

# Tech Trends 2014

## Social activation

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# Social activation

## From passive to active tense

**Over the years, the focus of social business has shifted from measuring volume to monitoring sentiment and, now, toward changing perceptions. In today's recommendation economy, companies should focus on measuring the perception of their brand and then on changing how people feel, share, and evangelise. Companies can activate their audiences to drive their message outward – handing them an idea and getting them to advocate it in their own words to their own network.**

**O**RGANISATIONS have spent the last several years chasing the tantalising prospect of “social.” Within the enterprise, social represents a bastion of hope for productivity and collaboration – a chance to effectively navigate who knows what, who knows whom, how work gets done, and how decisions get made. We're still in the opening frames of a broad wave of social-driven enterprise transformation,<sup>1</sup> as a recent study by *MIT Sloan Management Review* and Deloitte confirms. That study revealed that 69 percent of executives thought social business would be critical to their organisations in the next three years.<sup>2</sup>

Social businesses<sup>3</sup> ideally rally around well-defined business problems, supported by committed communities with well-defined incentives for participation. To take full advantage of this potential, age-old organisational constraints need to be identified and rewired. Hierarchies, biases, standardised operating procedures, rigid job descriptions, and other embodiments of institutional inertia can stunt progress.

Meanwhile, the flurry of activity around external social channels continues. Social media has become a frequent online destination, commanding 27 percent of global time spent on the web.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, social monitoring and

listening were some of the earlier investments companies made in the social arena. Social efforts leaned on the enabling tools that allowed passive data collection, tracking the volume of surface-level activity and broad-stroke awareness – followers, likes, mentions, and click-throughs to their own corporate channels. As the numbers grew, premature victory was announced. But volume doesn't tell you much – good, bad, or indifferent.

Monitoring gave way to sentiment analysis. Raw quantitative counts were replaced by happy and sad faces in an attempt to glean what the social masses were thinking about brands, products, services, and campaigns. Once again, out-of-the-box tools were often used to drive sentiment calculations, but they often lacked the nuance and context needed in business. The aggregated sentiment was a general measure of positivity, but it lacked subject-matter specificity. The sentiment camps ignored so-called “neutral” conversation – the lion's share of dialogue and the place where opinions are formed through exploration and discussion. Sentiment analysis was difficult to take action on, though the possibility nonetheless sparked a wave of investments in social command centres.

The thought process was that we need to do *something*, now that we've shone the light on what people are saying about us. So companies rolled out social-based customer service, communications, broadcast marketing, and crisis communications. These applications use social as another channel and are largely a means to distribute mass messaging or to pull customers back to a company's own websites and call centres.

The business potential of social technologies is real. But that potential lies in moving from monitoring sentiment to influencing perception – and helping customers become advocates for marketing, for sales enablement, and for servicing.

## The recommendation economy

Social activation is based on the new recommendation economy – where customers have tuned out anything that smells like traditional advertising, seeking instead the contextualised recommendations of peers. We have seen the rise of informed, passionate audiences who are ready to engage – willing co-creators who are actively sharing what they are interested in, buying, and using. They are participating in their own words, on their own turf, with personalised messages on social networks, blogs, community forums, and other locations where those with shared interests congregate. They are inspired to share why they made a decision, what they considered along the way, and why others should follow suit. A recent Nielsen study confirmed that 84 percent of global respondents trust word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family – the most highly rated among digital and traditional methods.<sup>5</sup>

Social activation involves new tactics. Audiences and influencers need to be understood at a granular level – who they are, what they care about, and how they spend their time. Then campaigns can be designed to empower and engage specific communities for tangible, expected results. Content should be rapidly created, tailored, monitored, and refined – according to the context of the audience, the outcome, and the campaign. It should be designed so that consumers feel motivated to add context to brand content

with their individual insights for friends and readers. Content supply chains are often put in place, allowing core collateral to be pushed through internal and external ranks – in formats that encourage regional social teams and end consumers to localise, personalise, and enhance it.

Finally, digital outreach can – and should – be paired with traditional in-store or on-site campaigns, delivering on the potential of seamless, omni-channel digital engagement.<sup>6</sup> The goal is not to divert social activity onto corporate assets; instead, it is to influence outcomes and promote advocacy.

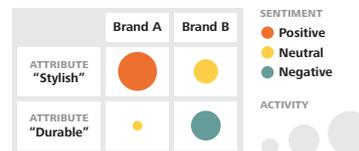
### 1 Focus: Map the audience



### 2 Insight: Identify influencers



### 3 Perception: Use brand analysis to identify target areas



### 4 Audience: Distribute content through advocates, enable audience contribution



### 5 Campaigns: Inject new energy



## A social science

Social media continues to grow and evolve bringing powerful new opportunities for brands to engage directly with consumers. However, as Facebook celebrates its tenth birthday, the use of social media for brand awareness and promotion is still relatively immature. At the same time, businesses are continuing to seek clarity on how to focus their time and budgets effectively in this space.

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (Sony) is one such brand that has been keen to explore the potential of social media to engage its audiences. In particular, they wanted to understand and quantify the impact of social media activities on their DVD and Blu-ray sales and analyse how and where to effectively engage with consumers and influencers to maximise this impact. Some of the questions the Sony team have been looking to answer are: Should we spend any money on social media? How should we split our marketing spend across traditional and digital channels? How can we use social most effectively to drive incremental sales?

John Biggin, Publicity, Promotions and Media Manager at Sony Pictures Home Entertainment says “The media landscape is becoming increasingly diverse. There is a proliferation of new touch points to reach our consumers, and that means we have to make a lot of decisions about where we put our marketing investment. Where once on the traditional model you would try and market to your consumers, we now have to think about how we can market with them”.

In 2013, Sony turned to the science of big data and analytics to inform its social media strategy. The company used econometric modelling techniques to develop a predictive tool that could combine insight from historic data to forthcoming titles. Data across 400 recent Sony and competitor titles was used to measure and forecast the sales impact of social media and other marketing levers for new releases. This enabled Sony to focus its attention on those platforms and activities that generated the greatest traction, both above-the-line and in the social media space.

Clear trends are emerging from this set of data. For example, Sony discovered that increasing Twitter activity for an action title will generate twice the sales impact as for a comedy, whilst Facebook is most likely to influence sales for children’s titles.

Sony is now using the findings to inform decisions on how and when it might be able to engage with audiences more effectively. For example, the team re-focused budget and activity timing according to the tool analysis for Quentin Tarantino’s *Django Unchained*, establishing key activities on Twitter such as a tweet-a-long, and bringing a portion of spend forward. This move also allowed Sony to be more agile and to react to things happening in the social media space in real time. On one occasion, Sony was even able to involve one of the *Django Unchained* stars in the campaign by tapping into his relevant tweets. As a result, the team successfully influenced online conversation, lifting positive word-of-mouth.

By understanding which activities, content, and influencers are instrumental in driving successes, the team are able to carry forward lessons learned to future campaigns, to further refine content and partnership decisions, and implement a continuous cycle of test and learn.

## Where do you start?

**T**HERE are many beneficial social listening, sentiment, and analytics products on the market – and likely many already within your organisation. But social activation shouldn't start with tools. Instead, it should begin with well-defined business objectives and measurable, attributable metrics that can guide your efforts. Your objective may be to increase the number of leads or sales, boost your share of voice on a strategic topic, or reduce call volume to your call centre.

Once the call to action is clear, the following areas of emphasis can help you fast-forward to social activation:

- **Focus.** Avoid the temptation to overload initial efforts across too many desired outcomes. There will be opportunities to extend the reach and effect of campaigns, but initially you should opt for focused results.
- **Insight.** Gain understanding about existing communities, channels, and content. Community insight involves understanding the various relevant constituencies within regions and groups, as well as the influencers and their relationships across the market. Channel intelligence measures the impact that programmes make across various digital platforms and sites. Content reviews look to understand the health of social assets and how aligned they are to community and channel preferences.
- **Perception.** Perception involves uncovering what conversations are taking place, where they're happening, and how people really think and feel about the company or product. Counting Facebook "likes" or how many tweets contained positive words such as "good" or "happy" only skim the surface. Instead, engage in a perception study and let today's conversations inform how you, your competitors, and your partners are perceived. You will likely need to deal with negative perceptions, amplify positives, and design strategies to seed and grow your aspirational perceptions.
- **Audience.** Gather, monitor, and enlist targeted pockets within the community over time. Create plans to motivate and shape perceptions – including the build-out of content supply chains to manage, govern, and enhance digital content worldwide. Launch hyper-targeted ambassador or consumer VIP programmes, fostering a community of passionate and connected users to help drive messaging, promotions, and – perhaps – even product innovation.
- **Campaigns.** Focus on the ideation, creation, execution, and monitoring of social experiences that engage audiences and shape perceptions. These may be tied to external events such as seasons and holidays, conference schedules, or industry milestones. Or they may be linked to internal happenings such as product launches, new content releases, or media events. Content, promotions, games, mobile applications, and microsites that harness the power of social media to achieve business objectives are possible tools. Either way, look to create natural links to e-commerce platforms – allowing activation to actually influence sales.

## Bottom line

Effective social engagement is no longer about consumer loyalty to the brand; it's about a company's ability to nurture loyalty from the consumer.<sup>7</sup> The goal is not just passive monitoring, but active influencing. In today's recommendation economy, educating and empowering your audience can lead to impactful, long-lasting results. Social is neither a passive distraction nor a dangling modifier. It can drive real business performance through measurable, sustainable results. But it requires a shift in mindset – with a focus on perception, engagement, and activation.

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