



June 16, 2010

Engage Conversationalists Using The POST Framework

by Augie Ray
for Interactive Marketing Professionals



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How To Create Social Media Strategies For Your Conversationalist Customers

by **Augie Ray**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With real-time and social search appearing in Google search results and Facebook surpassing Google in number of visits per day, marketers are realizing that earned media on social networks — what customers say about brands — is more important than what brands say to customers. Forrester's Social Technographics® research recently revealed dramatic growth in the number of people who update their statuses using social media (we call them Conversationalists). By aligning outreach strategy with pre-established business objectives, marketers can tap into the power and popularity of status updates to support business goals.

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NOTES & RESOURCES

This document is based exclusively on Forrester's North American Technographics® Empowerment Online Survey, Q4 2009 (US).

Related Research Documents

"Introducing The New Social Technographics®"
January 15, 2010

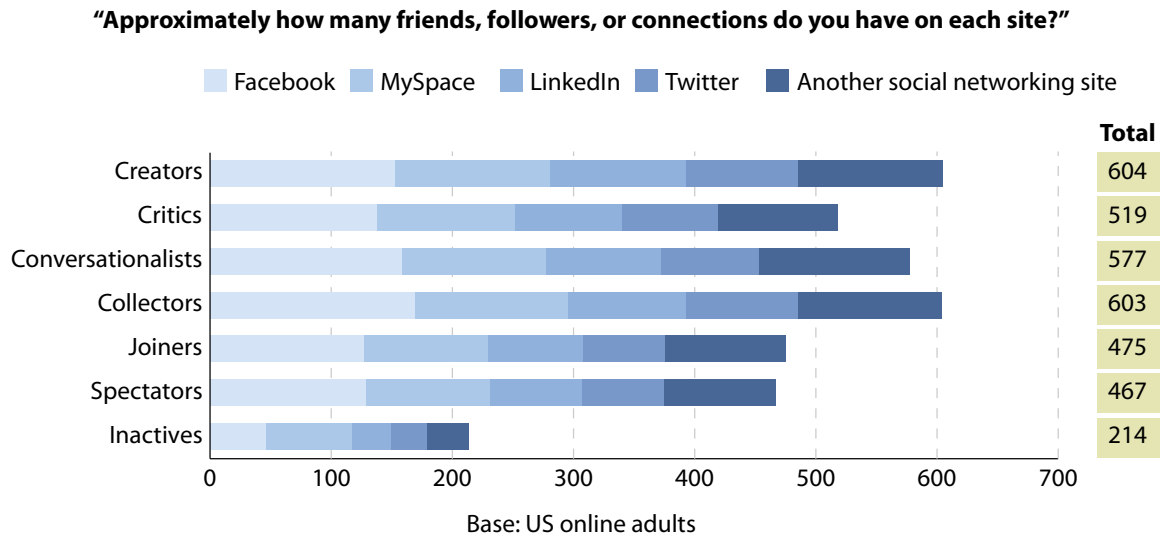
CONVERSATIONALIST IMPACT

How do you know if you need to focus on Conversationalists? Forrester recommends that before starting any social media endeavor, marketers must follow a simple four-step planning process called POST: people, objectives, strategy, and technology.¹ The first step, people, involves reviewing your target audience's Social Technographics® profile, which reveals where your customers are online and how they already interact with social tools. If a significant number of your customers are communicating by frequently posting status updates on Facebook and Twitter, it is essential to understand what this means for your social marketing strategy.

Forrester defines Conversationalists, the newest rung on the Social Technographics ladder, as people who update their statuses on platforms like Facebook and Twitter at least weekly.² Though the demographics of this group are attractive, what's more important is the impact of status updates, particularly when they refer to your brands or products.³ Marketers need to know that Conversationalists:

- **Have many followers.** When asked how many friends, followers, or connections they are connected with, Conversationalists are among the most connected, reporting an average of 577 friends, followers, or connections on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter (see Figure 1).
- **Are highly influential.** Hearing information from someone you know has a much more significant impact than hearing the same information from someone you don't know. In the digital world this principle holds true with US online adults who report that things like blogs and social network profiles are more trustworthy when published by someone they know.⁴ This supports the idea that what Conversationalists say about your brand is more important than what people they don't know — you — say about your brand. With fully 83% of Conversationalists reporting that their friends and family sometimes, often, or always ask for their opinions before making purchases, the ability of frequent status updaters to influence others is high (see Figure 2).

Figure 1 Conversationalists Have Many Followers



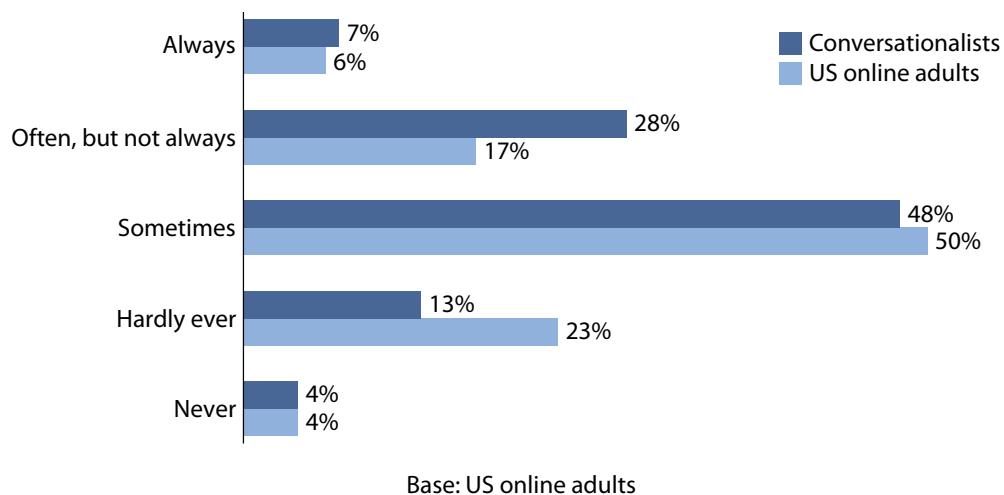
Source: North American Technographics® Empowerment Online Survey, Q4 2009

57005

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 2 Conversationalists Are Likely To Give Product Advice

How often family and friends ask conversationalists for opinions before making a purchase



Source: North American Technographics® Empowerment Online Survey, Q4 2009

57005

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

REACHING CONVERSATIONALISTS WITH POST

For marketers who find that they are targeting conversationalists, it is time to consider how to reach these customers and meet your objectives (listening, talking, energizing, supporting, or embracing) at the same time.⁵ Focusing energy on a single objective results in strategy decisions that tie directly to business goals, reducing the risk of campaigns that don't produce business value. Marketers can effectively target conversationalists by:

- **Listening to the chatter.** Many marketers determine that listening is a good first objective; this is a good idea because it lets you learn the ropes before becoming publically engaged. Keeping a finger on the pulse of your Conversationalists in real-time has never been easier than with search.twitter.com (not to mention Google Alerts). Additionally, there are many listening platform vendors that will aggregate your social media content into actionable business insights.⁶ The Coca-Cola Company did something a little different; the company exposed conversations about Coke to the world by configuring its home page to aggregate live dialogue from social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube. This not only provides visibility for investors, press, and consumers, but it also provides “a direct path to and compelling reason for The Coca-Cola Company and its brands to listen to what their consumers are saying.”⁷ In this way, The Coca-Cola Company took the opportunity to increase its own earned media exposure both internally and externally, elevating the importance of listening to live conversations for fans and employees alike.
- **Talking to customers and through customers.** The goal of talking is to spread messages about your company through social media. Many large eCommerce sites have adopted share widgets that let customers broadcast branded or product-related content to their networks with just a few clicks. Tasti-D-Lite, a lower-calorie frozen dessert company, takes this a step further by asking customers to tie their loyalty cards directly to Facebook, Twitter, and Foursquare. Customers who opt into the program allow Tasti-D-Lite to update their statuses with a branded message automatically every time their loyalty cards are used. Participating customers receive additional points toward a free dessert every time Tasti-D-Lite posts on their behalf.⁸ Not only do customers create a valuable relationship with the brand, but all of their friends are also exposed to a trusted and consistent brand experience that asks them to participate with a link to join the rewards program.
- **Energizing brand advocates.** Similar to talking, energizing shares a consistent message, but this objective includes an aspect of virality. Not only are you asking your own friends and followers to share your message but the message itself encourages others to keep sharing with the goal of building momentum and percolating through different users' social graphs. For example, *USA Today* held a four-day Twitter hashtag campaign called #AmericaWants, where charities competed for a full-page ad in the newspaper with the goal of garnering the most #AmericaWants tweets and retweets. Each tweet required the inclusion of the following phrase: “#AmericaWants (insert full name of charity) to get a full-page ad in *USA Today*.” By making the message consistent, customizable, and share-worthy all at the same time, the message spread

to millions of Twitter users. According to Radian6, the listening platform that supported *USA Today's* contest, users posted more than 60,000 tweets reaching an estimated 67 million Twitter users in support of more than 500 organizations.⁹

- **Supporting customers.** While the supporting objective can be about providing a platform for customers to support each other, companies have started directly supporting their customers by listening to status updates and intervening on behalf of customers who are in the midst of a customer experience meltdown. This is shown repeatedly by companies in industries where customer service is paramount. For example, most major US airlines maintain a presence on Twitter attempting to help customers with everything from rewards statements to lackluster airline steward behavior. JetBlue reaches out to many Twitter users who mention JetBlue in their tweets. Sometimes it offers helpful advice like, “No Asia, but we have plenty of Caribbean routes” and sometimes, when dealing with a detractor, it asks for more information: “Please follow so we can DM and get more information from you.” By taking the conversation offline, JetBlue can support its customers while immediately reducing the risk of public escalation.¹⁰ Though listening and responding to status updates won't prevent Twitterers from venting when planes are delayed or guitars break, evidence suggests that contacting a disgruntled conversationalist minimizes continued brand damage and creates an opportunity to repair and even elevate the brand's image.¹¹
- **Embracing change through community insight.** Embracing customers occurs when companies can incorporate feedback into products and strategy decisions. Papa John's, an international pizza chain, created a Facebook application where people create their own pizzas by selecting their favorite toppings and then posting their personalized recipes to their friends. Corporate taste testers as well as Papa John himself, John Schnatter, will determine the best three pizzas to be sold in stores. The creator of the pizza that gets the highest sales wins a portion of the sales and the opportunity to appear in a Papa John's TV commercial.¹² This is an example of how embracing community ideas and participation can help companies deliver change and innovation to customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TACTICS TO KICK-START CONVERSATIONALIST OUTREACH

After you've decided on an objective, it's time to plan for an execution strategy. Some important first steps include determining a budget, creating an execution timeline, and reviewing agency and vendor relationships for the right fit. Additionally, keep in mind the following best practices to ensure that your organization succeeds at tapping into the power of Conversationalists:

- **Listen before you leap.** If you're stuck in stage-one analysis paralysis (you know you need to get in the social media game but don't know how to take the first step), listening is the easiest and least risky objective to pursue. If you've already started listening and are in stage-two analysis paralysis (data overload), consider hiring a listening platform that specializes in transforming social data into actionable business strategy.¹³

- **Deploy social sharing tools.** Tools like Facebook Share and Tweet This are easy to build into eCommerce sites, company blogs, etc., and are attractive forms of automated status updates to Conversationalists. For example, GroupOn, a group coupon club, encourages sharing “Today’s Deal” with friends and followers on Facebook and Twitter on every page of its site, including the purchase confirmation. To increase the effectiveness of “Today’s Deal” posts, GroupOn exhibits the following best practices: 1) Portions of the share text are customizable so the user can show authenticity while posting a consistent brand message; 2) content can stand alone, out of the context of a Web site; and 3) messages are share-worthy with humorous, emotional, or informational text.
- **Empower employees.** In talking with interactive marketers, it’s clear that many parts of the organization, not just marketing, can contribute to the success of social media endeavors. Whether it’s Twelpforce, an online Tech support center for Best Buy’s customers, or Bravo’s PR team increasing online buzz and offline ratings with @BravoPR, there are many uses for customer conversations. Sharing data with different parts of the organization increases collaborative efforts that may result in unique ways to market your brand.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Methodology

Forrester conducted the North American Technographics® Empowerment Online Survey, Q4 2009 (US) fielded in November 2009 of 10,112 US individuals ages 18 to 88. For results based on a randomly chosen sample of this size (N = 10,112), there is 95% confidence that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 1% of what they would be if the entire population of US online individuals ages 18 and older had been surveyed. Forrester weighted the data by age, gender, income, broadband adoption, and region to demographically represent the adult US online population. The survey sample size, when weighted, was 10,045. (Note: Weighted sample sizes can be different from the actual number of respondents to account for individuals generally underrepresented in online panels.) Please note that this was an online survey. Respondents who participate in online surveys have in general more experience with the Internet and feel more comfortable transacting online. The data is weighted to be representative for the total online population on the weighting targets mentioned, but this sample bias may produce results that differ from Forrester’s offline benchmark survey. The sample was drawn from members of MarketTools’ online panel, and respondents were motivated by receiving points that could be redeemed for a reward. The sample provided by MarketTools is not a random sample. While individuals have been randomly sampled from MarketTools’ panel for this particular survey, they have previously chosen to take part in the MarketTools online panel.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Forrester designed the POST method to help marketers organize their social strategies for success. To learn more about the POST method and how Forrester can help, see the October 9, 2007, “[Objectives: The Key To Creating A Social Strategy](#)” report.
- ² There is overlap between people who update their statuses and other social behaviors exhibited by the higher ends of the Social Technographics ladder. For example, people who blog (Creators) are likely to also update their statuses (Conversationalists). For additional information about the demographics of Conversationalists, see the January 15, 2010, “[Introducing The New Social Technographics](#)” report.
- ³ Recently, Forrester reported that 6.2% of the US online population generates 80% of all the impressions about products and services in social networks. This small group is called Mass Connectors. Not all Conversationalists talk about product and services and therefore not all are Mass Connectors, but there is overlap. To learn more about the impact of social impressions, see the February 26, 2010, “[Tapping The Entire Online Peer Influence Pyramid](#)” report.
- ⁴ For more data on how much people trust various information sources, see the February 26, 2007, “[Tapping The Entire Online Peer Influence Pyramid](#)” report, and look specifically at Figure 3.
- ⁵ To see expanded definitions and examples of the five POST objectives, see the October 9, 2007, “[Objectives: The Key To Creating A Social Strategy](#)” report.
- ⁶ The process of Social Intelligence, turning social media data into actionable marketing and business strategy, is driven by data provided by listening platforms. To learn more about Social Intelligence, see the March 12, 2010, “[Defining Social Intelligence](#)” report. To learn more about the listening platforms, see the January 23, 2009, “[The Forrester Wave™: Listening Platforms, Q1 2009](#)” report.
- ⁷ To learn more about Coca-Cola Company’s site change, see the Forrester Groundswell Award Web site. Source: Resource Interactive, “The Coca-Cola Company: connecting with consumers worldwide,” Groundswell Web site (<http://www.groundswelldiscussion.com/groundswell/awards2009/detail.php?id=101>).
- ⁸ Though Tasti D-Lite was the first to create a rewards program using social media, at the time of publication, Starbucks had also started a similar rewards program. Source: Brian Morrissey, “Tasti D-Lite to Reward Brand Tweets,” *Adweek*, January 13, 2010 (http://www.adweek.com/aw/content_display/news/nontraditional/e3i9fb53b6e7c4173def262e58d96c4a90b) and Jennifer Van Grove, “Foursquare and Starbucks Team Up to Offer Customer Rewards,” *Mashable* (<http://mashable.com/2010/03/11/foursquare-starbucks/>).
- ⁹ The winner of the #AmericaWants challenge was @TWLOHA, “a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide.” At the time of publication @TWLOHA was in the process of crowdsourcing ideas for the actual ad. See its blog to learn more. Source: To Write Love on Her Arms (<http://www.twloha.com/blog/>)
- ¹⁰ On April 14, 2010, JetBlue wrote “@ucmytwitts No Asia, but we have plenty of Caribbean routes <http://bit.ly/wherewejet>” in response to “@jetblue can you please send me all the places you fly to in the caribbean & asia? Thank you!” Source: Twitter (www.twitter.com).

- ¹¹ Visit Augie Ray's blog for further discussion of social media insurance and Augie's own experience with airline carriers that responded to his tweets. Source: Augie Ray, "Risk Avoidance and the ROI of Social Media, Insurance, Guitars and Tires," *Augie Ray's Blog* (http://blogs.forrester.com/interactive_marketing/2010/01/risk-avoidance-and-the-roi-of-social-media-insurance-guitars-and-tires.html).
- ¹² At the time of writing this publication, Papa John's Facebook page had more than 1 million fans. For more information on Papa John's competition, see the following article: Source: Jennifer Van Grove, "Papa John's Recruits Facebook Fans to Create Next Pizza," *Mashable*, May 21, 2010 (<http://mashable.com/2010/05/21/papa-johns-pizza-challenge/>).
- ¹³ Social media provides a continuous flow of rich qualitative and quantitative data that can be useful and overwhelming. For more information about how to get the most out of your data, see the March 12, 2010, "[Defining Social Intelligence](#)" report.

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