



How to Accurately Track Your Social Media Buzz

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Ten years ago, marketers had to rely primarily on customer surveys and mainstream media coverage to track the buzz created by a new product launch or campaign.

Social media has turned the world into a focus group and today, social media monitoring and research tools give marketers the lens to see exactly what people are saying about companies and brands.

For most marketers, however, with great power comes great confusion, and despite unprecedented access to millions of people and billions of conversations, they have no idea what to do with the information they uncover.

Smart marketers have discovered the power of buzz. They know that by tapping into the conversations, opinions and recommendations across the social web it's actually possible to make buzz a tactical part of their campaigns.

The steps outlined in this tip sheet can help you properly leverage the social data at your disposal. You'll learn why it's important to establish a 'buzz baseline' even before you start a campaign, and understand why tracking and benchmarking social media buzz is a major contributor to your success.





Before the Campaign

Before sending a single tweet, it's important to chart the amount of relevant, day-to-day chatter and general sentiment about your brand across the social web and set a baseline. After all, without establishing a starting point, how can you know if your marketing campaigns are successful in growing your brand or generating leads?



FIND YOUR BASELINE

Monitor social channels and track what people are saying about your brand today and how often you're part of the discussion. To measure the buzz your campaign will generate effectively, you'll need to know how much chatter your brand already generates on a day-to-day basis without the encouragement of your campaign.

It's also important to listen to what your target customers are talking about right now. What's important to them? What types of words are they using? These insights will prove valuable as you develop marketing tactics, and can help you identify what to include in your messaging and what to avoid.



FIND YOUR COMPETITORS' BASELINE

Now repeat the same exercise to gauge what people are saying about your competitors. You want to know what sort of impact your marketing efforts have on your competitors' chatter. So use your social tools to research their brand names and the names of all their products. Look at things like the number of mentions they get, and the sentiment behind what's been said.

Look at what their customers are saying. Are they happy, or are they complaining a lot? What you uncover by listening to the social buzz about your competitors can be valuable fodder for your own marketing messages. It's also important to track how often you and your competitors are mentioned in the same posting. If people are talking about your two companies at the same time, your campaign should focus on pivoting the tone of those conversations in your favor.



FIND YOUR INDUSTRY BASELINE

Look at social activity and conversations about your industry. How much does your industry, as a whole, get talked about?

Take a look at the mentions of your industry, from the broadest possible view. If you're in real estate, for example, look for discussions and people talking about real estate. Then look at the general conversations around terms like "homeowner" or "mortgages." Now you can see exactly what type of changes your campaign makes to these baselines.



SET GOALS

The only way to know if your campaigns are working is to measure them against a baseline and against goals you set. The goals may be lead generation, thought leadership, brand awareness, crisis management or any other marketing or PR goal, with associated numbers and quality of buzz. After you have some experience creating and shepherding social media campaigns, your goals and predictions will become more accurate.

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During the Campaign

LOOK AT THE RIGHT NUMBERS



Different types of campaigns have different objectives and desired outcomes, and generating buzz can help achieve a wide variety of goals. Let's take a look at how listening to the right conversations and monitoring the right social data can help you guide your campaigns and measure success:

Lead Generation

Putting the right message in front of the right audience is one of the best ways to attract quality marketing and sales leads. By monitoring the buzz around your campaign and analyzing the demographic and geographic data, you will be able to determine whether your message is reaching your target audience, and if they are engaging with your content. You can also track how many people are clicking on a call-to-action link, following and talking about a campaign-specific hashtag or using any promo codes that are part of your campaign.

Thought Leadership:

Becoming a trusted resource and subject-matter expert is a worthwhile goal for a company's social outreach, and social media affords a wealth of opportunity to engage, educate and build relationships with customers and influencers. Are your messages reaching and resonating with the social influencers who are important to you? Monitor the conversational buzz to see if your company is perceived as a thought leader. Remember, when it comes to relationships, quality is more important than quantity, so the buzz generated by just a few industry heavyweights can have an impact on your marketing campaigns and your brand.

Believe it or not, some negative sentiment in your social numbers during a thought leadership campaign is not necessarily bad news. Maybe you're discussing a controversial idea or statistic. Polarization can mean that you're successfully stirring the pot and getting people talking.

Brand Awareness

When you're trying to carve out your own place in a crowded marketplace, positive mentions are always good. However, you also need to keep an eye on the sentiment and tone of those discussions and how they progress. Is your message still intact as it travels across blogs and through social channels, or is it being distorted? Measure and monitor who is saying what about you, and where those conversations are taking place. Demographic breakdowns of your traction can help you make sure your content is reaching your target audience. If it's not, you may want to tweak your messaging or tactics.

Crisis Management

Crisis communications demand that you know what's being said in the moment, and by whom, so you can address issues head-on and help change the conversation. If your baseline is established, you can use text analytics to track the sentiment of what's being said about you, and how your efforts are affecting the crisis. Social media monitoring tools can generate wordclouds before and after your communications so you can see if your efforts have positively influenced the conversation and halted crises.



LOOK BEYOND THE NUMBERS

Too many marketers focus on numbers and fixate on the volume of posts, mentions, followers and RTs.

Because of this disconnect, it's easy to misinterpret data. You might be fooled into thinking your campaign was a hit, based on big (but meaningless) numbers. Or, it's just as likely that you write your social efforts off as a flop, even though they're reaching the right people. Without the context and sentiment that surround that data, an incomplete picture can emerge; you might be fooled into thinking you're more successful than you are with your marketing efforts (or less successful). By digging in to the buzz about your brand and looking at what people are saying – not just how many are saying it – you're able to understand what's working.

When Apple released the iPhone 5, they saw an incredible 5 million mentions in the social space on the day of the release. That's an unimaginable amount of traffic for most companies to generate, and it's easy for a marketer to equate that volume with success. However, a closer look at Apple's dominance of social chatter during that week reveals tens of thousands of postings and blogs that expressed frustration with their new Apple Maps app.

Just looking at numbers without proper context can be dangerous.



MAKE CHANGES AS NEEDED

One of the benefits of an online campaign is that it can be changed at a moment's notice. Real-time monitoring of your social buzz will allow you to tweak campaigns if necessary. While it's important to make sure that you let a campaign run long enough to determine what kind of buzz it will generate, and don't make changes without a plan, there's no reason to let an ineffective campaign play out if the social media data is showing you a good way to change it. Just make sure you record what you did and when you made the change so you can review it later and integrate the lessons learned into the next campaign.

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After the Campaign

SUMMARIZE AND RECORD



Now that you've completed the campaign and measured the results properly, it's time to aggregate and summarize the numbers and metrics to see how the campaign performed against your goals and previous campaigns. This data should already be saved so you can compare it with subsequent campaigns. Once you've reviewed the social media impact of the campaign, you will have a better idea of what worked and what fizzled.



PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

What did you learn from your campaign? How did your audience react to your creative approach? More important, what lessons from this campaign will you carry forward to the next one?

For example, if the demographic that reacted the most to your campaign wasn't the same as your target audience, you might want to re-focus your message. Or you might have stumbled across a new sub-market and may want to reach out.

Now that you know what you're looking for, you may realize you were looking for buzz in all the wrong places. Your research should show you where your competition has faltered, and where you can now capitalize. You can use social data to take advantage of their lack of buzz (or negative buzz) and establish yourself as the leader in your industry's social space.



The Bottom Line

Something as daunting and indefinable as social media buzz can prove to be a powerful arrow in the marketer's quiver. By listening to conversations, identifying influencers and learning to draw insights from those conversations, marketers can use buzz as a tactic, before, during and after their campaigns.

Despite the enormous number of companies participating in social media, very few are monitoring their channels and social buzz. And even fewer companies are looking at the right numbers.

This means smart, attentive and adaptable businesses have a huge advantage. They're the ones who actually know what the word "buzz" means, and where to find it in the social space.