

Social Media for Business

Part 2: Listening

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Listen...

Social media is not all about setting up accounts on social media networks to talk about your business. It is about monitoring your business online, understanding your customers and engaging them in a conversation with you. This is where listening comes into the picture.

The first section of Part I of this series had a small exercise. What were the results of this exercise? Did you learn something new about your business? For example, were there listings of your business on Yellow Pages and Super Pages? Were there reviews of your products and/or services? How many of your customers are talking about your business? Whether you learned that you have no presence online or saw a positive review or a negative comment, continued listening to such information will help hone in on a sound social media strategy for your business.



Why? What?

Listening involves tracking what customers are saying about your business, trends in your industry, what your competitors are talking about with their customers or how your employees perceive your business. More than 60 percent of people research products online before making a purchase.¹ Consider it lost revenues if there are negative reviews about your business and without necessary action taken to overcome the reviews. On the other hand, there might be a conversation online about the need for a product or service that your business provides. Entering this conversation allows your business to capitalize on an opportunity that you might not have found otherwise.

Listening helps you develop a focus for your social media strategy. How? As a business, the purpose of developing a social media presence is to be able to build relationships with customers. You have to understand what your prospective and current customers are talking about to be able to converse with them through social networks. The strategy becomes clear when you know where people are talking (or not talking) about your business and what they are saying. You can decide what tools to use to enter into discussions (Tools will be discussed in a future paper). You can learn if your potential and current customers are even online before going ahead with a social media strategy.

There are also valuable lessons to be learnt from your competitors and employees. You can observe what your competitor is doing online before you dive into it. You will be able to position your business in those markets or segments where your competitor has limited reach. Understanding how your employees perceive your business will help in addressing employee training needs and customer service concerns as a result of employee dissatisfaction.

How?

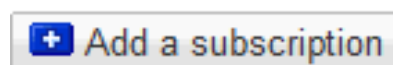
[Chris Brogan](#), popular blogger, in his blog post [If I started today](#), says he would start with listening. Chris suggests starting with reading blogs on topics of interest and comments that people make on these blogs and observing what type of posts get comments. He also recommends searching on Twitter for relevant information.² Suppose you visit a website or blog and find it interesting, but you don't want to go back to the website to check if they added new content. Websites publish updates that indicate when new content is added to the site. These published updates are called RSS feeds, XML feeds or simply "feeds". There are several tools available to track conversations on different social media networks. The following tools are recommended to subscribe to feeds:

Google – There are many free tools that Google offers to help monitor and listen to conversations about your business. To use these tools you will need to set up a Google account at www.google.com/accounts/NewAccount (free). Once set up, you can access tools such as Google Blogs and Google Reader, which are described below:

Google Blogs – Google Blogs allows you to find and follow blogs that are of interest to you. For example, to find Chris Brogan's blog, type "Chris Brogan" in the search box at www.blogsearch.google.com. If you want to find blogs related to "social media for small business", type the phrase in the search box to find blogs related to the topic. You can subscribe to a blog through Google Reader.

Google Reader – Go to www.google.com/reader and log in to your Google account to access Google Reader. From the Reader, you can subscribe to information from websites and blogs. There are two ways to add subscriptions.

Click on **Add a Subscription** below the Google Reader logo to search for the topic of your interest (or the name of the website/blog if you already know it). For example, if you want to add Chris Brogan's blog to your subscriptions, but you don't know his blog's address, click on the **Add a Subscription** and type Chris Brogan. A list with matching feeds is generated. Choose the appropriate feed to start subscribing to it. If you already know that Chris Brogan's blog address is www.chrisbrogan.com, type it in the **Add a Subscription** box to instantly subscribe to the feed.



The other way to subscribe to feeds is by clicking on an icon in the website or blog itself. There are different versions of the icon, some of which are shown in the image to the right. Choose *Google* from the drop down list for setting the **Subscribe to this feed using** option. Click the **Subscribe Now** button to choose **Add to Google Reader** on the next screen.



Icerocket – Twitter can be a valuable source of information with more than 100 million registered users on the network.³ Icerocket helps consolidate information on Twitter about a specific keyword or topic. You can then subscribe to this information through your Google Reader account by clicking on the Subscribe to RSS link on the right side of the search results page.

To use this tool, go to www.icerocket.com and click on the **Twitter** tab. Type in your search word or phrase in the search box and click on **Search** to get a list of tweets about your topic of interest. Tip: Type a phrase in quotations to generate results containing the exact phrase. For example, if you want to find information specifically on wind energy, type “wind energy” (within quotations) to generate all tweets relating to wind energy. Not adding quotation marks displays all tweets containing the words “wind” and “energy” in the search results.

Who? How Long?

This is really your decision. If you have a marketing department, get them to take a lead on listening. Involve people from each division of your organization to get their buy-in with regards to social media, in case you decide to put a plan into place. You might need every division’s input when developing content. Observe for as long as you want, until you feel comfortable making a decision. You can ask for reports on what the team is finding on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Create a Strategy

A social media marketing campaign without a strategy works just as well as leaving on a road trip with friends or family without a destination in mind. Sometimes, it can go really well, but when it goes bad it really throws the entire group out of sync. **Part III: What’s your Strategy?**, the next part of this series, will help you apply what you learn through these listening exercises to create a strategy.

References and Additional Resources

¹ Experian Marketing Services. (2010). The 2010 digital marketer: Benchmark and Trend Report.

² Brogan, C. (2008, November 22). *If I Started Today*. Retrieved August 31, 2010, from Chris Brogan: www.chrisbrogan.com

³ Ostrow, A. (2010). *Twitter Has 105 Million Registered Users*. Retrieved August 17, 2010, from Mashable: www.mashable.com