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Listening matters



Listening to clients, employees and any other stakeholders who interact with your organisation is critical, even if they aren't saying things directly to you. As Jeff Bezos describes: "what people say about you when you're not in the room!"

Social listening gives us unprecedented access to that room to see the innermost (or outermost) thoughts, feelings and actions of target customers and clients, target recruitment candidates, existing colleagues, influencers and media outlets, even rivals and peers.

How it works

Social listening is the act of using smart 'listening' tools, such as Brandwatch, alongside desk and field research to help tell you what you need to know about your audiences. It can open up a whole channel into some of the most important questions that businesses frequently ask to try and increase revenue.

Using certain social listening tools, business leaders can find out what people like and dislike about your competitors or peers, why they refuse to do business with you, what they'd like to see change and, perhaps most pertinently, what would make them hand over their money.

One of the biggest advantages of social listening is the ability to shave months off research as the 'crawlers,' the pieces of software that search social media, forums, media and the wider web for insight, number in the millions and are at work 24-hours a day, seven days a week without respite. Picking up the important conversations, shares, likes and follows, this army of virtual researchers certainly put humans to shame.

Social listening also allows businesses to gain a full insight into what to say, when to say it and how to say it. It tells us how others have said it, how successful it was and how to avoid the same mistakes next time.

This is especially useful from a strategy perspective, not only for individual projects, but to act as an 'always on' indicator of what people are saying about your brand, campaign, workforce, organisation or product/service.

If businesses were told they could easily predict the future, monitor their competition and understand their fans, they'd want to be able to do it immediately. And social listening does just that.

What makes social listening so important?

Social listening itself provides hard data, which is useful but not game-changing. What makes social listening such an excellent solution is the ability for this data to be interpreted. It takes the right experts to set up what the platforms 'listen to' or 'listen for'.

But it isn't just about listening to the results either. Social listening can be set up in a way that allows information to be organised, channelled or picked out from a much bigger conversation. This is where the real value can be seen.

When insight teams work with creatives, strategists and account teams, the results can be translated into a campaign, advertisement, strategy, video, or indeed a chunk of social media real estate that instantly speaks to the audience who are already discussing that topic. Suddenly, metrics, KPIs and desired outputs that are designed to gain engagement can be put in place, just by listening to feedback, comments or consensus, then reacting with a fast solution.

This ability to react so quickly and gain insights that are way more in-depth than ever before is critically changing the way that marketing happens. Responding to time-sensitive events and happenings, like the COVID-19 pandemic, means that marketing departments need to be much more agile, with creative solutions needed in hours and days rather than months. You may have seen the BBC's Citizen Khan making jokes about toilet paper in recent adverts – funny, yes, but also incredibly accurate when it comes to listening to what the wider crowd is talking about.

Time travel

The big takeaway from social listening, however, is the ability to predict the future. Being able to digest and store information gained from social meaning suddenly makes it a lot easier to see trends and work towards creating a forecast of what will happen when a certain product or service launches.

The clever part here is that by using the predictability of humans, businesses can meet their needs potentially weeks before it is there – an incredible feat, based on our current model of supply meeting demand on a more traditional timeline.

This matters in the current crisis as, thankfully, there will be an end. Whether it takes weeks or months, demand for services will once again come to be, so have you listened to your audience in the meantime?

