

The importance of social listening in 2015

 By [Heidi Mers](#)

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Social listening is arguably the most significant technology to hit marketing since social media itself. It will be a huge trend in 2015. So, what is social listening and why does it matter? Social listening informs better business decisions.

But marketing isn't the only department that can utilise social listening: your entire business organisation can use social listening to inform its programs, products and business decisions. If you want to learn more, download Meltwater's [free e-book](#).

Put simply, social listening is a way to see what people are saying on social networks. Think of it like traditional news clipping for PR. By effectively listening on social media, we are able to easily and consistently find information on our company, competitors, customers and industry.

Big data is really, really big: there are billions and trillions and gazillions of conversations happening online at any given time on worldwide social media channels. So how do you keep track of all those conversations, and more to the point, how do you find actionable insights in all the noise?

There is no way to keep track of the billions of conversations happening at once: really good insights are dependent upon really good tools. You're not superhuman, so you need a tool to sift through the noise and find the joyful nuggets of business intelligence that will make you a hero to your boss. (And then you can wear a cape.)

Social search

The better your social marketing tools are, the easier your job is. Social media monitoring, at its core, is a social search. And our tools are our search engine. What we do with the search results is what makes us mighty.

Ideally, you want a comprehensive social media marketing tool that does four things:

1. Monitor conversations on all the major social media networks AND blogs, comment fields and message boards.
2. Publish content and engage with influencers - engagement.
3. Segment people - community management.
4. Measure results of your social efforts - analytics.

Interesting question: If a tweet falls in a forest and no one is around to share it, does it make a sound? The short answer is:

nope. If your content isn't shared socially, it simply isn't social marketing. It's long-format advertising.

- As social media marketers, driving word of mouth is our primary goal.

"Going viral" is just another term for word-of-mouth marketing. What that means for us as social media marketers is that we want people clicking on our content to share it. Once they share it, that's viral word of mouth - and that's what we're after.

Top tip: don't be the guy with the megaphone.



We as marketers decided on a static target message, and we broadcast it to a target audience. This is fine for traditional advertising and some PR initiatives: basically, if you want to control the message and that's more important than having it shared, this broadcast model works.

However, the traditional monologue marketing model doesn't work for social media: you can't just broadcast a message at an audience and hope it resonates, because we're trying to start a conversation.

With that in mind, social media is a dialogue marketing model.

Dialogue marketing as a principle is a really big shift from traditional marketing, in which we broadcast a static message to a target audience and hoped it resonated.

Dialogue marketing is about finding and starting relevant conversations within target social communities (as opposed to an audience) so that its members share it through their social channels.

The main difference between a social community and an audience is that they talk to each other: they engage one another in dialogue.

Whereas an audience is attuned to a singular content source, a community is attuned to each other, and they share content among themselves.

Social share gives us word-of-mouth, and that viral word-of-mouth gives us earned media on the personal broadcast network that is someone's Facebook page or Twitter stream.

But the big question that people have been asking about social media is: where's the ROI?

Customer Purchase Funnel



And this is just another way of asking, "Why does word-of-mouth matter?" Here is why:

- A typical sales funnel starts with awareness and ends in purchase, but an ideal customer journey ends in advocacy.
- Relationship marketing disciplines like social marketing and PR typically touch the customer at the top and bottom of this funnel.
- When people share your content, their social community may or may not be entirely targeted in terms of your usual target audience demographics, but that community is hyper-targeted in terms of attention span.
- People are simply more inclined to pay attention to someone in their online community than they are to a pesky marketer trying to sell them something.
- So, with that in mind, it's crucial that social marketers be part of the community by providing value. Content that is engaging, helpful or entertaining in some way is the key to success in starting a good social conversation.

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ABOUT HEIDI MYERS

Heidi Myers heads up marketing and communications for Meltwater across Central Europe, the Middle East and Africa. She was formerly managing director of Meltwater San Francisco and opened the Meltwater Wales office as managing director. Meltwater specialises in software for organisations to help master the social business environment and increase online intelligence.

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