

Chapter 3

A Review of Tools for Overcoming the Challenge of Monitoring of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, a company's communications with the public were unidirectional and mostly limited to advertisements in mass media. This gave companies almost complete control over their brand and image. Nowadays, a new set of media, in which the public has similar capabilities for creating content as companies has emerged: social media. The growth of this medium has been exponential, endowing it with a reach that can dwarf traditional mass media. Having or not having a presence in such media is not just a choice of the company. The company's customers and the general public can generate content related to a company without the company's consent. There is no way for the company to avoid it. All they can do is listen to the conversations, engage in them, and try to dampen negative feelings while steering the overall conversation in positive directions. Given the size of social networks and the large number of conversations that they support on a daily basis, manual monitoring is impossible. In this chapter, the authors review and evaluate various tools to support the tasks of monitoring and managing the content of social media that is relevant for a company, a brand, or a product.

INTRODUCTION

Part of Web 2.0 is comprised of social networks, blogs, wikis, and other collaborative applications where end users are no longer mere spectators, but

participants that generate content continuously and guide the direction of the conversation. In the past, business communications with the public were unidirectional and mostly limited to advertisements in mass media. Therefore, companies had strong control over their brand and image. Now the public has new ways to spread messages about

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4373-4.ch003

companies through social media. These messages sometimes have a reach equal to or even superior to the reach of mass media messages. Heinlein and Kaplan (2010) found that at least in one medium (Internet) companies have lost complete control of the messages related to their own brand and products, since the public can guide the conversation and respond to the company on equal terms. The lack of full control over this new media forces companies to monitor and react to what happens in these new avenues of communication. (O'Reilly, 2007; Gallagher, 2010; Constantinides, et al., 2008; Dösinger, et al., 2007)

To monitor social media, large amounts of heterogeneous information such as text, images, audio, videos and other unstructured data need to be analyzed. Sometimes these contents are negative, requiring prompt intervention to reduce or prevent damage to the reputation, products and/or services of the business or organization (Heinlein, Kaplan, 2010; Constantinides, et al., 2008; Bhattacharya, Du, & Sen, 2010). When no adequate and prompt action is taken, the image of the company may be affected negatively (Constantinides, et al., 2008; Social Media Report, 2010; Sterne, 2010; Leganza, 2010; Hutley, 2009).

All social networks provide user interfaces, usually via the Web browser or mobile applications, for creating and accessing user-created content. But these interfaces are intended for personal use, and for accessing only the content created by users who have some relationship between them such as friends, followers, etc. They are not intended for use by several people working within the same account (a very common scenario in a company). They do not provide effective mechanisms for discovering or monitoring discussions on a certain topic throughout the entire network. In addition, they only allow the user to manage content within the social network itself, while a company must maintain a presence in multiple social networks simultaneously.

Currently, there are various monitoring tools that provide assistance in the overwhelming task of

social media content monitoring. These tools can monitor the generation of new content relevant to a certain area (a company, a brand, a product...), analyze the scope of the conversation, provide a sentiment analysis classifying the discussions in categories such as "Positive," "Neutral," and "Negative" trigger alerts or actions whenever a conversation on a certain topic is started, etc. (Constantinides, et al., 2008; Sterne 2010; Leganza, 2010; FreshMinds Research, 2010; Koch & Richter, 2008). There are over a hundred monitoring solutions of this nature (A Wiki of Social media Monitoring Solutions, 2011), making it difficult to select the most appropriate tool/tools for the particular context and needs of each company (FreshMinds Research, 2010).

Well exploited, social media monitoring can not only be used to respond to negative content related to a company, but it can also be integrated into business processes in the areas of marketing, market research, customer service, public relations, and sales among others. With the adequate support of monitoring tools, these functions can be carried out in a more effective manner and at a lower cost than with traditional solutions (Gleanster, 2010). However, before such tools can be used effectively in a company, both the staff who is going to participate in the social media monitoring task and the management must understand the potential of social media and how it can make a difference in their company (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2010).

In this chapter we will analyze the capabilities of the most popular tools currently available for monitoring and reacting to social media content. We will examine their ability to track, analyze, obtain metrics, manage, and respond to what is said about a given topic (in our case, a company, its products and its business) in social media. In the next section, we briefly present several case studies that demonstrate how the social media can provide considerable value if the business knows how to properly take advantage of it. However, when it is ignored or misused the social media

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