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Monitoring the Social Media Conversation:
From Twitter to Facebook

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The prevalence of social media has not just grown but exploded. Millions of conversations are taking place online. Company reputations are being made or harmed hourly… and all in 140 characters.

Are you trying to find value hidden in the millions of Twitter and Facebook conversations taking place every day? While the microblogging and social media network may have started as a way to stay connected with friends, its ability to connect you with the public is proving invaluable for PR professionals.

The social media buzz continues to grow as people see the legitimate business impact of the medium. Do you want to know what people think of your brand? Want to join in the conversations? Learn from industry leaders and provide valuable information to your peers? Organizations can no longer afford to ignore Twitter and Facebook, chalking them up to the latest fad. In today's world, whether or not you are aware of or join in the social media conversations, they will still take place. As a public relations professional, you need to be prepared to monitor and analyze your organization's online reputation in the social media landscape.

While social media has opened organizations up to public criticism it has, more importantly, also created a direct line between your customer and prospect base. Carefully monitoring headlines and reading industry articles has always been an integral part of everyday public relations activities. Today, by integrating traditional and social media monitoring, the value to the company is much greater.

This whitepaper will offer tips and techniques to both monitor and analyze the social media conversation to get a clear understanding of your online corporate reputation, interact directly with your customers and uncover potential sales opportunities for your company.

Understanding your Online Corporate Reputation
With media moving online, PR professionals need to not only monitor what traditional journalists have to say but also what online journalists, bloggers and customers are saying.

While PR professionals are beginning to understand the impact of their online corporate identity, they are also beginning to see its power. Suddenly, monitoring news can not only be used to gain perspective but also to help create that image and uncover potential business opportunities.

According to the Institute of Public Relation's recent study, "An Analysis of the Increasing Impact of Social and Other New Media on Public Relations Practice," the new medium is impacting the profession:

- 88% of respondents believe blogs and social media have made communications more instantaneous because they encourage organizations to respond more quickly to criticism.
- 73% of respondents believed the emergence of blogs and social media had changed the way their organizations (or their client organizations) communicate.
- More than 90% of respondents encourage the use of research to measure how blogs and social media are impacting their organizations, but only about one-third (39%) say their companies actually are conducting this measurement.

As companies put solid social media monitoring strategies in place, they will find the information necessary to help define their online corporate brand identity and to develop a strategy to ensure these new platforms are helping them strengthen their image and communicate with their customers.

Ignoring it Won't Make it Go Away

The most important thing to understand about Twitter, Ning, LinkedIn, Facebook and other social media networks is that the conversations are taking place with or without your participation. As a PR professional, you can't miss the opportunity to keep your organization's voice in the discussion.

With company perceptions flooding the Internet, it is now possible to get insight into all aspects of an organization through monitoring both online and offline media. Reputation management has grown in importance as one single post or comment has gained the ability to either boost or collapse company perception. The Internet has also made it possible to not only track your own reputation but also that of your competition. The rise in consumer-generated media in blogs and other social media forums has added insight into customer service problems and other corporate perception issues.

With frustrated consumers turning to Twitter and Facebook to share their bad customer experiences, companies are watching their online reputation change rapidly. Through monitoring, savvy companies have been able to use the information on these sites and turn around perceptions just as quickly. Comcast, for example, has found a way to not only to get in front of the customer complaints to change their opinions, but also help out the customers in the process. With dedicated Twitters that monitor and respond to customer issues, the organization has been able to stay one step ahead of the Twitterverse and balance any negative tweets with positive outcomes. By responding, they have established a presence in social media that allows them to control the company's perceived value to its customers.

With so many social media networks, blogs and communities swirling around the Internet, PR professionals are challenged to identify a jumping off point and to find the time. Many organizations are overwhelmed trying to track social media, not knowing where to begin or how to get started.

Uncovering Opportunities

As with traditional media monitoring, many key areas need to be taken into consideration to develop a sound strategy to utilize the information PR professionals are able to gather. It is important to establish an understanding of the landscape itself to see what information will be most influential to the company's future direction.

- **Competitive Analysis-** Monitoring both your company and the competition will help create a fair evaluation of where the organization falls within the industry. As important as what the public says about your own company is what they reveal about your competition. Monitoring the information shared by both your competitors and their customers can help you gain a better understanding of their product's advantages and disadvantages. That knowledge can not only help strengthen your own business strategy but also provide insight into your customers' needs.
- **Industry Experts-** Monitoring the industry as a whole can accomplish two goals: to see how the industry is shifting and what trends are emerging. With industry leaders establishing an online presence, you now have the opportunity to communicate with the experts and gain a better understanding of emerging trends. Additionally, you are able to see the upcoming turns and changes as they happen.
- **Message and Reach-** Traditionally, news coverage was monitored to see the number of clips and impressions for companies. In today's world, it is not just about the clips themselves, but the message that resonates. Social media and online publications, allow key messages to reach even further and to permeate throughout the industry. Monitoring messages about your company will allow the organization to qualitatively evaluate its online perception.

- **Foster Relationships with Current and Potential Customers-** By monitoring social media, you can leverage your direct connection to the public and your potential customers. While monitoring and addressing the concerns of current customers is extremely important, so is uncovering opportunities to secure new customers. By tracking industry, competitor and other key terms, you can identify people looking for information on your products as well as general information on your industry and competition. Approaching these situations very carefully, can lead to new business opportunities for the company as well as raise your public perception.

How to Begin

1) **Establish Guidelines-** Controlling the messages, responses and interaction of your brand is a big job. Social media has turned everyone associated with your brand into a potential company representative. Whether you are a large or small company, the nature of social media requires specific guidelines for conduct. Through careful monitoring, you are able to track the internal and external messages flowing through the Internet and ensure the guidelines are being followed.

    While many employees are tempted to participate in conversations, monitoring helps you control the message that is being sent. While 99% of the participation is likely harmless, in some cases, it may impact company brand and reputation. Knowing what is said and by whom will help you identify any potential internal risks to your online reputation as well as identify potential organizational issues.

    By offering an internal social media code of conduct, you can provide employees with messages that will help them serve to further your initiatives and steer the online conversations favorably.

2) **Identify What to Monitor-** With so many social media sites emerging and conversations taking place, it is important to identify what to monitor. With 1000's of new outlets appearing online, it is increasingly overwhelming to monitor and evaluate them all. But, managing and defining the process offers some relief. Get started with a small subset of blogs and social media sites that are important to the company and/or industry and use them to move forward and grow your online universe. As new online outlets are discovered in the company's industry, determine the impact on the business and therefore, the priority in your strategy.

    In addition to determining which sites to monitor, you need to keep in mind what areas to monitor. Aside from your own company there are three key areas you should be tracking—competition, industry and messages. This will not only help you see how your company is viewed but also provide the context and comparison you need to understand your industry as a whole. You will be able to see which messages are resonating and how you are viewed amongst the landscape.

3) **Gauge Impact-** Not all online conversations will impact the company and not every mention of your company or brand will require the same attention. While a discussion on the latest product upgrade is worth following, others may focus on areas of the company which will not impact perception.

    In addition to the value of the actual conversation, noting the impacted audience will also help drive your strategy. Most social media sites offer you a gauge of the affected audience. For example, with Twitter you are able to see how many followers will see a tweet and Facebook allows you to see how many members are within the group to view the discussion.

    While knowing what conversations are taking place and using the valuable insight gained through monitoring them within the company is important, being able to set up a strategy based on impact will help you define the priority to the company.

4) **Integrated Media Monitoring-** Neither traditional nor social media monitoring alone will give you a solid perspective of the entire company. You need to integrate both mediums within your monitoring to get a complete picture of your company's presence.

Both mediums offer different avenues for promoting the company and influencing perception. By using the two to complement each other, you are able to make your message go even further. With traditional media as a base, you are able to advance your strategy and further develop your message within the online world.

As a 24/7 source of information, understanding the information within social media and knowing what is important to the company is increasingly important. Sifting through postings can sometimes lead to more questions than answers without clearly defined values and an understanding of what is most important for your organization.

Evaluating Impact and Value

As with anything, value is determined by the goals of the company. While it is important to generate online buzz, the quality of the postings and impact on the company is still the ultimate judge. Comments and discussions must be evaluated for both tone and prominence. As we know, the amount of positive and negative tone and prominence of coverage makes all the difference. Companies need to not only track where and how often their brand is discussed but assign a value based on the importance of the outlet to the organization and determine if the conversations are positive, negative or neutral to get an accurate read for the company. Whether using technology to identify and evaluate articles based on set criteria or having individuals sift through the articles to determine their value, it is important to take tone and prominence into consideration when evaluating its ultimate impact.
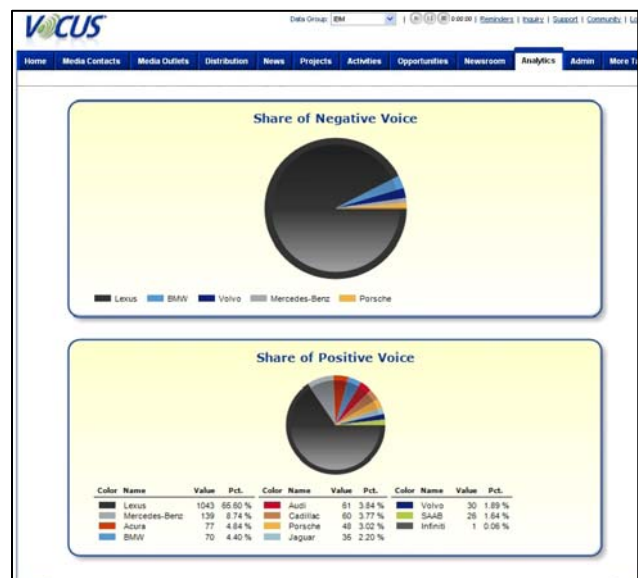
While today's leading PR management solutions enable PR professionals to monitor news for the current landscape, the more advanced tools offer an integrated media monitoring solution. Vocus, for example, has an open architecture that allows you to monitor all of your news from Vocus, plus social media channels like Twitter and other 3rd party sources such as Google, to get a comprehensive view of the media landscape in one place.

These systems also allow PR professionals to easily produce customized, automated reports complete with charts and graphs that dissect news and social media coverage to create a complete picture of an organization's reputation and, consequently, determine a strategy for an integrated media campaign.

Conclusion

Many companies are still trying to determine the business value of social media and an understanding about how 140 characters can influence their brand.

Today's technology offers PR professionals a variety of options for effectively monitoring the social media landscape:

- **Searching Individual Sites—**Searching key social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook and Linkedin directly will help you get started. Some sites allow you to create and save a search that you can easily run throughout the day. This is the most time consuming of the options but it will serve as an entry point to better understanding your online reputation.

- **Free Online Tools and Applications**—There are numerous free applications to help sort and monitor social media that will help you get started, including Tweetdeck and tweetbeep. These applications help you get a feel for the conversations taking place and will keep you updated on the latest discussions.
- **PR Monitoring and Management Systems**—PR monitoring and management solutions monitor and analyze multiple social media sites at one time to help track your online reputation. For example, using Vocus you are able to bring together mentions from the various social media sites within the application to simplify the monitoring process and get a full view of your online reputation on social media sites. These also allow you to produce customized reports complete with to analyze your online reputation.

With social media continuing to draw in your current and potential customers, the opportunity to legitimately add value to your organization is very real. Monitoring social media coverage helps you to connect with the online community that can influence your company's reputation. PR professionals are able to use the information they find to uncover opportunities, increase customer loyalty and establish their brand online.

The most important thing with social media monitoring is to get started because the conversations are already happening.

About Vocus
Founded in 1992 by two entrepreneurs and best friends, Vocus (NASDAQ: VOCS) has grown into one of the world's largest and fastest growing public software companies. More than 30,000 organizations around the world, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to one-person start-ups, use Vocus products and services to generate publicity and grow their businesses. Vocus software was awarded the prestigious SIIA's CODiE for "Best Business Productivity Software" and has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune.* We deliver our solutions over the Internet using a secure and scalable platform that allows our customers to eliminate expensive up-front hardware and software.