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Social Media and Customer Experience Feedback

Mindshare's Recommendations
(Version 3, June 25, 2009)

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Social Media Overview

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Web blogs are just a few Internet services that make up the new growing digital world called Social Media (SM). SM provides participants with a community to create and maintain relationships and a forum to share their ideas and experiences with the world. The power of SM networks, like all networks, is multiplied by the number of participants. Just a few years ago, no one had heard of Facebook. Yet today, 200 million people around the world regularly use this site to communicate with family and friends, adding an average of over 100,000 users daily.

Many companies have seen the influence these new sites can have on their organizations for both good and bad. A national pizza chain witnessed the power a few of their employees could have utilizing Social Media resources. The employees made a video of workers cleaning pizza pans with dirty sponges and doing other unsanitary acts. They posted the video on YouTube, a popular video sharing site, and within hours thousands had viewed the clip. In the past, this might have been a minor issue, but because of the reach of Social Media, the company's CEO was compelled to record a message and post it on YouTube in an attempt to stop brand erosion.

As Social Media increases in popularity, more individuals are telling those in their SM networks about their service experiences. Some companies, especially those with customer demographics over 25 years of age, wrongly assume that SM is merely used by teenagers and young college students. However, Facebook reports that its **fastest growing demographic is age 35 and older**. According to PR firm, Arment Dietrich, over 90% of Americans expect companies to have a social media presence and to use it to participate in conversations, engage with brands, and present job opportunities.

Mindshare advises all companies to ask themselves, "How can we tap into the power of this new method of communication to improve our business and the experiences we are providing for our customers?" The answer is to **do something**. Get started. Jump into the online social conversation. You can't sit back and wait for information to come to you – you've got to "give" before you "get."

Social Media "Need to Knows"

It's Not all Useful Information

The majority of opinions and ideas shared on Social Media sites are much less structured than those of a customer taking a phone or web survey, where feedback can be quantified, and tied to a specific store, employee, or incident. This makes the information from most SM sites difficult to report and act on. Much of the information "floating around out there" is not intended as helpful feedback to companies, or even specific complaints about service lapses, but rather just a bully pulpit for grippers, whiners, and even unscrupulous competitors to vent and spread unsubstantiated and vague claims. Simply spreading a net to collect this information is akin to dredging a stream for fish – while some legitimate fish will be captured, so will a lot of old boots, sticks, hubcaps, and tires. Similarly, merely collecting data from the unstructured web will provide you with very little actionable information that can be used to improve a company's strategy or operations. The way to overcome this weakness is to **add structure** to data flowing in from Social Media networks. (See our tactical recommendation on how to do this, below.)

Relationships and Relevance – Not Advertising

Although organizations may be tempted to use SM sites to promote their products or services, SM communities will not accept them as one of their own if they use the Social Media sites to advertise using old-fashioned methods. No one wants to follow a company that posts about how wonderful it is and then posts links to canned marketing pitches. Social Media is all about **relationships** and **relevance**. Companies need to participate by adding valuable, relevant information to forums and communities such as: special coupons for SM users, relevant information concerning products and services, or media that is worth sharing with their friends. Furthermore, a person in an organization that has the power to help resolve concerns should respond to a dissatisfied customer in a genuine manner. Unfortunately, there is not a simple, automated way to participate in these communities. There needs to be **personal human involvement**. While there are various free and paid services that can help a company **aggregate the feedback**, this does not eliminate the need for an actual person to respond to customers and deal with their concerns. This employee(s) needs to have good judgment and strong communication skills.

Mindshare Recommendations

Mindshare is dedicated to helping companies receive feedback from all of their customers. Below, we present three recommendations that companies can pursue right now to take advantage of powerful Social Media networks.

Recommendation 1: “Structure the Unstructured” (Gather, Respond, & Add Structure)

You need to be able to:

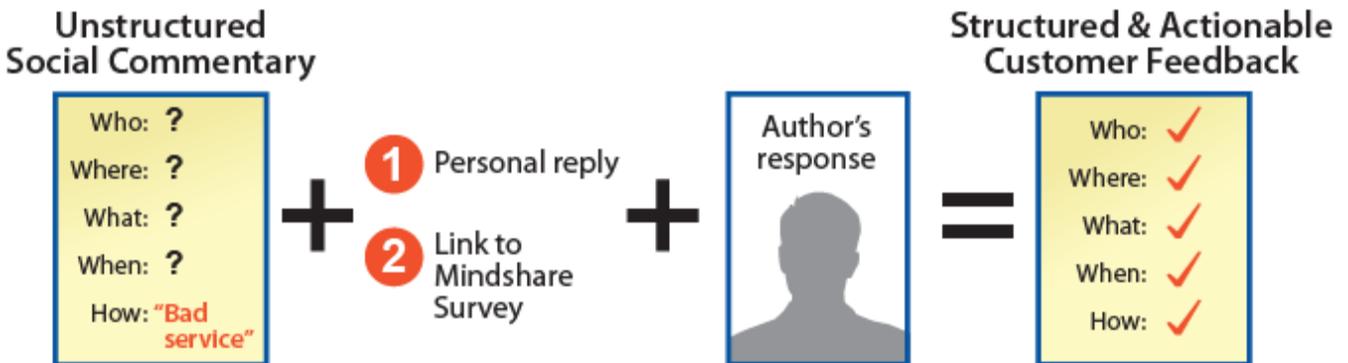
- Gather** in feedback from the unstructured SM sources,
- Respond quickly** and **personally**, and then
- Give the author an easy way to provide you with **additional, structured information**.

You need to watch for raw posts/tweets/comments that mention your products, services, company, and staff members. When you catch customer complaints early, you are able to respond quickly, further engendering customer loyalty. There are many free services and applications that can help you catch new feedback about your company, including Google Alerts, Icerocket.com, Twitter Search, Twist, Ping.fm, Tweetgrid, etc. Your account manager can make it easy for you to **access live SM information right from your Mindshare Success Center page** by conveniently adding in, (1) a current buzz trend chart (showing the current level of online discussions about your company), (2) a live twitter feed, (a scrolling bar showing current “tweets” about your company in real time), (3) a Social Media search bar (pre-screening all online Social Media sites for postings about your company,) and (4) a “blog listener” (a live gathering tool that consolidates all blogs mentioning your company).

Even with these gathering tools, you will still need to dedicate at least part of an employee’s time to filtering and responding to comments, and to managing your Social Media presence. A complaint is an opportunity to demonstrate your dedication to customer service and willingness to listen and respond to customers’ concerns. A posted complaint may also draw out comments from other people with the same concern, which provides an opportunity to reach out to an entire group. **Responding promptly** to customer concerns may lead them to subsequently post positive comments about how quickly you replied, and how well you resolved their problems.

When you respond to SM feedback, we suggest you provide a way for the author to easily give you additional structured information. This is best accomplished by simply **including a link** in your response that directs the author to a Mindshare **mini-survey**.

Getting anonymous Social Media authors to take a mini-survey (1-2 minutes) will provide your company with actionable and reportable feedback, rather than the unstructured feedback that is typical of today's social media communication. (By the way, don't use the term "survey" in your reply. Instead, ask the author, "Would you please provide some additional information, so we can better meet your needs?") Work with your Mindshare account manager to create a SM mini-survey. You can use this survey to gain more structured information about the customer's issue, such as the location, who was involved, the type of problem, when the problem occurred, and any additional comments to aid in addressing the issue. The data provided from this mini-survey can be **easily integrated** with your existing Mindshare feedback surveys and presented to your local managers through Mindshare's integrated Enterprise Feedback Management (EFM) reporting.



This strategy transforms unstructured comments into structured feedback and actionable information, and delivers it up and down your organizational structure through your existing Mindshare reporting hierarchy. It also provides your company with a chance to catch a negative experience while its audience is still small.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Presence (2a): (Contribute to the Community)

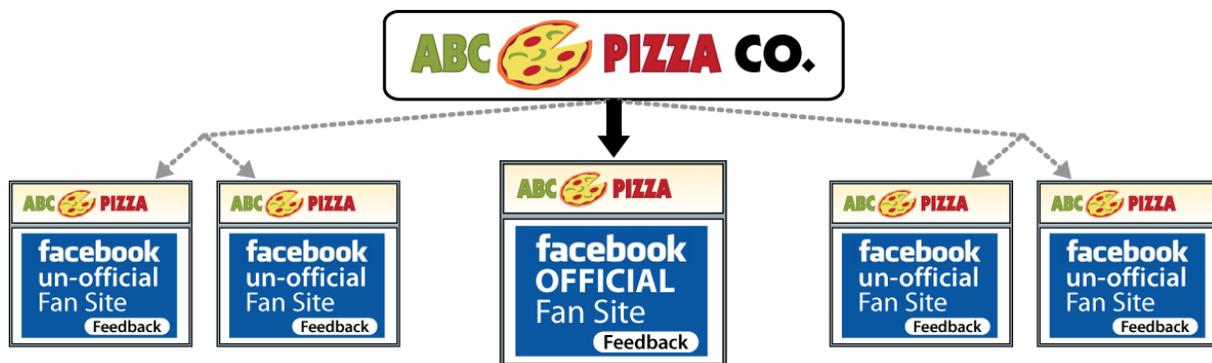
In order to participate in Social Media you will need to establish a **formal presence** for your company in the global social network. This is easily done by setting up company accounts with key SM websites. We recommend that you start by creating a Facebook fan site and a Twitter account for your company. (Your Mindshare account manager can assist you in getting started with these, and later can help you evaluate which of the many other specialized sites would be most appropriate for you.)



As you become more established in the SM world, people will know where to turn to give you feedback and it will be easier to respond to issues – both good and bad. We strongly suggest that you **do not use SM** as a place to advertise your wares, or for triage management. Become an authentic member of the community by providing helpful tips, announcing promotions, and giving valuable information about new products. The benefit of this approach is that your brand will become a trusted resource in the Social Media community and your customers will be more likely to come to your SM pages to leave feedback. Your company’s investment in a formal Social Media presence will demonstrate your organization’s desire to solicit both positive and negative feedback from your customers, and to keep pace with their changing needs.

(2b): (“Fertilize” third-party fan sites about your company.)

In addition to establishing your company’s own Social Media presence (fan sites), you might also consider a strategy of “fertilizing” fan sites about your company that have been created by third-parties, and “seeding” others. Some organizations are having great marketing success by distributing promotions/coupons, etc. directly to the fan site administrators, and through these fan sites to end-user customers. (E.g. “Secret” promotions, available only on specific fan sites.) Others are rewarding fan-site administrators for expanding their customer reach further. (E.g. Gift certificates presented to the fan site that adds the most new friends.)



Beyond improving your marketing efforts, you can also use these third-party fan sites to direct customers toward providing you with structured feedback. The best way to do this is to encourage each third party site administrator to place a link on their site directing customers to click through and take a mini-survey from Mindshare. By directing fans toward a mini-survey, you can grow the amount of actionable customer feedback you collect (that can be used to drive improvements in your company), rather than the unstructured information that is often swirling around on SM networks.

Recommendation 3: Word-of-Mouth Advertising (Make more FANS)

Your current Mindshare surveys can be used to your advantage using Social Media. For example, we suggest that at the end of each survey a few links be provided to allow happy customers an easy way to share (on various Social Media sites) the positive experiences they had with your company. This helps you to empower people to become advocates of your brand. The easier it is for them to speak out, the more likely they will.

SmartLogic, which is built into the Mindshare system, allows you to pinpoint those survey respondents who gave you high ratings on certain questions and/or said they would recommend your company to

their family and friends. At the end of the survey, these respondents can be shown easy-click icons linking to various SM sites. For example:



The survey respondent can then choose from the options provided, at which point Mindshare will enable them to post comments on their Social Media wall, or "tweet" about their experience, etc. When their friends and family login to the SM site they will notice the comments and will be able to click a link which will take them directly to your home page or SM site. We have several clients currently using this method with great success. This approach **connects positive customer experiences** with an audience who knows and trusts the author of the post. This kind of general word-of-mouth advertising is extremely powerful when positive experiences are shared. Company image increases as more people are converted from merely "customers" into "promoters" of your brand.

(Note: Some small programming to your homepage may be necessary to make it easier to share your site on Facebook. Ask your Mindshare account manager for details.)

Change, Summary, and Future Development

Change

Social Media is a rapidly evolving area of feedback. Just a few years ago, few had heard of Twitter, and MySpace was significantly more popular than Facebook. The reverse is true today. And today's top site (e.g. Twitter) may become tomorrow's has-been (e.g. Friendster). Hang on, it's going to change.

The opening up of Social Media networks creates a very difficult resource allocation challenge for most organizations. With potentially millions of customers "holding a microphone," how can companies be personally responsive to all of the unstructured SM feedback, without adding headcount? (i.e. "We want to respond, but we can't afford the additional FTEs it would take to answer all of these comments.")

Like all business problems at an impasse, sooner or later something will have to give. Our belief is that eventually, SM authors will become "trained" to provide companies with feedback in a more automated and structured way. This is not dissimilar to other marketplace "trainings" that have occurred – getting money from a wall rather than a bank teller (ATM), taking food to your table and cleaning up after yourself (quick-serve restaurants), and pouring your own soda rather than a cashier doing it (restaurants). Similarly, the current "wide open west" of Social Media as a feedback tool will have to acquire more structure. The recommendations presented in this paper move in that direction.

Summary

Regardless of what channel, method, or approach is the latest fad, the concept of a growing social community is here to stay. But it's the **strategy**, not the current hot channel or technology, which matters most.

So, what can you do? What should you do?

Mindshare suggests you take action in the three areas outlined above:

- (1) Gather feedback from Social Media and respond quickly. Engage in the dialogue. Add links to your response that direct the author to a mini-survey, whose results will have significantly more structure and can be integrated with feedback from your other Mindshare surveys.
- (2) (2a) Create a formal presence on the major Social Media sites and perhaps a few more specialized or evolving sites. (2b) Fertilize and seed third-party fan sites promoting your company.
- (3) For customers who answer one of your "normal" Mindshare surveys with positive feedback, provide them an "easy one-click" option at the end of the survey to be re-directed to one of several Social Media sites where they can share their positive feelings across the SM network.

Summary Next Steps		
(1) Gather & Add Structure	(2) Establish a Presence	(3) Facilitate Word of Mouth
<p>Assign or hire a SM manager.</p> <p>Use Google Alerts, Ice Rocket, Twitter Search, etc. to find and aggregate comments on the web.</p> <p>Respond to Social Media feedback personally and send a link to each author directing them to a short Mindshare mini-survey.</p> <p>Use the mini survey to add structure to feedback and to route it to the correct resources.</p> <p>Leverage the power of Mindshare to report any issue to the correct person in your organization, so they can fix it.</p>	<p>(2a) Create and maintain at least a Facebook fan site, a Twitter account, and a company blog.</p> <p>(2b) "Fertilize" and "seed" fan sites created by third parties about your company. In addition to marketing efforts (e.g. promos, coupons, etc.), also encourage third-party administrators to place a link on their fan site, directing customers to take a short Mindshare survey, thereby adding additional timely and actionable feedback to your reports.</p>	<p>Update your homepage to make it Social Media-sharing friendly.</p> <p>Place Social Media links at the end of Mindshare surveys for easy sharing of positive feedback across SM networks.</p>

As Social Media continues to evolve, be assured that Mindshare will be positioned to provide you with the latest recommendations and applications to help you take advantage of this new method of collecting customer feedback. Several additional areas of research and development in Social Media are already well underway (see Future Development on the next page).

Future Development (Coming soon from Mindshare)

- **Text analytics engine and data mining tools:** to better detect and quantify issues
- **Further Social Media Integration:** for easier sharing of survey comments on SM sites
- **More useful “Reputation Reports”:** enabling you to view what Social Media communities are saying about your company.

(**Note:** Casting a net to measure the social “buzz” about your company sounds important and inviting. (And your Mindshare Account Manager can make it easy for you to access this data conveniently right on your Mindshare Success Center page.) But simply collecting unstructured comments from Social Media sites will leave you with a bunch of public postings, but very little actionable information. (e.g. Where did the issue happen? Which employee(s) performed poorly? When did this happen? What product was affected? Etc.) We strongly encourage you to implement our **three suggested recommendations** (above) which will give you **structured** feedback that can be used to improve your company’s operations.

Appendix (Other sites to be aware of)

Flickr, YouTube, Windows live spaces, Google groups, Yahoo Groups, Ning.

This is how we see it.

About Richard D. Hanks, Jon Grover, and Mindshare

Richard D. Hanks is the President of **Mindshare Technologies**, the leading provider of real-time, automated customer and employee feedback solutions. His experience spans multiple industries and disciplines, including many years as an adjunct professor at Cornell. He is a frequent teacher/speaker at trade, academic, and professional gatherings, and the author of “Delivering and Measuring Customer Service.” **Jon Grover** is a Product Manager at **Mindshare Technologies**. He has pioneered many of Mindshare’s best practices in Enterprise Feedback Management (EFM), especially in the implementation of Mindshare’s outbound email offerings and leads the design and development of Mindshare’s Social Media strategy.

Mindshare’s business monitoring tools help companies improve operational excellence and minimize customer attrition through personal customer involvement. Mindshare’s proprietary survey technology captures the voice of the customer in real-time and immediately transforms it into actionable intelligence through powerful and incisive enterprise reporting. As a hosted system, Mindshare is affordable and flexible, with surveys and reports tailored to fit a company’s individual needs. For more information please visit: www.mshare.net & www.duffroad.com. To reach Rich directly, contact him at rhanks@mshare.net or (801) 263-2333. To reach Jon directly, contact him at jgrover@mshare.net or (801) 263-2333.