



WHITE PAPER

Your Customers Are Talking. Are You Listening?

*Gaining Business Insights Through Proactive
Social Listening Programs*



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INTRODUCTION

The rapidly evolving world of **Social Media Data-Mining** provides organizations the insight to make more informed, proactive business decisions. Beyond basic **Social Monitoring**, data mining requires additional effort and sophistication. Businesses that only focus on those who share their @ handle on social media (e.g. Twitter) are doing themselves a great disservice by missing out on vital business insights.

In today's hyper-competitive marketplace, businesses need to listen clearly to fully understand what people really think and feel about their brand. This is the essence of "**Social Listening**"—**gaining new customer insights by engaging proactively, not just monitoring or watching.**

*This white paper examines the evolution from **Social Monitoring** to holistic **Social Listening**, explores why this shift is critical for businesses today, and explains how it can be achieved through upgraded marketing tools and partners. The paper concludes with case study vignettes that highlight the tangible benefits businesses can expect from leveraging social media data beyond simple monitoring.*



SOCIAL MONITORING VS. SOCIAL LISTENING

SOCIAL MONITORING

Is the practice of listening for social media mentions of your brand, hashtags, and user accounts (as well as other engagement) on owned social channels. Customer service teams were early adopters of this practice. By now, just about every company with a social media channel engages in Social Monitoring, listening for @ mentions of their handle and often responding in a strategic runbook. Increasingly, Public Affairs teams and Customer Experience teams are also involved in the practice.

While absolutely essential, Social Monitoring is a purely reactive task. The practice fails to get teams in front of issues, market trends, and customer behavior. In contrast, Social Listening is the practice of listening to—and deriving insights from—the online social conversations consumers engage in about your company and brand, as well as about the industry as a whole. Social Monitoring is the first level of Social Listening and is foundational to a healthy Social Listening strategy. However, teams too often miss the benefits of extended layers of listening by stopping at a Social Monitoring program.

SOCIAL LISTENING MAY BE SUBDIVIDED INTO THREE CATEGORIES:



1. Social Monitoring of brand mentions happens in real-time and **empowers brands to be aware of and quickly react to unfolding issues.** With the introduction of new and simpler tools, teams continue to bring monitoring tasks in-house, though some still choose to let experts handle more difficult problems.

- *Telecom companies leverage real-time Social Monitoring for early-detection of service outages, shortening response time.*
- *Social Monitoring keeps Consumer Packaged Goods companies informed of public customer complaints, enabling real-time responses to concerned customers.*



2. Competitive or Event Tracking provides data beyond the brand, allowing trends to emerge over time. Data is culled on major competitors as well as on brand performance, **providing info on the social presence and perception of like brands.**

- *Sponsors and hosting organizations across all industries track the online discussion around their conferences to assess customer perceptions, experiences, issues, and opportunities for future events and messaging.*
- *Companies in competitive markets monitor and assess the successes and gaps of competitor marketing campaigns and social presence to identify white space and avoid pitfalls.*



3. Market Insight Analysis sets wide parameters around the market as a whole and is not solely focused on a brand or competitor. This process helps businesses discover what barriers consumers face, find information gaps, identify consumer emotional and financial needs, and reveal which factors are driving their decisions. **These insights help companies create a better customer experience, improve conversion, and drive brand loyalty.**

- *Early-phase brands research consumer aptitudes for differentiating features and identify decision-drivers to inform their go-to-market strategy.*
- *Established brands assess unmet consumer needs in their market in order to inform a more holistic customer experience.*
- *See Use Cases section for further examples*

When Social Listening goes beyond monitoring, **it becomes proactive, providing understanding for what's between the lines.** For example, if a company's mentions are rising, Social Monitoring will capture the increasing metrics and graphically plot them.

Holistic Social Listening on the other hand, is much broader, more diverse and helps pinpoint the exact characteristics of the increase, such as:

- *Consumer frustration towards a particular product.*
- *Seasonal spike that competing products are also experiencing.*
- *Groundswell of market voices for all brands to change a practice.*

Social Listening is ideal for capturing the insight-driving pulse and mood, uncovering critical trends and attitudes. Ultimately, if understood and applied correctly, a comprehensive **Social Listening program provides keen insight into changing business dynamics that should be leveraged to make more informed, proactive decisions.**



BUSINESS ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL LISTENING

Because traditional methods of data collection (e.g. interviews, surveys, etc.) call for prompted consumer responses, the data is prone to response bias. In contrast, social media data ("Social Data") are unguided, peer-to-peer conversations that could never occur in an interview environment. **Social Listening makes it possible to hear what people are saying freely among themselves, providing researchers with a rare look into the organic language consumers use with each other, uninfluenced and unhampered by a corporate presence.**

Another critical aspect of social data is that it's captured in real-time. This means the average research period—which typically spans months—can now be reduced to weeks. And since these social discussions and trends may be identified, gathered, and interpreted so quickly, researchers are able to react faster than ever before. Naturally, in addition to reducing reaction time, the shortened research cycle also significantly lowers overall costs.

Another essential advantage of social data is that it is a **public, wide-reaching form of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing**. Unlike offline conversations, opinions and information shared online (whether factual or not) extends far beyond one's own circle of friends, potentially impacting the purchasing behavior of complete strangers. Simply put, failing to learn from the organic opinions in the market is an error of judgment the current hypercompetitive market will not allow.

With these benefits in mind, it's important to also remember that social data comes with its own biases and limitations. As opposed to a survey or an in-depth interview, data is unprompted and, as such, may not answer all research questions. But of course, just because something isn't discussed organically doesn't mean it never occurs. As with any distinct dataset, working with social data requires a unique set of considerations. But when undertaken correctly, Social Listening analysis provides businesses a profoundly unique and actionable advantage.

THE APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL LISTENING

A Brandwatch 2018 report rates the top three most common applications for Social Listening as (1) community management, (2) competitor and market research, and (3) influencer marketing. Further valuable business applications include:

- *Learning why consumers select competitors over your brand.*
- *Validating and testing hypothesis from other research.*
- *Elucidating gaps in the market your brand or team can close.*
- *Understanding what resonates with consumers to inform content development.*
- *Identifying opportunities to improve your brand's customer experience (CX).*
- *Identifying authentic consumer language for use in marketing campaigns.*
- *Tracking and monitoring reactions to DTC campaigns (digital and traditional).*
- *Exploring the viability of a social engagement by analyzing the success of competitor engagement strategies.*
- *Identifying influential brand advocates or partners in the online community.*
- *Integrating emerging market trends into marketing campaigns.*
- *Exploring market perception to inform brand positioning.*
- *Tracking community reaction to a marketing event.*
- *Identifying reputational risks as they emerge.*
- *Uncovering potential controversies before they become irrevocably linked to your brand.*

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL LISTENING PROGRAM

A successful social media program requires a **well-defined strategy, a wide, intentional data net, meaningful analysis, and non-siloed results**. As with any business endeavor, complete executive support is also crucial.

Obtaining executive support begins with a **well-defined strategy of analysis**. As with any research project, a Social Listening program is best setup for success when business need guides the endeavor, and when program goals, and the learnings you hope to capture, are clearly defined. Goals might include improving the digital consumer experience or informing marketing efforts. While your initial research questions may be vague at the outset, they will surely evolve over the course of the program. Typical initial questions might include:

- *Why and where are my consumers discussing my brand online?*
- *What do consumers like about my brand?*
- *How do they discuss my brand compared to my competitors?*
- *What factors do consumers discuss as having the greatest impact in a purchasing decision?*
- *What are my competitors doing on social media and how successful are their efforts?*

Once a strategy is defined, selection of appropriate listening tools and data collection may begin. With the multitude of Social Listening tools on the market today, having a defined strategy will help facilitate selection. Some tools are designed to allow for customer service response within the tool. Others are designed to empower your analytics team with easy-to-read and build visuals. Evaluate each for the unique benefits they offer and select the one that best suits your uses. Once a tool is selected, data collection may begin. Be sure to cast a wide enough net to capture relevant discussion around your business questions.

Conversations vary across social media platforms, so it's paramount to understand not only what people are saying about the company, but also where they are saying it and how it varies between platforms. If you have questions about consumers of the industry at large, be sure to also capture industry discussion that doesn't specifically mention your company or a competitor brand.

Data converts to insight in the monitoring and analysis phase of a research project. Both are perpetual; monitoring is constant and research is cyclical. Most listening programs kickoff with a benchmarking to establish a baseline. Information learned will lay the groundwork for understanding and defining what a typical discussion of the brand, competitors, and industry "looks like." From here, it's possible to ask more informed questions to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the brand and market.

It's also important to note that **insights gleaned from the analysis need to be shared throughout the company with all applicable stakeholders.** Keeping this information contained in a silo will yield no dividend. Oftentimes, sharing this information initiates many additional useful questions that help derive intuitive answers for better business decisions from every part of the organization.



THREE SOCIAL LISTENING USE CASES:

The following cases illustrate how Social Listening informs and improves your business decisions:

1. A major CPG manufacturer relied on Social Listening to identify effective brand advocates with whom to partner, and to evaluate the success of their content, boosting brand awareness and positive sentiment.

2. One apparel brand used Social Listening research to identify decision drivers of consumers in their market. They shared this information with the marketing team who in turn highlighted those product features that were evidenced decision-drivers.

3. For the manufacturer of a psychoactive drug, online discussions provided unique insight around adherence. Within their online communities, patients were uninhibited in sharing instances when they had skipped a dose in favor of having a few drinks. Patients had failed to report this type of activity in interviews (conducted by the brand team) with researchers and even with treating physicians, either because they were not prompted to do so or because they were ashamed to admit their behavior. Social Listening allowed the team a peek into a disease-management reality that had otherwise been hidden from them.



*In each of these cases, the insights obtained could not have been gleaned in any way other than via Social Listening. **The info represented pure, honest consumer sentiment, which in today's market is gold.***

CONCLUSION

Businesses need to move beyond passive monitoring to **embrace Social Listening in order to make more informed, proactive business decisions based on current, accurate, organic intelligence gleaned from social media data.** To do so, businesses need to devise a clear strategy that encompasses widespread data collection across multiple social media platforms, followed by investments in data visualization and analysis tools. The information you gather from a Social Listening program will be dynamic and complex. But remember: in order to maximize the true potential of social media data-mining, your Social Listening must be a continuous, real-time process.

It often makes sense to choose a partner to help you navigate the complex world of Social Listening. In this case, be sure to find one that will help craft meaningful questions, design a project that addresses those questions, and present actionable recommendations from the research. A partner adept at this process will enable any business to optimize their marketing strategies and accelerate brand usage.

TAKE A NEXT STEP

Anexinet helps global brands uncover insights from social media data to drive their strategy. Our ListenLogic Social Listening platform and services provide insight into how consumers feel about your brand, products, services and competitors by tracking the nuances of emotion and sentiment.

Schedule a meeting

Reach out to us today to schedule a free consultation to learn how we can help with your Social Listening strategy.

[Schedule a Free Consultation](#)

Not ready for a meeting?

If you're not ready for a meeting, check out our Social Listening Brochure to learn more about our offerings.

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