



BY SIMON SALT

TRACK YOUR SUCCESS

EMERGING APPLICATIONS MAKE IT EASIER TO COMPUTE YOUR RESULTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

AS USER-GENERATED CONTENT

increases and the tools available to generate it continue to appear, influencers will become ever more specialized and diverse. Marketers face an increasing challenge to not only monitor the conversation but to engage with it. Tools that provide both the ability to measure impact and allow real engagement at an organizational level will become even more important.

Telling someone to “go do something Web 2.0 is like telling them to pick the winning lottery numbers,” said Scott Ballantyne, vice president and general manager of consumer direct at HP, during an **American Marketing Association** chapter luncheon in Austin, Texas, in October. Yet that is exactly what marketers are being told to do.

The problem facing marketers looking to engage in social media is that there is no one channel. Social media spans Internet and mobile devices. Participants, an estimated 50% of all adults online in the United States, use different technologies and different tools—and those frequently change as new ones become available.

Blogs, video sharing sites, social networking sites, consumer opinion and review sites and discussion forums all form parts of the array of tools used by those engaging in social media. One such site, Twitter, is capturing new users at an increasingly fast rate. It had a 600% increase in traffic in the 12 months ending in November 2008. While Twitter doesn't provide exact figures for users, there are currently nearly 3 million registered accounts. Estimates vary regarding how many of those are active or duplicates, but nonetheless, it is rapidly becoming the micro-blogging site du jour.

Twitter is spawning an industry of its own. New applications that leverage the data generated by Twitter are being released on a weekly basis. The majority of these are aimed at the personal Twitter user and are applications that

make following conversations easier, provide a “grading” or suggest people to follow.

Until recently, there were no applications that could provide marketers with the metrics they need to adequately measure the results of a Twitter social media effort.

That is starting to change. An application called Tweepie Twak—yes, say it with a lisp—is set to provide some in-depth metrics regarding the use of Twitter. It provides the user with the ability to gauge a following, how “influential” those followers are, how many followers they in turn have, and how many people have stopped following you. It also provides geographic data based on the profiles of your followers, showing you where the followers are located.

While this data was always there in Twitter, it took a lot of hard digging to find it. Now this tool is set to provide it in an easy-to-read dashboard.

Tweepie Twak, based in Tampa, Fla., isn't alone in providing real metrics to marketers wanting to use social media tools. Seattle-based Visible Technologies already provides big brands with a powerful toolset that allows them to monitor multiple channels for topics relating to their products, brands or campaigns. Not only does it provide monitoring, but the monitoring is context-sensitive.

This is extremely important for marketers wanting to make this data actionable and close the loop on their social media activity.

As any marketer engaged seriously in social media knows, it is not enough to simply use social media channels as a broadcast medium to push brand messaging. For a social media campaign to be effective, it must involve true customer engagement. Being able to follow, evaluate and respond to topics across multiple channels goes a long way to providing that ability to engage fully with customers and potential customers.

Visible Technologies' solutions allow a user to determine the criteria for the analysis of topic sentiment and the sites included in the monitoring, and a routing workflow that pushes the results to the appropriate internal subject matter expert to respond.

Social media is predicated primarily on reaching influencers. Visible Technologies recognizes that in its tool by providing metrics that establish a particular poster's influence. Rather than being based purely on questionable numbers such as RSS subscribers, or subjective popularity, influence is measured by interaction metrics, enabling marketers to focus their attention on conversation hubs.

While the ultimate measure of most traditional campaigns is sales, social media expands that because of its focus on influencers. Cable provider Comcast utilizes social media to monitor existing customer issues, not to attract new customers. Known on Twitter as @comcastcares, it quickly developed a reputation for engaging its customer base, resolving issues and providing updates through the use of the micro-blog. All of this takes place in the public timeline, and the ability to show potential customers that it takes responsibility for issues has had a positive impact on Comcast's overall brand.

[Editor's note: For more on Comcast's efforts in social media, see MN's Q&A interview with Comcast's Jenni Moyer in the Oct. 15, 2008, issue, or find it at MarketingPower.com.]

Developers are now catching up with the demand for real, actionable metrics that can provide marketers with the ability to “go and do something Web 2.0.” ■

Simon Salt is the CEO and co-founder of Inc-Slingers, a marketing communication company in Bastrop, Texas. Salt is also the director of technology for the AMA's Austin chapter.