

It's 2017: Do you know where your social media metrics are?

4 January 2017 by Katie Paine — [Leave a Comment](#)

Depending on who's prognosticating, 2017 will be the year when social media become the answer to the media clutter and better marketing—or the year social media are lost in a sea of fake news and meaningless impressions and likes. The truth for most organizations will likely be somewhere in between. Certainly the deluge of fake news, the highly publicized use of social media for propaganda purposes, and the lack of business results for many organizations has dampened senior leadership's enthusiasm for these channels.



In fact, chances are good that social media, and the metrics that are needed to measure their effectiveness, will probably be found in the marketing department. The function, which began in PR with organic conversations with customers and the media, is now increasingly being moved into paid digital marketing groups, according to the 2016 Social Media Marketing Report from Simply Measured.

From a measurement perspective, this makes perfect sense. Sure, social has its own “engagement” metrics that relate to specific campaigns or initiatives, but ultimately the goals are the same: to sell stuff, grow lists and strengthen relationships. Most of which are best measured via digital analytics.

The other reality is that the realignment of many social media functions from PR into marketing is an indication that paid social is overtaking earned and organic social in the marketing mix. In part, this has occurred because social media and their myriad metrics have introduced a whole new landscape of accountability to communication professionals. In the early days, it was exciting and interesting to watch how a piece of content would generate likes and shares. Or to see how just one tweet could bring you so many retweets or new followers.

Then Facebook and Twitter started adding metrics like “engagement,” with their own specific formulas, while platforms like Pinterest and Instagram sprang up, offering even more metrics. Thinking that they would make sense of this clutter, vendors emerged that offered even more metrics and the ability to slice and dice data a million different ways.

All of which led to mass confusion (and frustration) among professional communicators and their agencies. Most of them threw every metric available into a report to justify the time they were spending (or wasting) on social media. Thus, reports rarely contained comparable data, and none of them accurately reported the actual impact that a program had on one's business.

Today, there's a growing consensus among professionals that most social media metrics aren't useful. It's a far more useful exercise to focus on meaningful metrics than to get overloaded with too many of them. Worse still, most metrics confuse senior leadership and don't answer the questions that need answering if you want to improve your program. Over the years, we've learned that leadership essentially wants to know the following data points:

1. Net increase in share of desirable conversation

The key word here is "desirable." Forget automated or "positive versus negative" sentiment scoring. Each organization has its own definition of what is desirable. Establish that definition, and analyze the earned conversation in social media based on it. Compare it to the competition to get share of desirable versus undesirable voice.

2. Top five performing pieces of content, measured by conversion

All that really matters these days is conversion—however you define it. Whether it's a follower who turns into a client, a donor or a vote, you must be able to connect your social activities to a desired business outcome. This is where living in the digital department has its advantages; they're typically the ones who set up conversions, and all you need to do is properly tag your content to get this metric.

3. Percentage increase in conversions

Once you have conversion behavior established, conversion goals become a key metric that tell you how well your efforts are inspiring your stakeholders to act. If you're managing an online newsroom, for example, you might want to track the percentage increase in pieces of content viewed. If you're managing media outreach, increase in requests for more information might be your key conversion metric.

4. Net growth in high-quality engagement

Evaluating the quality of your engagement in social media is more critical than ever. Likes tell you very little, but comments that contain your key messages are meaningful—revealing which messages are resonating with your target audiences and which are not. Retweets and shares that contain personal endorsements carry far more weight. Develop your own custom engagement index that weighs each user action based on your goals and track this metric over time.

5. Cost-effectiveness comparison

The most important analysis of all that should be on your dashboard is the chart or charts that show the correlation between these four metrics. Did that great, message-rich story in the *New York Times* drive positive engagement and thus conversions? Or did that user-generated video have much greater impact? And how much time and how many resources did it take you to produce each one? What is the relative cost effectiveness of each effort?

In addition to having these metrics at your fingertips, communicators are also constantly bombarded with questions on a near daily basis about the content they're producing. To solve this problem, Paine Publishing developed this table that can help guide you to the right metrics and methodologies.

While there's no doubt that 2017 will bring a host of changes to many communication department, having good data and the right metrics with which to navigate the landscape will be essential to a happy and productive new year.



Katie Paine

Katie Delahaye Paine (@queenofmetrics), has been a pioneer in the field of measurement for three decades. She is the publisher and CEO of Paine Publishing and author of the books *Measure What Matters*, *Measuring Public Relationships* and, with co-author Beth Kanter, *Measuring the Networked Nonprofit: Using Data to Change the World*.

Filed Under: January 2017