

Analyzing the Impact of Social Media

From Twitter to Facebook



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Engaging and monitoring the new world of social media are the big first steps, but once you've jumped in, how do you evaluate and measure the impact and success of these new efforts? With the explosion in social media, public relations has become an integral tool to generate interest not just among journalists but consumers, investors and other key stakeholders. PR is front and center in the organization and professionals need to demonstrate tangible results to really understand the impact of social media.

While the number of followers you have on Twitter, how many ReTweets you get or even the number of "fans" your organization draws on Facebook can show you how far your message is traveling, the real determining factor of your success is if you're meeting your company's goals and impacting the bottom line.

As with traditional PR methods, the right analysis can result in a more successful PR strategy that provides a quantifiable contribution to the organization. Understanding how each initiative influences your results will help you fine tune your PR strategy to focus your efforts on those with the highest impact and help filter out the noise.

This paper will illustrate how to evaluate social media's contribution to your PR campaigns and evaluate the effectiveness of the new channels in helping you reach your public relations goals to create a solid, quantifiable strategy.

Understanding the Potential

Today, the barriers to communication are breaking down. Social media has removed the filters between your company and the public. Every employee, customer, prospect and other individual connected to your company can influence your online reputation. As a public relations professional, you have to be prepared to control your message and your brand.

While social media enables your news to become viral in nature and gain momentum, if you're not careful, it also allows other messages to gain momentum. As Forrester Analyst, Jeremiah Owyang terms it on his blog, *Web Strategy*, many brands have been *Punk'd* by social media. Owyang's blog explains that the "criteria of *Punk'd* includes a situation where the story would have not been told if social media was not available, or if social media enhanced the situation."

Among the many companies who have realized the power of social media on their brand and have recently made the *Punk'd* list is Domino's Pizza. Two employees of the popular chain filmed and posted a YouTube video of a prank on a customer's food. According to reports, the video made its way to as many as 500,000 would-be customers with the help of social media. While both employees lost their jobs and are facing charges, Domino's decision to defer comment initially resulted in its brand and online reputation taking the bigger hit.

CNN also got a lesson on the impact of social media when it made a deal to acquire the CNNbrk Twitter handle from a British web developer which had amassed 900,000 followers, and subsequently faced a public challenge from actor Ashton Kutcher to race to reach one million followers. Upon his victory, Kutcher described the moment as a "changing of the guard" and added: "I think it's a huge statement about social media for one person to actually have the ability to broadcast to as many people as a major media network."

While extreme, these examples illustrate the fact that social media has the ability to take what would be a small incident and share it with the world. Ignoring social media won't make it go away or help calm a situation that has already begun. However, that does not mean you should react to every incident equally. One of the biggest adjustments companies and particularly PR professionals have had to make with social media is that as with traditional media,

things should be weighted differently. Evaluating the importance and impact a statement will have on your company and your goals should determine your response.

Indicators of Impact

With a new world of communications channels opening, determining where to focus your efforts is a challenge in itself. Social media provides the opportunity for PR to impact the entire organization:

- **Reach Further with your Message-** Popular sites such as Facebook and Twitter have emerged as a great way to share your news and increase its impact. To help spread news and information across the Internet and around the world, today's communications can leverage content shared through traditional outlets to extend your message even further. Content is easily shared and re-posted throughout the social networks using social media tools, reaching a wider audience. Incorporating social media outreach and conversation into your PR strategy is a great way to generate buzz and invite more people to your company's spot on the Web.
- **Generate Sales Leads-** As the audience for PR has increased so has the importance of coordinating with the marketing department. While you can not limit your social media conversations to marketing speak, raising the awareness of your messages and promotions keeps your audiences up to speed on everything the company has to offer. Coordinated SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, efforts in your online news services and social media platforms is increasingly useful in keeping the company in organic search results and enhancing the success of the marketing team. PR can now effectively increase sales leads and, ultimately, lead to an increase in revenue.
- **Gauge Customer Satisfaction-** Social media helps you leverage your direct connection to the public and your potential customers to address the concerns of current customers. Tracking industry, competitor and other key terms, can help you identify people looking for information on your products as well as general information on your industry and competition. You can gain valuable feedback on what your customers are looking for and how you can meet their needs. Interacting with your customers can not only lead to new business opportunities for the company but raise your existing customer satisfaction.
- **Increase Brand Recognition-** Online reputation management has grown in importance as the Internet has the ability to either help or harm the overall perception of a company. Communication related to the way people perceive different companies and brands is flooding social media sites and offers insight into all aspects of your organization. Your participation in social media can help you not only track and positively influence your own reputation but understand your online reputation in respect to the competitors in your industry. Consumers are on blogs and other social media forums talking about your brand and offering you the opportunity to help form your corporate identity.

Determining Success

Every company has different criteria for success and it's critical to measure success in terms of what is important to your organization. As PR continues to grow and change, make sure your analysis provides an accurate assessment of the impact social media has on your company. In many cases, PR analytic tools, such as those within Vocus, can not only help you quantify your traditional PR methods, but can deliver the same real-time results for your social media activities. Make sure you are looking at factors that will effectively evaluate your PR success in relation to your company, product and spokesperson mentions as well as issue response and competitive edge.

- Getting the Right Results-** Do your results impact the company? Make sure the results you are getting are those that will help your message penetrate and equal success for the organization. Monitoring the corporate brand online and in blogs helps you tailor your efforts to ensure your message isn't lost. The latest PR software provides PR professionals with the ability to not only keep track social media but also analyze messages. Monitoring and tracking the messages within the platforms themselves will ensure you are getting the right results for the organization and recognize when you are not.
- Follow your Message-** One of the biggest benefits of social media is its ability to cost-effectively spread your message. Pay attention to what messages resonate and where they appear throughout the Internet. If you follow your message throughout the different platforms, you can determine the appropriate messages for each platform and create a plan to maximize the value of each.
- Benchmark with Caution-** Measure your PR in a way that makes sense. Judge your efforts against organizations in the same league as you, whether it is a competitor or an organization with a similar model, size or level of brand recognition; choose something that is comparable. If you are in a field where you compete with more well known competitors, monitoring success at the product level instead of the company level may give you a more appropriate measure of comparative success. Monitoring not only your news but also your competitor's will improve your strategy as well. Knowing where their message resonated and what message has worked for them will help you fine tune your own messaging.
- Learn from Success-** Find out what is already working so you can better analyze your success. Discover which platforms and techniques have had the greatest impact and who they have influenced. By tracking and comparing your activity and efforts against results, you can gauge what activities are most effective in maximizing your message and concentrate your efforts to focus on mimicking those results in other outlets. Use this information to determine which messages resonate and why.
- Spotlight the Results-** At the end of the day demonstrating your results will have a strong impact. Companies can now measure how much traffic PR activities have driven to the website, where the traffic is coming from, where are they looking and, most importantly, is that traffic leading to sales. And remember, you need to showcase your results. Provide your executives with a dashboard so they can immediately see just how much of an impact
- PR has had on their business. Getting results is great but if no one knows, they won't help show your value. With PR analytic tools you can analyze the impact of your social media conversations easily. Vocus, for example, allows you to not only follow the mentions but link each back to charts that illustrate and analyze your results.





As campaigns come to an end, PR management systems are making it possible to take a step back and look at the key success factors. These systems offer an affordable avenue for easily producing customized reports to create a comprehensive picture of the organization's place within the industry, manage the company's online reputation and, most importantly, evaluate the social media impact.

Conclusion

Today's PR is about more than media, it is about impact. Social media provides the tools and tactics to empower PR and prove its value. As PR has grown in importance and companies are making large investments in its value, the expectations of its impact on the organization as a whole have also grown.

Evaluating each area of your programs to improve your public relations programs and gain control over the landscape will help you increase your impact on the organization and provide a greater ROI. Determine where efforts have had the greatest impact and where they are working and use the new channels to help achieve your public relations goals and create a solid PR strategy.

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. The Lanham, MD-based company has been named one of the fastest growing technology companies by leading organizations including the Washington Business Journal, Deloitte and Forbes Magazine. More than 3,500 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. Our on demand software addresses the critical functions of public relations including media relations, news distribution and news monitoring. Vocus has offices in North America, Europe, and Asia. For more information please visit www.vocus.com or call 800.345.5572.