



brandwatch

How to Write an Effective Social Media Report

A GUIDE FROM BRANDWATCH'S REPORT WRITERS

Introduction

Social media monitoring has become an important part of understanding consumers' behaviour, thoughts and ideas. Tools such as Brandwatch allow you to gain insight into established and emerging markets through how people are discussing a certain topic or brand online.

This document aims to outline a process, and some of the ways in which social media monitoring can be used, to produce meaningful reports that lead to insight and knowledge about a brand or topic.

Clients can commission reports to be written externally, or procure a tool and gather the social media data to compose similar documents in-house. Your approach could be shaped by your goals, budget, staffing resources or a desire to merge your social media findings with data from other business areas such as SEO, web analytics or sales figures. Accordingly, insight from an unbiased analyst outside of your organisation could be valuable for its objectivity alone.

Your ultimate audience should also be considered here; reports are constructed to provide greater insight for board members, department heads, employees at various levels of seniority and third-parties.

In this guide, we will focus on the ways that social media monitoring tools can be used when producing reports. The techniques and practices described are examples and can be altered to achieve the desired result.

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Why do you want to produce a social media report?

When creating a social media report, it's important to fully understand its purpose. You will have to make decisions regarding your desire to include or disregard certain types of mentions throughout the report writing process.

Specify your expectations of the report at the beginning and tailor questions accordingly. For example, a request such as "*identify if there is significant demand for Koi Carp ponds in the UK*" is more precise than "*what are people are saying about Koi Carp?*" Understanding your ultimate goal will fundamentally improve the decisions you make. Take the time to write a detailed brief outlining the purpose of the report before you start.

The purposes for commissioning a social media report can be diverse, but here are a few common cases:

1. Social media data can be analysed as a means of producing reports to answer a variety of introductory questions:
 - How visible is my brand online?
 - What is the sentiment of conversation surrounding my brand?
 - Where are social media users engaging with my brand?
 - Who are the influential bloggers, tweeters or forum contributors addressing my brand?
2. Top-level findings can also be developed, using individual analyses and comparisons, to provide greater insights into the following:
 - Was my recent marketing campaign successful?
 - How significant is my competitors' exposure on social media?
 - What is the tone of discussion involving my competitors?
 - Which departments or products in my company are regarded highly, or poorly, online?
3. The more involved functionality aspects of social media monitoring tools can also be manipulated to assist with more specific business decisions:
 - Is social media discussion of frozen yoghurt influencing how young people eat ice cream?
 - Does Twitter buzz during a television show coordinate directly with viewing figures, and why/why not?
 - Why do my competitors have the edge in terms of online exposure?
 - What are the key influencers in purchasing decisions in my sector?

The examples above can be grouped into the three reporting variations:

1. A brand audit
2. A competitor audit
3. A research report

Ask the right questions

The more you use a social media monitoring tool for reporting, the more you learn to understand its strengths and limitations. A report brief can often be made clearer by rephrasing it. Consider the following:

“What do people say about my brand online?”

The broad nature of this question could elicit individual answers but is less likely to produce the detailed insights of the inquiry below:

“How are people discussing my brand online in comparison to my competitors?”

Narrowing the scope of a report in this way will allow the output to assist you in making practical business decisions rather than merely providing a blanket overview. Accordingly, the report should focus on areas relevant to the questions you wish to be answered; by ignoring corporate activity or share prices, for example, the report could concentrate on a specific product.

Where and when?

Instructing a social media monitoring tool to look for data in specific locations or periods can be another reliable way of finding only the conversation to meet your objectives. This can be applied in the following ways:

- **Searching specific websites**

If your report is aiming to analyse conversation posted by a specific demographic, then it may be useful to limit the report to a set of adjoined sites. For example, if the brief is to examine conversation from parents, an efficient way to ensure you analyse only relevant discussion could be to limit your analysis to a pre-defined list of parenting forums.

- **Limiting data to types of websites**

Restricting by site type is another good way to ensure your report focuses on relevant chat. For example, Twitter and forums will often convey the thoughts of consumers, whilst online news articles and blogs may have been published by professional authors or companies.

- **Restricting your query to individual, or groups of, countries**

If your question directly pertains to the UK, the data should be restricted to exclude conversation from other markets. Similarly, if the report contrasts findings from numerous countries, these findings can be established independently in the course of writing your document, with the results then compared.

- **Confining the results of your search to a specific period of time**

Your reporting goal could be to ascertain the visibility of a particular marketing operation on the social web. It is therefore logical to limit your data to the period of time in which the campaign was prominent. Correspondingly, in order to benchmark your findings against alternative or competitor activity, different time periods can be isolated and contrasted.

How?

Retrieving relevant mentions

Now you have a clear picture of the mentions you are looking for, you need to create a query to retrieve them. This can be easy or complex depending on the topic in question. If, for example, you are looking for brand mentions, the query set-up process is fairly straightforward for certain brands whose name only ever means one thing (Logitech, Nescafe, iiyama etc.). Other brands are more difficult to tackle as the company names may also be common words (Orange, Boots, Jaguar etc). In these cases there are, broadly speaking, two approaches you can take or, more commonly, a combination of both:

1. Exclude irrelevant terms

Taking the example of Boots (the pharmacy), you could add a swathe of words to the query that will *exclude* data from the search results. Terms such as “Ugg”, “wellington” and “car boots” could all be excluded. This method can be more involved depending on how ambiguous the initial query is. It also carries the danger of unintentionally omitting relevant mentions that happen to include one of your exclusion terms.

2. Only include relevant terms

Taking the car manufacturer Jaguar as an example, you could edit the query to return only mentions where “Jaguar” appears alongside a relevant term. Examples could include brands or models of Jaguar or related competitors; “XJ” or “XF”, for instance. This may be long-winded, particularly if there is difficulty finding every last potential term. Additionally, you may return irrelevant mentions in this process (e.g. “we saw a jaguar in Argentina when it ran in front of our car”).

3. Iterate

It’s also possible (and often advisable) to combine these methods; the process should be one of iteration. You should create a query, scrutinise the results and continue to refine the query as appropriate. This process should be repeated until the data returned is considered of acceptable quality.

The nature of your initial brief will dictate precisely how relevant your data will need to be. If your project demands analysis of *all* appropriate conversation on the web - a quantitative analysis - your query could be designed to maximise findings at the expense of a small proportion of unrelated chat. Similarly, if you are scrutinising individual conversations more carefully - a qualitative approach - you may be prepared to sacrifice a share of your headline mention count to ensure exceptionally clean data. A compromise of these approaches is often preferred.

Query writing is never an exact science and it is necessary to accept a small margin of error. You can, however, decide the magnitude of error you are willing to proceed with. Typically, anything better than 90% relevant conversation is representative of a useful query, so review a sample of your data as a means of scrutinising its quality. Anything below 90% accuracy may require refinement, although it ultimately depends on the level of data relevance you require to fulfill your brief. Also, remember that if you intend to manually review mentions for categorisation or sentiment, any irrelevant mentions can be excluded at this subsequent stage.

Segment

What does the data say?

Once you have your query written, it is a good idea to spend some time familiarising yourself with the data. Read a sample of mentions to obtain an idea of the varieties of conversation and topics that repeatedly arise. Approaching this stage with an open mind is important - it's natural to have preconceptions about what will be found, but these are frequently proven to be inaccurate once the data has been analysed. Therefore, be prepared to acknowledge new facets of conversation around your brand rather than looking for evidence of what you expected. For example, conversation of a range of environmentally-friendly cars may be expected to contain discussion of purchase price or fuel economy; you may not have anticipated scrutiny of the car's design. If this surprise finding accounts for a significant part of the conversation, you should include it in your analysis.

You are now ready to make a list of the different ways you can segment the data. For example, you could segment by:

- Topic
Customer service, price, quality, stock, performance
- Author-type
Customer, prospect, advocate, expert, competitor
- Mention-type
Complaint, compliment, recommendation, review, sales lead

How you categorise your data will ultimately depend on the report brief outlined at the beginning and your subsequent findings within the data.

At this stage, you can manually analyse your data using the categories you have chosen. This is a very important part of the process. Any mistakes here will return to haunt you, so ensure that you know exactly how the data should be categorised before you start. You will find mentions can be difficult to section and may require a rethink in your category structure. Accuracy at this stage is key; there is little worth in producing a report from inaccurately marked-up data.

Analyse

Now that you have a clean data set you can begin to answer the initial brief. Some common ways to report on the data are:

- Volume over time
- Volume by site type
- Top sites
- Volume by category
- Sentiment by category

Look for trends in topics over time or differences in sentiment when segmenting. Use verbatim quotes to illustrate key topics and varying sentiment. It's a good idea to refer to the initial brief at

this stage to ensure you are meeting the initial objectives. Do not, however, be afraid to work outside of the brief if you discover something interesting.

Conclusion

Proceed with caution...

It is not enough to set up a report as described above and blindly report the findings. Common sense is required to properly interpret the numbers. Consider the following scenario:

Your department head asks you to produce a report investigating whether people eat ice cream with spoons, knives or forks most frequently. Your approach is to write the following queries:

- “ice cream with a spoon”
- “ice cream with a fork”
- “ice cream with a knife”

You analyse two weeks of data and return the following volumes:

- Spoon – 55 mentions
- Fork – 334 mentions
- Knife – 14 mentions

This does not mean that more people eat ice cream with a fork than with a spoon! It is much likelier that spoons are infrequently addressed in this context because of the practice is common and therefore not noteworthy, for example. Common sense and further analysis is required when reading and interpreting data. Similarly, sentiment will frequently be overwhelmingly negative around a topic. This may not reflect overall feelings; people are more likely to complain about a brand online than praise it. Judgment is always required.

Ultimately, the efficacy of the report will depend on the ability of its writer to extract meaningful insights from raw data. Following the steps above will ensure you are on the right track and give you the best chance of creating an effective report.

Thank you

Here’s an [example report](#) from our team demonstrating much of the above methodology.

If you want to hear more about Brandwatch’s report-writing services, please don’t hesitate to contact us.