in a timely fashion in order to avoid any additional negative Tweets for the online world to see.

In effect, Skittles implemented a technique to both monitor, and broadcast, their brand mentions all at the same time. As quickly as the site launched, Skittles became one of the most innovative brands in cyberspace.



COMCAST: Customer Service through Twitter

The most prominent example of how a company can effectively monitor and manage their brand through social media involves the occasionally-ridiculed cable and internet service, Comcast. Through the Twitter feed, @Comcastcares, the brand created a completely new online identity for their brand's customer service team. The Twitter account responds to queries and complaints in real-time, in paradoxical fashion to the way that customers are used to dealing with their cable service, both in-person and over the phone.



MOTRIN: Crisis un-averted

When Motrin came out with an online advertisement to document their product's strength at alleviating the pain caused by carrying your baby around all day, the viral power of the ad was anything but positive. But protestors did not take to the streets in this instance. Instead, legions of disgruntled viewers, including many of the mothers targeted by the ads, took out their frustrations online. The ad was instantly uploaded to YouTube, and angry comments flooded the site. Viewers found the advertisement to be patronizing and disrespectful.

Within hours of the ads launch, #MotrinMoms became an extremely active Twitter discussion thread. Tweeters began to follow one another and share their commentary directly with one another. Eventually, the blogosphere, and even traditional media outlets, were aware of the uproar, and reported the bad buzz. But Motrin remained mum, until ultimately pulling the ad from their homepage.

The lesson was simple. Motrin launched a new campaign without having a true understanding of the power of social media tools like Twitter to rally conversations around a brand's each and every move. They also missed out on the opportunity to monitor these conversations in real-time in order to address the controversy and control the message before it spiraled out of control and into the hands of The Wall Street Journal.



Next Steps For You

Here are some immediate actions you can take to drive more leads to and through your Website.

Free SEO Analysis

<http://www.451marketing.com/Free-SEO-Analysis.html>

Free Search Engine Optimization analysis of your website. Get a customized report of how your website is performing in search.

Free SMO Analysis

<http://www.451marketing.com/Free-SMO-Analysis.html>

Free Social Media Optimization analysis of your website. Get a customized report of how your website is performing in social media.

451 Heat

<http://www.451heat.wordpress.com>

Blog about online marketing and digital marketing strategies.

For Further Help

Contact an inbound marketing specialist at strategy@451marketing.com

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