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Social media strategies



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Social media strategies

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Strategies

Social media is becoming integral to marketing plans. New strategies are being adopted to optimize its impact for companies or brands. According to *Marc Dfouni*, CEO of Eastline Marketing, an online marketing agency, social media is no longer the question. “The question is how well you do it.” The social media era has shifted power from business to consumer, from push marketing to pull marketing, from elitism to crowd-sourcing, and from generalization to personalization.

BECOMING A MUST

“Social media is not a passing trend. It is a permanent communication tool, only its techniques will change with time,” said *Samar Layoun*, co-founder of AddBloom, an online advertising agency. Consumer patterns have shifted from what was known as Version 1.0 to the second version. In the first model, consumers were passive elements in the communication or marketing process. With Version 2.0, consumers moved toward interactivity and engagement. They are now influencers of social media, not ‘influences.’ Consumers are more flexible in trying out new services, said *Tina Rousse*, Communication, Digital Media, and PR Manager at ABC. According to Rousse, a brand or a company can engage with a 2.0 customer using a proper social media strategy. ABC now has more than 165,000 Facebook fans, 4,500 Twitter followers, and 3,300 on Instagram.

THREE PILLARS

Success on social media necessitates a clearly designed strategy. Dfouni said the strategy rests on three main pillars: Recruiting, engaging, and converting. By recruiting, the brand reaches the target audience and raises its awareness. This is translated on the business level in many fields. In hospitality, recruiting will help increase bookings and first-time clients. For car showrooms, it will help grow footfall and walk-ins. Sub-website pages or sub-Facebook pages, known as landing pages, are good mediums to increase traffic. To engage the consumer, the brand must convey its added value and rely on its distinctive qualities. This makes people talk about it, and eventually engage with it, said Dfouni. To raise engagement rates, Deek Duke offered a free movie ticket at Cinemall Dbayeh with every LL50,000 spent at the restaurant in the same mall branch. Using engaging content is a must, as well as mastering techniques of listening and replying to comments, or claims. Sharing live and appealing events is also an effective way of engaging through social media. Ashraf Mansour, Partner in Interesting Times, a marketing and advertising agency handling the local 961 beer brand, said it is more important to be attractive on social media than to be right. “People are interested in exciting stories,” he said. “This is what they share.” Using remarketing techniques is very efficient. Remarketing means the same advertisement bouncing back each time

a new window is opened online. Converting happens when followers turn into loyal clients and advocates of the brand. “These three pillars work as a gear, where the performance of one affects the rest,” said Dfouni. Basic components are necessary to set a successful social media strategy. According to *Omar Abou Ezzedine*, Deputy General Manager at Cleartag, a web design and advertising agency, such components include the tone of voice (inspirational, classy, passionate), the attitude (friendly, advisory), and the values (inviting, transparent). Being flexible is the main component of acting online, said Abou Ezzedine. The strategy begins with the visual identity and guidelines of the brand, determining how it becomes imprinted in the minds of its followers.

CORPORATE STRATEGY

Gabriel Abiad, Marketing Director at McDonald’s, said that social media was at first perceived simply as an additional channel to connect with customers. It became a tool to amplify marketing campaigns. “Social media is considered as a support vehicle for punctual campaigns, an important feedback loop from customers, and a channel for our corporate branding,” he said. Many companies and brands intend to integrate a social media strategy into departments within the company: Marketing, customer service, or communication. *Sahar Dumyati*, Senior Brand Manager at Roadster said they incorporated a social media strategy into both marketing and customer service action plans. “We are lucky to have a well established customer relationship management (CRM) department,” said Dumyati. Within the department, Roadster has a team who deals with web feedback,

and processes it within Roadster’s CRM database. “We get 20,000 comment cards or feedback forms every month. We process this wealth of information and to change it into action,” she said. Integration should be done across social media channels, said Dumyati: “When we get a nice tweet we retweet and post it, and we also encourage people to Instagram about it.” This is a way to widen the outreach of the media. Other companies work on integrating the social media plan within their overall business scheme. Mansour of Interesting Times said: “We don’t believe that you need a digital strategy separate from the offline strategy. We believe that online and offline should not be separated.”

WHICH NETWORKS

The list of social media channels gets longer by the month, complicating the choice companies must make about which is the right channel to use. Most companies try to be active on the most famous networks: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and lately Pinterest, Foursquare and others. GS is available on

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. “We incite our followers to take pictures with their friends and participate in the brand’s competitions,” said *Marie José Abed*, Regional Communication Manager at Hamra Shopping and Trading (HST), known as GS. The brand also introduced a new mobile app, where users can browse latest collections, check stores, offers, and follow their points balance if they are members of GS’s reward card program. The latest entry to the app was the GS fashion blog, where news from the red carpet is posted along with other fashion and beauty news. Medco, the gasoline

Social media
strategy rests
on three pillars:
Recruiting,
engaging,
converting





distributor, launched its presence on Instagram with regular posts to its ProLebanon page where happy moments are shared and reposted by followers. The account has more than 28,000 tags. According to *Ziad Kamel*, founder of Couqley, a French bistro, a brand cannot be present on every social channel: “You have to pick which networks serve you best.” The choice is largely dictated by customer profile. Facebook is the most used platform and best for daily updates. On a more specialized level, TripAdvisor, a social media dedicated to hospitality, is used as a credible source for ranking service establishments. Tourists love it. “But its negative reviews can go absolutely brutal and must be promptly addressed by hospitality professionals, especially because the user cannot privately send a message to the restaurant or the hotel,” said Kamel. Instagram follows a different strategy: You’ve got to see it to believe it! It is simply laid out and is great for lively pictures and behind the scenes snaps. Twitter is also considered an essential tool, but has shown some difficulty in growing followers. “Twitter is full of bullies and public shaming, and one must know how to handle it,” said Kamel.

ONLINE BUDGET

Budgets dedicated to social media strategies have been increasing. “We believed that investing in social media is crucial if we wanted to survive online,” said Abed. Couqley have eliminated every single dollar spent on traditional media. “We dedicate four percent of our budget to marketing and advertising, all of which is spent online,” said Abed. This also includes photography and graphic design. Abed said social media targets Couqley’s clients more effectively. Some companies dedicate 15 to 20 percent of their advertising budgets to online ads, according to *Maya Karanouh*, Chairman of Tag Brands, a branding and media agency. Others believe that classic media, and especially magazines, are still the way to differentiate their brand. Unlike social media, where everybody can gain exposure, magazines preserve a certain level of dedication and specialization when it comes to readership and target audience.

People share exciting stories

OUTSOURCED OR IN-HOUSE

Some companies apply their social media strategy through an internal employee, while others prefer relying on a third party. Outsourcing social media services is justified by the high professionalism of these companies. But according to *Darine Sabbagh*, social media and digital marketing consultant, even when a brand hires an agency to manage its community, the internal follow-up must never stop. “There is a lot of strategic work that must be done behind the line,” he said. A company that totally outsources its online management runs the risk of missing out on the evolution of its brand in people’s minds, meaning it loses engagement. In-house social media managers must have basic design skills, as it is not sufficient to simply post off the rack pictures provided by an external supplier all day long. “A social media manager must know how to deal with the picture and couple it with a useful caption to raise the client’s engagement and interest,” said Sabbagh. Internal social media tasks can also stretch to direct advertising.

Reported by Rana Freifer

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- ▶ [L0614-147](#) Guide to designing a social media strategy
- ▶ [L0614-148](#) Framework for measuring social media activity
- ▶ [L0614-149](#) Best practices for getting started with social media
- ▶ [L0614-150](#) Developing a social media strategy
- ▶ [L0614-151](#) Social media marketing industry report 2013
- ▶ [L0614-152](#) Social media measurement putting it all together 2012
- ▶ [L0614-153](#) Understanding motivations for Facebook use
- ▶ [L0614-154](#) What’s your social media strategy?
- ▶ [L0614-155](#) Contact information

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Managing the online community



After putting together a credible strategy, the day-to-day work of a social media campaign should be carried out by an online community manager. The community manager (CM) is becoming a central figure in the marketing process. “The community manager, being on the front line, the first person that clients go to for questions, knows about the brand more than anyone else,” said *Darine Sabbagh*, social media and digital marketing consultant. “The brand is as cool, as friendly, and as visible as the community manager.”

RISE OF A NEW ROLE

The role of the community manager reigning over the online society has become essential. According to *Mohamed Hijazi*, a social media consultant, the online community can make a huge difference for a brand, with direct impacts on profits or losses. “Online community managers helped us develop relationships with our fans in a cost effective way,” said *Marie José Abed*, Regional Communication Manager at Hamra Shopping and Trading (HST), known as GS. Locally, the online community is made up mostly of the 16-30 year old generation, tech savvy, where English dominates, followed by French and Arabic. “The local online community is highly segmented, even more than the general population,” said Hijazi. It has critical clans, and gets irritated easily. They also crave attention and demand to be treated royally. Special rules must be taken into consideration while setting guidelines for online community management. Many people

assume a CM is just a Facebook addict. Most companies think they can hand the task to any freshly graduated geek who does well on social media. But a CM’s job goes beyond this. According to Sabbagh, most companies do not feel how strategic this role is. “It is not an intern’s job,” said *Ziad Kamel*, founder of Couqley, a French bistro. A CM has a multitude of tasks and, according to Abed, he is a person able to build a brand’s online presence – or destroy it.

COMMUNICATE AND MARKET

Communication and marketing is the most obvious role that a community manager is tasked with. “If you want to market a brand over social media, remember EID,” said Kamel, “Engage online, Interact with customers, and Diffuse negativity.” Social media increases top of mind awareness and creates a brand personality. The CM must start by becoming familiar with the brand’s audience, said Sabbagh. Then a story online must be told. “Facebook posts need to be interactive and interesting at the same time,” said Abed. It is also the CM’s task to define the tone of messages. “We need to be authentic, genuine, and personal,” said Abed. Lots of social pages ask questions in order to drive followers to start a conversation about the brand. This creates a buzz and raises audience numbers and rate of engagement. According to *Ayman Itani*, Founder of Think Media Labs, a specialized social media agency, it is difficult to get people involved in a brand’s online

activity. Posts should be interesting, interactive, and innovative. It is common that a brand runs out of appropriate content to feed its social media networks. A well prepared schedule is essential to set the topics that a community manager will be focusing on during a week, a month, or over a longer period of time. GS prepares on a monthly basis a calendar of concerns and highlights of the month that the team follows and posts. The length of each post is taken into consideration. Large paragraphs have low engagement rate because people often won't read the whole thing. "The simpler the post is, the higher the engagement rate," said Abed. Some brands do struggle with the regularity of updates. "It is recommended to be active every day because users expect it," said Itani. The larger the page's reach grows, the more the page is closer to user generated content. This is the type of content provided by followers. These kind of interactive followers are called Super Fans at Roadster Diner. They send unique pictures enjoying Roadster food. It is easy to share back or retweet this kind of post because they derive from the community, and interest this community at the same time. A CM also works on creating incentives for followers. Incentives can be emotional, physical, monetary, or even spiritual. Couqley offered a free dessert and a chance to win a trip for two to Paris with each client reserving online. Before the incentive, Couqley had four online reservations per month. Within two months of the offer the restaurant reached 1,700 online reservations and 6,200 guests. Competitions also help increase brand awareness. GS posts on a regular basis a picture of a new product in its stores and invites followers to guess the brand and a chance to win it. Medco also relies on competitions to drive engagement. Its Lucky Pump competition gave competitors a chance to win a trip to Abu Dhabi to watch Formula One with Nadim Mehanna, Medco's brand ambassador. Humanizing online activity also helps attract an audience. As Couqley's Kamel said, social media would be just media without the social element in it. "We personalize our presence by posting about our team, our events, and our activities," said Abed. Consumers are interested in knowing more about what's behind the brand name.

CREATE INTEREST

One of the challenging tasks in community management is creating interest when followers are not attracted to a particular brand. Medco managed to take gasoline from being a basic not-so-sexy commodity to a socially active brand. Medco studied why and when users log into Facebook. It found that it is mainly done for entertainment. "We decided to transform a prime necessity into a social interaction," said *Luciana Younis*, Social Media Strategist at Medco. The company's online community shifted its activity to a personal, livelier approach, personalizing online posts. Mercury, the yellow character of Medco, smiles each time the gasoline table shows a drop in fuel prices and has spiky hair and a mad expression when prices go up. The team also added funny pictures to drive engagement. The picture of Lebanon drowning in water in 1971 versus a similar picture in 2013 grabbed 16,000 views and 670 likes, comments and shares. Medco also shares its Corporate Social Responsibility activities online. The

Sharing is Caring campaign asked for 1,000 likes in order for Medco to make a donation to the Jeunesse Contre la Drogue campaign. The campaign reached 1,555 likes, comments, and shares, and reached more than 29,000 people.

SATIFY CUSTOMERS

Customer support is big part of community management. Social media has become the first channel through which customers report a product or a bad experience. People no longer bother calling or complaining in private. They just spread the word through social media. Before these channels, marketing literature taught that one unhappy customer tells seven people about their experience, said Kamel. But with social media, one unhappy customer tells an almost unlimited number of people about their bad experience. Community management means responding as fast as possible with instant damage control and taking immediate decisions regarding a complaint. "If a bad experience is reported, the community manager must have the authority to correct it in the most appropriate way," said Kamel.



A community manager is a strategic developer not a social media geek

COVER STORY

SOCIAL MEDIA

DRIVING SALES

Most brands are using social media as a tool to drive sales, which is not an easy task for a CM. Most companies know who their in-store clients are, but online followers are often different. Some of them have never been to a brand's store, but they remain Facebook followers. The challenge of a good community manager resides in shifting these followers into clients. This can only happen if the CM manages to create maximum brand traffic and engagement. "We still cannot assume how social media channels can impact sales, the phenomenon is not easy to calculate and assess," said Abed. But she said GS still hope that the higher the engagement with the brand the greater the possibility of shifting that engagement into real sales. "The better we integrate social media into our marketing strategy, and become more able to track it, the closer we will be to reaching positive returns on investment," said *Sahar Dumyati*, Senior Brand Manager at Roadster. Brands such as Grand Cinemas can turn their social media fans into actual customers by leading them to the company's website, let them know about the latest offers, and creating new offerings. Messages inciting sales have to be creative and not pushy, according to Sabbagh. Online messages must be discrete and a bit refined. "You cannot keep on posting 'Buy Me' messages all day long. You should know what vocabulary to use in order to attract your followers," said Sabbagh. Others are still not convinced that turning social media followers into actual clients is a must. Dumyati questioned the necessity of converting virtual followers into real clients, and vice versa. She said that there is no right answer to that question: "It all depends on the brand, the company, and the client."

MONITORING

According to Sabbagh, 60 percent of the community manager's task is monitoring trends, content, and the reaction of followers. Community managers analyze numbers and demographics. They scrutinize and review the communities' characteristics across all social media platforms and help companies attract new members. Through monitoring, they are able to assess the efficiency and the impact of the companies' online strategy. It is also a way to amend an unsuccessful step in order to improve results. Couqley's Kamel said that social media is a great tool to benchmark the market and spot competition. Online community monitoring can also be coupled with offline tasks. The CM can meet members of the online community in person at networking events, parties, meet ups and tweet ups. These events can be sources of good content for social media. Where the community manager must be is where the brand's clients are. "If you are restaurant, your community manager must go to that restaurant. He must watch the people, how they interact, and know what are their interests," said Sabbagh.

TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COST

Discrimination is the first thing to stay away from. A renowned detergent brand recently took the misstep of referring to women as merely housewives on its local Facebook account. Inaccurate material also creates a bad image. A television station once used the same picture twice to refer to two different events happening on two different dates. Amateurism on social media also acts against a brand image. A leading fast food restaurant's Twitter account once hash tagged another joint in an erroneous tweet offering people a



free meal, instead of leading people to their own place. Grammar mistakes show the community manager's unprofessionalism and affect the brand's esteem. Singer *May Hariri* once tweeted: "God Bless Lebanon." Provocative posts attract lots of viewers, but must also be avoided. Brands responding negatively risk losing their followers. One leading car agent responded in a tweet to a follower commented negatively about one of their commercials: "Finally, one out of four millions doesn't like it! We thank you for your feedback. Actually, we don't care about your opinion." Deceiving followers must also be avoided. A so-called Lebanese Canadian singer promoted himself as Haifa Wehbe's brother to get extra exposure. Automated replies or posts make the brand look ridiculous. Fake followers remove all credibility from a person or a brand. According to Hijazi, out of one famous singing star's promoted 2.5 million Twitter followers, 53 percent are fake, and 32 percent are inactive. Several brands do not realize the promise they make, giving away a particular gift, for example, when one wins a contest. Spamming and bombarding the community with press releases is a sure fire way to drive it away.

A community manager is able to build a brand's online presence – or destroy it

Reported by Rana Freifer

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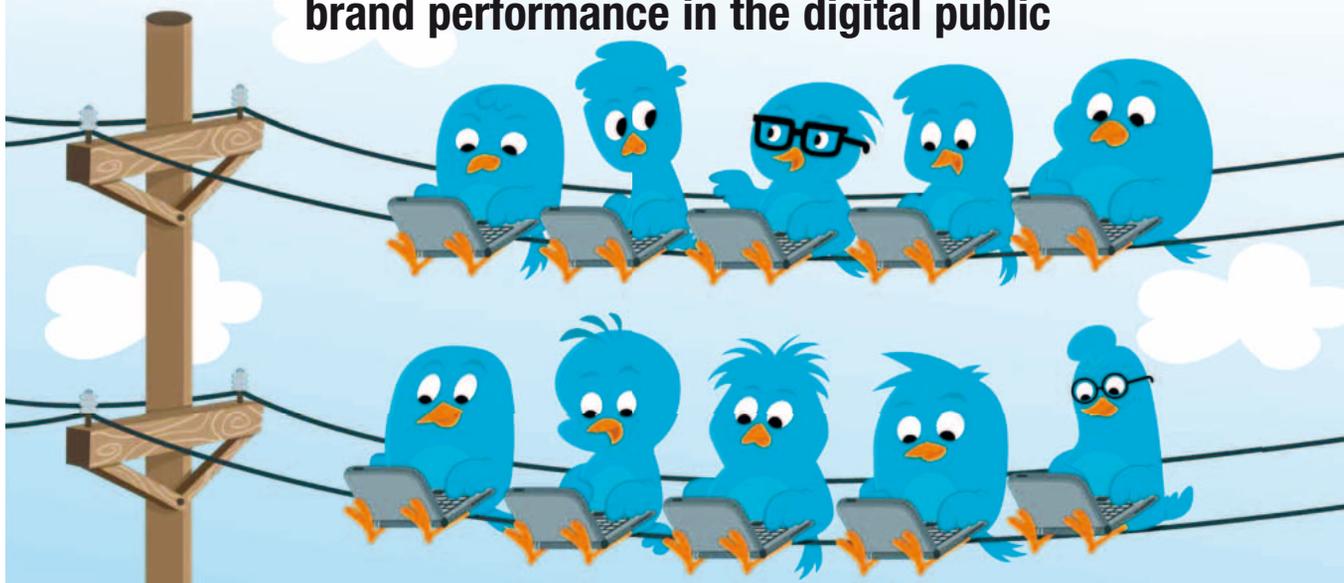
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- ▶ [L0614-136](#) Grand guide to community management
- ▶ [L0614-137](#) From social to sale
- ▶ [L0614-138](#) Contact information

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Watching the watchers

A number of tools are available to measure a brand performance in the digital public



Keeping track of its online strategy and management and measuring its performance are a must for every brand. Key performance indicators are metrics that can inform the company about their client base. Several online platforms are available to users to help them gather these metrics, such as Google Analytics, Social Bakers, and Woopra. Metrics allow companies to collect large amounts of data about their consumers, how they are interacting with the social media campaign and what their level of engagement is. The collected data will be used for future corporate decisions. By analyzing this digital information, brands and companies can turn the virtual presence of followers into a tangible marketing tool. Online metrics are the medium through which a brand or company can transform a digital strategy into reality.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Being able to dig into the figures underlying a social media strategy is crucial. Specialized metrics are there to help understand the performance of social media pages and help companies identify business problems and resolve them. Results mainly derive from analyzing Key Performance Indicators. These KPIs are numerous but some of them are more important than others. *Ayman Itani*, Founder of Think Media Labs, a specialized social media agency, said that there are two categories of KPIs. The built-in KPIs, natively available on social media platforms, show the page administrator who the visitors of the page are, their age groups and other basic information. The other source is metrics. They are divided into public ones, which help benchmark activity versus competitors, and private ones, which give a more in-depth exploration of the online activity of the brand itself. Itani said that a combination of both, built-in and external analysis platforms, is essential.

FAMOUS METRICS

Engagement Rate is a KPI that is tied to the quality of content, community size, quantity of likes, comments, and shares. According to Itani, the company must know how to amend the content of its page to increase this KPI: "It is not only about the number of followers/likes." Share activity is one of the most important metrics to take into consideration. It assesses the frequency of the likes/shares a post gets. The national flag cheesecake posted on Roadster's Facebook page on Independence Day instantly got 1,000 likes and 25 shares. Brand Activity is another KPI that looks at how active the brand is in posting updates to its social media. Response Rate measures the percentage of users' questions that the brand addresses. "We have an edge on fast response to complaints or praise because we are in a fast paced industry," said *Sahar Dumyati*, Senior Brand Manager at Roadster. Audience Demographics is a native reporting metric, which provides insights into the age group, gender, and location of a brand's audience. Grand Cinemas' Facebook audience is made up of 13 to 34 year olds, mostly males. ABC's audience is made up of 35 to 54 year olds and is 54 percent male. Targeted advertising campaigns can help rectify certain aspects of the brand's audience demographic. Reach Metric is a tool which measures the number of people reached through your content. For example, it can tell users that a posted message was seen by 11,000 people. Promoted posts and other forms of ads significantly help boost reach rate. Click Tracking is a metric that assesses the number of clicks that a brand or content gets. Mobile Usage analytics helps the brand identify the number and specifications of mobile users. This can be gleaned from the website analytics and mobile app analytics, if the brand has a mobile app, mobile site, or was assessing the need for a mobile presence. Most social media users are accessing content from their mobile so the content needs to be mobile friendly.

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING TOOLS

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

A free tool with strong online presence. It gathers real-time website and social metrics. Dashboards and reports available. Multi-channel analysis, ability to capture stats on web-enabled mobile devices

HOOTSUITE

Three versions: Free, Pro, and Enterprise. Taps into conversations with audience, keeps track of hashtags within a specific geo-location, and schedules tweets. Executes and monitors campaigns across numerous social media platforms. Tweets and messages can be automated and mentions of the brand can be monitored on platforms like Foursquare and LinkedIn. Dashboard, reports, and raw data

SYSOMOS

Segmented approach to monitoring conversations using a “Five Ws” system: Who is doing the talking, and what kind of influence do they have? What are people talking about? When did the conversations occur? Where did this happen? Why are the conversations happening and are they positive or negative? It is popular for its robust analytics and demographics

SOCIAL MENTION

Quick and thorough assessment of the online presence of a brand. Crawls all of popular social media platforms, and looks at blog content as well as forums for mentions of the keyword. It provides a large series of stats, including reach, sentiment, passion, and frequent authors

WOOPRA

A complete suite of enterprise grade analytics in one easy-to-use live interface. The user can monitor multiple websites simultaneously in a tabbed window, and switch seamlessly among them. The platform has also sophisticated features such as the Dynamic Labels, similar to the Labels in Gmail. Users automatically label individual visitors using customized filters

SPROUT SOCIAL

Designed for SMEs. Allows companies to monitor their brand across social channels and the Web, schedules and publishes updates, manages online conversations, and measures campaign efforts with reporting and analytic tools. The platform has an easy-to-use, easy-to-understand interface with dashboards that provide a snapshot of social activity and customer engagement. Three price plans, starting at \$39/month

SOCIALBAKERS

Based on three pillars: The ‘Builder’, a content management platform to improve social media efficiency. ‘Listening’, allows monitoring conversations across Facebook and Twitter in real-time and performs analysis of conversations by keywords and across multiple social media platforms. ‘Ad-Analytics’, measures brand performance in the social ad space with comparison with competitors

MEASURING PLATFORMS

Apart from regular metrics, a handful of top management tools also assist in measuring social media efficiency, said Dfouni. The aim of such tools is to help companies understand how customers behave. Google Analytics is one of the most used tools. SproutSocial allows companies to monitor and manage their Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn channels. SproutSocial offers its users free trial phases, but has three different paid packages: Deluxe for \$59 per month, Premium for \$99 per month, and Enterprise starting at \$1,500 per month. Social Bakers and Hootsuite are also considered as reliable data and reporting sources. Woopra is a real-time customer analytics service used by sales, service, and marketing teams. It was founded by Lebanese entrepreneurs *Elie Houry* and *Jad Younan* in San Francisco. The platform is designed to help organizations optimize the customer life-cycle by delivering live, behavioral data for website visitors and customers. It consolidates this individual-level data to compile analytics reports for managers to help them understand where the gaps in service are. The Woopra platform is active in different industries, from high tech, to e-commerce, banking, and real estate, tracking over 200,000 websites worldwide. Some platform versions offer free trial phases, before going into the paid ones. Other platforms such as Woopra offer basic metric tracking for free but more sophisticated services are charged.

RELYING ON THE RESULTS

“If you are on social media and not planning to change and adapt to what people are telling you, you are on the wrong platform,” said *Omar Abou Ezzedine*, Deputy General Manager of Cleartag, a web development and advertising agency. Reviewing results helps build new strategies or amend existing ones. A brand should accept different opinions and even criticism over social media platforms, said Abou Ezzedine. However, it is not easy to turn results or the insights on Social Bakers, for example, into increased income or revenue, or even an increase in the number of followers. But, according to Roadster’s Dumyati, successful social media does not necessarily need to translate into increased footfall or sales. It can be an end in itself.

Reported by Rana Freifer

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▶ **L0614-108** Best practices for social measurement

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