

# brand reputation

## WHY LISTENING SHOULD BE YOUR FIRST SOCIAL MEDIA OBJECTIVE

This is the fourth in a series of white papers by Brand Reputation. The purpose of this paper is to provide summarised thought leadership to Marketing Directors and Chief Executives of consumer brands on how to effectively listen to online sentiment about your brand as a tool to mine insight, make marketing budgets work more effectively, and more cost-effectively deliver customer service.

### LISTEN FIRST AND THEN TALK TO YOUR CONSUMERS

We have always known that consumers can be unforgiving; poor brand experience leads to switching and lost sales. This is even more of a threat now because in ever-increasing numbers consumers are adopting digital technologies to share their experiences and opinions. Whether it is in Twitter, Facebook, forums, or blogs there are substantial numbers of conversations about your brand, and people being influenced about your brand. Do you know what is being said? Where these conversations are happening? Who is influential? Who is being influenced? What your competitors are doing about it? If the answer is yes then you are amongst the few early-adopters using listening to sharpen your marketing and your customer service. If the answer to these questions is no; this paper presents the 8 business benefits of listening to consumer sentiment about your brand.

### FIND OUT WHAT YOUR BRAND REALLY STANDS FOR

As a marketer what you think about your brand doesn't really matter as much as what your consumers think of your brand; because your brand only meaningfully exists in the minds of the people who could and do buy it. What your consumers say about you is more critical than it has ever been because digital technologies give everyone the ability to reach and shape the opinions of your consumers.

There is no doubt that consumer insight can create truly effective marketing, yet why is it that so many marketers seem so reluctant to listen - and indeed talk with - their consumers? It is an unfortunate fact that as many marketers become more senior they become more distant from their consumers. Attending focus groups in Bolton on a Thursday night is too often seen as a "rite of passage" for junior team members; and that means many marketers are missing the opportunity to hear first hand insights that can make their marketing more effective. And even when groups are attended, sitting behind a glass mirror eating peanuts is no substitute for real dialogue with your consumers.

Out there in blogs, forums and in all sorts of places your consumers are expressing real frustrations and, hopefully, joys and ideas about your brand. Listening to your consumers online enables you to tap into what they are saying about your brand: spontaneously and not mediated through a research process. You will hear exactly what they think and, if you use the right approach and technologies, be able to assess how many people are expressing this sentiment and how influential they are. And, what's even better, you can do it from wherever you want to sit with your laptop.

### MONITOR CHANGING SENTIMENT IN REAL TIME NOT JUST ONCE A QUARTER

Brand sentiment can switch swiftly and the first you might know about it is a drop in sales, or in frequency of use, or an increase in customer support calls. Without knowing why.

We've all sat in those quarterly brand reviews; pages and pages of PowerPoint that tell you what people thought of your brand 3 months ago, along a fixed set of questions that can't be changed because 'we can't upset the methodology'. There is a better way.

If you actively monitor for relevant conversations about your brand you can find out what is driving shifts in sentiment - whether positively or negatively - and change your activities as a result. Gathering insights in real-time means you can act in real-time.

## **REFINE YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY BASED ON REAL BRAND SENTIMENT NOT SUPPOSITION.**

As identified by Jim Collins in *"Good to Great"*, leaders in great companies usually have the strength of character to confront the brutal facts of their reality, however unpleasant they may be, and take whatever action is required. Listening to your consumers on an ongoing basis connects you to the reality of their world, and disconnects you from suppositions that can blind you and lead to marketing failures.

By listening you can correctly identify sentiment to pick up on how different products and services deliver value and meet customer needs. You are then able to assign a value to this feedback to correctly prioritise these sentiment insights by asking yourself questions like:

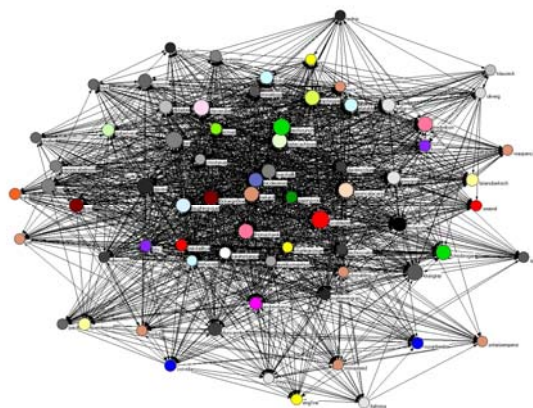
- Does the feedback come from your most valuable consumers?
- Does the feedback come from people who can most influence indirect sales?

## **IDENTIFY KEY INFLUENCERS**

Not all bloggers are equal; some are more equal than others.

Although anyone can contribute online at any time the reality is that most people are consumers not contributors, and that most people who contribute have limited influence: either because their networks are small or their influence within large networks is limited. However some people are very important indeed because they have large networks and deep influence. It is these people you should be identifying, and with whom you should be creating a relationship.

Every network has 'nodes' - connection points in the network. Think of your consumers who are active contributors as 'person nodes' - the more they contribute and the more they are read, the more important they are as nodes in your network. The image below represents the connections in a network. Each coloured dot is an influential individual connected to many other individuals in other networks – a 'person node'.



Listening technologies allow you to identify the influential value of these 'person nodes', and this allows you to do 3 things:

1. Know who they are by name and where they contribute
2. Assign a value to them; using a methodology like the 'Net Promoter' Score
3. Enter into a relationship with them and leverage the power of their networks for their and your brand benefit.

Brands that have created relationships with influential bloggers have developed powerful and effective advocates. Advocates who have extended the influence of their marketing activity, often way beyond that possible with more 'traditional' marketing activities.

### **BENCHMARK YOUR BRAND SENTIMENT AGAINST YOUR COMPETITORS**

A problem shared is a problem you probably don't have to worry about quite so much.

Listening to sentiment online enables you to understand what people are saying about your competitors too. This benchmarking enables you to establish where consumer concerns appear to be category concerns; and so are less important than direct concerns about your brand. It enables you to understand direct advantages they perceive for other brands. It also enables you to spot opportunities - particularly negatives they perceive about competitors which could give you an opportunity for tactical marketing; such as specific messaging, or campaigns focused at specific segments of your audience.

### **RESPOND QUICKLY TO CUSTOMER SERVICE ISSUES**

Before they become PR disasters and you lose consumers as a result.

The Economist once wrote that one of the reasons that service in America is so good is because Americans complain at the time of poor service, and staff are used to handling these complaints and dealing positively with them. Contrast that with the more taciturn Brits who have a tendency to pay up and go away grumbling. In the old days before the internet they'd do this at home or in the pub and their reach would be limited to whoever they could bore with their stories of how they were hard done by. Nowadays they talk in the pub AND log on to a social network of their choice. The trouble is that messages left in social networks don't go away and give complainants far wider reach; and far greater negative impact on the brand.

The infamous '[Dell Hell](#)' incident prompted Dell to invest in listening and responding to its consumers. Dell, a numbers-driven organisation only does things if they can measure their success. Not only is Dell selling computers through social media (what really matters to them) but they are also responding in real-time to their consumers and their concerns more efficiently and effectively. That's good for the consumers, and reduces servicing costs and lost sales for Dell. Typically Dell is not an adventurous marketer – if Dell is using listening platforms and social media; then it really has hit the mainstream.

Listening gives you the opportunity to spot these complaints, deal with them and satisfy the customer, as well as show others how responsive you can be. And we all know that resolving consumer complaints quickly and effectively can turn a complainer into one of your most enthusiastic and vocal brand advocates.

## **GENERATE NEW IDEAS FOR PRODUCTS AND COMMUNICATION**

Listening to consumers will give you insights that will lead to ideas; engage with your consumers and they can become an outsourced innovation department.

This approach (sometimes referred to as 'Crowdsourcing') has been used to cut the development time and cost of bringing new products to market and, for those who consumers are involved, helps create even more brand loyalty.

## **SAVE MONEY VERSUS 'TRADITIONAL RESEARCH'**

Ongoing listening to sentiment does not have to be an expensive exercise. It compares favourably on cost with research methods, such as tracking studies, that you may know well because you've worked with them for years but were never created for an age in which sentiment can change in a day, and you might know nothing about it.

## **SUMMARY & NEXT ACTION**

Consumers will continue to use social media to actively take control away from brands; a trend that will only increase. Marketers who seek to counter this trend and to leverage the power of online marketing to drive positive sentiment for their brands should start first with actively listening to consumer sentiment about their and their competitors' brands. Listening allows marketers to track discussions, understand sentiment, identify influencers and use the resulting insights to improve the effectiveness of marketing and customer service.

Ask yourself some basic questions:

- Do I know what people are saying today about my brand?
- Do I know who my most influential consumers are?
- Do I know where these conversations are taking place?
- How much could I improve my marketing effectiveness by improving sentiment for my brand?
- Do I really know what my brand stands for in the minds of my consumers?
- Do people trust my brand as much as they used to?

If you'd like to find out more and review some case studies of brands that have successfully benefited from listening to sentiment online, then do get in touch. Similarly if you would also like to understand how to set up a sentiment monitoring account for your brand.

## **ABOUT BRAND REPUTATION**

Brand Reputation is a multi-service brand communications agency that specialises in fixing Brand Pain™ for consumer brands. We build brand value, sales, profit and market share for some of the world's leading brands. For more information about us please visit [www.brandrep.co.uk](http://www.brandrep.co.uk)

For further details of any aspect of the content of this paper then please contact us at [enq@brandrep.co.uk](mailto:enq@brandrep.co.uk) or call us on +44 20 7025 8083.