Want to Know What Your Customers Really Think? Here's How to Implement a Successful Social Listening Strategy.

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Understanding your customers' needs, frustrations and praise for your brand is a critical element for entrepreneurs who want to improve their products and generate more revenue. What used to be a simple task through customer conversations and basic surveys is now more complex than ever. Today, audiences with rapidly changing preferences and buying habits are fragmented across multiple generations and platforms. For this reason, over 60% of businesses leverage some form of social listening strategy to gain insights and drive important decisions.

In a nutshell, social listening is the active observation of what consumers are saying, thinking and feeling about the brand itself or topics related to the industry, competitors or relevant products. This strategy goes beyond simply tracking brand mentions. The idea is to understand the context and underlying sentiments that are driving these conversations and comments.

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1. Identify the right keywords

The foundation of any successful social listening campaign is to identify which keywords to monitor. This can include a wide range of terms like the name of the brand or product, trending hashtags, industry terminology, names of competitors or even unique slang terms used by your target audience. When creating your list, it’s important to remember that people often use abbreviated terms or make typos when conversing online. Don’t forget to include common misspellings or alternate spellings of your brand name and other terms to maximize the results.

2. Pick a robust social listening tool

Some companies still rely on manual social listening techniques by reading and making note of things that customers are saying online. This is often completed by a social media manager. The challenge is that this approach is slow, limited to the team’s bandwidth and highly subjective. It’s best to find a social listening tool that can process massive amounts of data automatically and provide a detailed, unbiased analysis.

There are a variety of tools and options available to businesses that want to automate their social listening strategy. Free tools are a great place to start, especially if you have a limited budget. Tools like Google Alerts can provide basic information about trending topics and general marketing sentiment. More sophisticated tools come with more features and detailed analytics, but they also come with a higher price tag. Also, not all tools cover the full range of social media sites, online forums or review platforms. When selecting the right social listening tool for your business, you should take your goals, budget and team’s tech savviness into account when you are comparing options.

3. Listen across multiple channels

Your customers are likely dispersed across a number of different channels. It’s likely that the demographics on each platform are very different. To maximize the insights you gain from social listening, it’s a good idea to expand your listening efforts to include all of your most popular channels. Social media platforms are essential, but you can also leverage social listening on review sites like Yelp or online communities like Quora or Reddit. By increasing the number of sources for your social listening data, you’ll build a more complete picture of what the market is really saying about your brand and industry.

4. Go from passive listening to active engagement

Plenty of companies use social listening as a way to gain insights that will help them improve products and their customer experience. While this is a key benefit, many overlook the potential opportunity to actively engage with their customers and target audience. Through your social listening campaign, be sure to take the time to acknowledge and respond to both positive and negative feedback shared online. This is a great way to authentically engage with your customers and demonstrate that your brand cares about their experiences and opinions. Ultimately, this can go a long way to fostering stronger relationships and enhancing your brand’s image.

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5. Refine your strategy

Like most marketing efforts, social listening is an ongoing

process that requires continuous refinement. Finding the most effective combination of keywords or social listening tools may take some time to maximize your results. It’s also important to recognize that trends and customer needs change naturally over time, so you’ll want to regularly review your strategy and make adjustments as needed.

Social listening is a must in today’s digital economy. Consumers expect brands to proactively know how they feel and respond accordingly. By actively listening to online conversations, small businesses and entrepreneurs can gain valuable insights, build stronger relationships and improve their brand’s reputation.

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