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MEASURING SUCCESS ON TWITTER

Even the brave new world of twitter has to conform to the fundamental rule of marketing metrics in a corporate context – show ROI.



After the initial rush to take part in social media and a mass of "me-too" campaigns with little direction or integration into wider strategy, the trend now is for a more sophisticated approach which assesses the value of the medium as part of the overall communications mix, and its impact on wider marketing objectives. The challenge with all social media - and twitter in particular - is that the key to success lies in engagement and this is a difficult element to measure directly using standard metrics. Metrics such as the volume of tweets, or other easily charted figures such as the number of followers may have little impact on the bottom line, and marketers are faced with the challenge of justifying the resources allocated to the medium. With companies of all sizes tightening their belts, measurement can help to ensure that the right amount of resource is allocated to twitter for a demonstrable return. The key is to look beyond chasing easy numbers, or trying to quantify abstract concepts such as engagement. Instead of looking backwards at campaigns and trying to put a value on numbers that don't directly relate to business outcomes, marketers would be better to put measurement concerns at the heart of their campaign strategy by linking their campaigns and activity to SMART goals cascaded down from business and marketing objectives.

Business objectives are the source of marketing objectives. From there, the marketing department sets goals which relate to their area of activity. If the corporate goal is to increase sales, for example, the marketing department may set specific goals relating to breaking into and reaching a new market segment. Following an assessment of that segment, a plan will then be devised to best reach potential customers using a mix of above and below the line activities, and each of those activities will be measured by their contribution to the achievement of the original objective to reach the new segment. There will be a target level of sales to be reached which is measured regularly throughout the campaign and the chosen segment and related campaigns will be added to company databases to ensure accurate measurement. This is all basic campaign planning – so why is it worth mentioning? It seems in the exciting early days of new media, this methodical approach went out of the window and activity on twitter was allowed to meander without objectives or a plan, which made it hard to measure when it came to the final analysis.

Cascading twitter objectives from business objectives provides an opportunity to accurately measure the value of the activity. For example, in appealing to their new target segment, a company may decide to start a twitter feed which directly addresses that market. From there, measurement can take any number of directions: looking at how many relevant journalists working on that segment engage with the feed and how many of those provided press coverage as a result, or measuring click-throughs to the website and tracking whether any of these result in sales. Where relevant, devising twitter-specific offers will link campaigns directly to sales. In cases such as these, being able to track the direct impact on sales ensures that the activity stays focused and effective.

All this focus on the bottom line means that marketers have the opportunity to demonstrate the ROI of the channel. To do that, they must first provide a reasonable assessment of what the investment is likely to be. Often this is something that is misallocated or underestimated. The investment could range from outsourcing the work to an agency to staff time and training, and of course the often forgotten analytical work such as measurement. If the office junior tweets a link to the website once a week it is unlikely to provide any returns, but then it requires next to nothing in the way of investment. On the other hand, sending a marketing executive on a training course and then expecting them to tweet information, respond to enquiries and measure the results may allow the activity to gain traction, but it will take time from a person who may have otherwise been engaged in activities such as direct mail or traditional PR. These internal costs are often ignored if they don't show up on the line of an agency's invoice. This means that many marketers miss the true cost of social media activity; but gaining a true picture of what the investment is likely to be is essential if the ROI is to be measured accurately.

Some social media marketers may shy away from hard metrics, but the fact remains that any activity that has been allocated resources by the marketing department needs to show some results on the bottom line. Retaining a focus on the ROI is likely to strengthen campaign activity as a whole, and with a channel such as twitter it is fair to expect both quantitative and qualitative benefits if the campaign is successful. Quantitative benefits include sales tracked from links on twitter directly to the website, or a press article delivered directly from contact on twitter. Qualitative elements such as SEO and market intelligence are less easy to chart, but should be noted as part of the overall impact of

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the campaign. The range of possible returns demonstrates how important it is that objectives for twitter, and the resultant measures, are cascaded from wider marketing objectives and integrated into the overall activity.

Once all these results are recorded, you can find out whether you have a positive return on your investment. For example, did the amount of time it took to devise and deliver the twitter campaign match up with the level of sales received? Did the SEO benefits delivered by the activity cost more or less than the investment of specific work to optimize the website? Could the market intelligence have been gained anywhere else and if so would that have been quicker or cheaper? These questions aren't meant to devalue the twitter activity, but rather to sharpen the focus of the objectives and subsequent measurement. In broad terms, if the return is commensurate with the investment, then the activity is proven to be worthwhile. If you can look closer and determine that, for example, the activity was more effective in driving sales than direct mail, but less effective than a targeted PR campaign for delivering press coverage, then you can focus twitter campaigns on the areas where it delivers most return.



If you are committed to measuring your twitter activity and you've established the objectives and relevant measures to gauge their success, the next step is to find the right tools to measure the activity. There are a range of tools available to measure social media success, some free to use and others which require a financial investment. However, before you sign up for numerous services which appear to measure the elements you wish to track, take a look at the resources already available in your department. How effectively does your database track the source of sales? If it doesn't, is it a more effective investment to have this updated rather than allocating disproportionate resource to a single area of marketing activity? If you use Google analytics or a web-tracking service to measure the traffic on your site, can this be used to measure how effective twitter is at delivering web traffic or sales, rather than investing in a new tool? Again, going back to initial objectives and ensuring that all activity is integrated will ensure that you pick the right tools for effective measurement.

As your campaigns become more sophisticated and your objectives narrow, it may be worth investing in specialist tools. Paid services often offer sophisticated analysis of more qualitative measures such as engagement and sentiment that are difficult to chart through traditional means. It's worth assessing these tools thoroughly to find out whether it's fit for purpose.

One area with a broad range of tools is the measurement of engagement. Radian 6, for example offers engagement analysis and is targeted at PR and advertising specialists. This tool looks at measuring brand awareness, and supports reputation management and in some cases, customer service. This makes it an excellent tool to measure twitter activity if you've established that it is a positive channel to support PR campaigns and raise awareness in the market, but less so if you measure customer engagement by sales figures. Meltwater Buzz offers a similar solution, and with Meltwater roots in SaaS for PR measurement, their focus on engagement and reputation management could offer insights where twitter campaigns are closely aligned with more traditional PR. These tools can be deployed to gain competitive intelligence as often as providing information on the success of your campaigns.

Monitoring and tracking opportunities is also well-served with paid tools. For example, sproutsocial allows you to track your brand across all social channels and highlight new business opportunities. If your objective is to increase sales, or sales leads, in a chosen market then using this tool may help to demonstrate whether twitter has been an effective channel.

Finally, management tools can offer marketers with significant social media activity the opportunity to integrate and consolidate their activity through a single platform. Companies such as Lithium promise to support integration across an enterprise. The benefits are that marketers can spread the resource allocation and gain input from product or R&D teams for a range of content whilst still maintaining overall control.

In practice paid tools tend to focus on demonstrable ROI in the consumer sector, but what does this mean for B2B marketers? B2B campaigns are unlikely to have the same level of customer enquiries to manage and are very rarely faced with the same challenges relating to reputation management and volume opportunities that require sophisticated management. Often there is a long and complex sales process, with twitter, providing one of many touchpoints throughout that process. When viewed from this perspective, subscription tools which are designed to manage volume are unlikely to deliver a return for any organizations other than large enterprises. In most cases, selecting a measurement tool should involve the same process as the measurement itself – examining whether the investment is commensurate with the return, and considering whether alternative channels can deliver the same results for less.

One key benefit of paid services which B2B organizations should consider is integration – although there may not be the same requirements as consumer organizations to manage high volumes of twitter traffic, these services

could be judged as outsourced analysts. Therefore, it's worth contrasting the time it would take for an individual to measure, chart and analyse results from twitter, and contrast this with a paid subscription tool offering engagement analysis, opportunity monitoring, channel management – or all three. Remembering that staff time is also a cost is an effective way to ensure that all marketing resources – the staff and the budget – are employed effectively.

If you do feel that the scale of the opportunity on twitter and the volume of response is unlikely to warrant investment in a paid tool, there are still a number of free tools which marketers can use to ensure that every element of their twitter campaigns is effectively tracked and measured. Services such as TweetDesk, HootSuite and Seesmic offer management solutions which also allow for multiple users, scheduling tweets, and tracking mentions of brands online. Tools such as these can be cascaded across a large enterprise at no cost, but it is important to allocate one individual or team responsibility for overall management so that the activity doesn't spiral out of control. It is vital that you take steps to professionally manage your presence on twitter. Once you've signed up, you've set an expectation with your customers and stakeholders that you will be available via this medium. Therefore, it's important to track activity and respond in a timely manner to questions and comments – however infrequent they are. Accidentally ignoring a customer's comment on twitter could damage reputation and sales, where as a timely response could actually boost both. Free management tools, in the hands of a trained individual, can offer a good balance between effective management and reasonable investment in twitter management tools.



Engagement can be measured using free tools such as Klout or Kred, which provide a score based on engagement measures and can focus on specific topics. The services look not just at follower numbers or volume of tweets, but areas such as the amplification of the messages which highlight how effective certain tweets have been in creating engagement and understanding to their target audience. This provides B2B marketers operating in niche markets a more accurate view of the effectiveness of their campaigns. Ultimately, a B2B campaign is unlikely to have the engagement of one by a fashionable consumer brand, but these services can benchmark levels of influence within a specific market. The aim is not to be more influential on twitter than Stephen Fry, after all; just to be more influential than your competitors.

New tools emerging in the marketplace offer specialist analysis which will be of more interest to some marketers than others. For example, Twitalyzer offers location-based analysis, so if the business and marketing objectives relate to increasing sales in a particular region or country, this tool could prove invaluable. If you operate in a global marketplace with largely homogenous customer requirements, this would be less valuable. The number of tools relating to twitter continues to proliferate as the influence of the channel shows no sign of abating. The trick is to pick the right tool for the objective – and bear in mind, if you can think of measuring it, chances are someone in Silicon Valley has already developed a free tool to help you do just that. You can't measure everything and allocate more and more resources which diminish your return, so pick the metrics that really matter.

As highlighted earlier, integrating twitter objectives into wider social networking or online marketing objectives may mean that you already have the tools to measure your activity. In some cases, these can be integrated with twitter-specific tools, and in others, can be substituted for a broader approach which provides the level of detail needed. Google analytics is a free service which offers a wealth of information on the source of web traffic and could therefore demonstrate the ROI of twitter. Specific tools relating to twitter such as URL shortening services have decreased in importance now that twitter offers this service from within the interface, but what services such as bit.ly and owl.ly can offer is more extensive tracking and analysis of specific tweets. If, for example, three messages are sent out via twitter in a week asking individuals to register for a webinar, then Google analytics can offer the volume and timing of click-throughs based on measuring the traffic from twitter to the webinar registration page, and reasonable estimates can be made as to which tweet created the traffic based on timings. A link shortening service can take any element of guesswork out of this by providing accurate statistics of exactly which link provided click-throughs. This information can therefore feed into the process of continual improvement as messages on twitter are refined and developed to become more effective based on results. The click-through results of most link shorteners are public, so they can also provide valuable intelligence on the success of competitors' campaigns. Whether it is worth investing the time in reports on specific tweets, or whether understanding the overall traffic level from twitter would be sufficient is a question for each department, and goes right back to the start in assessing whether the investment is commensurate with the return.

There is an element of the emperor's new clothes to channels such as twitter. Experts proclaim that it has changed the media and business communications landscapes irrevocably, and predict the end of traditional media and marketing methods. Whether or not this will prove to be the case, the fact remains that twitter, as revolutionary as it may be for providing open access to individuals to publish and promote their views, is a communications channel.



This means that just like traditional methods such as direct marketing, advertising or PR, twitter must be justified in the marketing budget. The justification will come from going back to basics – setting objectives, measuring the results, and refining activity based on those results. Suggestions that twitter is too dynamic, too different to be captured by traditional metrics are counter-productive. First of all, it's hard for any marketing manager to justify an expense which has been presented as a riddle, wrapped in a mystery and inside an enigma; and presenting twitter as a lawless environment which defies measurement does just that. Secondly, if twitter is to have the impact and influence on modern communications that experts predict, then surely it's worth the investment in measuring activity to ensure that your company is getting it right?

Marketers should always look at the ROI of any activity and in this case, remember that just because twitter itself is free, the resources required to use and manage it are not. The return can come in many guises – from clearly tracked sales emanating from a promotional tweet to more intangible benefits such as gaining market intelligence which increase the effectiveness of a direct marketing campaign, perhaps through more detailed segmenting, or more specific marketing messages. This is a good example to demonstrate something that social media has changed forever: customers expect businesses to listen. Therefore, the right measurement isn't just about charting results, it's about considering what these results might suggest about the market and customer expectations, and then translating that intelligence into action.

Despite the many options for free and paid tools and for outsourced and in-house activity, in the final analysis, measuring twitter activity is simple, and based on the traditional marketing model.

1. Set reasonable objectives which relate to wider marketing campaign objectives

2. Measure the results as they relate to these objectives

3. Refine your activity based on these results

It may be an old-fashioned approach to a new channel, but it's the best way for marketers to keep their feet on the ground and gain an accurate picture of the results their hard work is delivering.

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