

The Forrester Wave™:
Listening Platforms, Q3 2010

Converseon: Listening 2.0

– LEVERAGING SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE TO DRIVE BUSINESS RESULTS

July 12, 2010

The Forrester Wave™: Listening Platforms, Q3 2010

by Zach Hofer-Shall
for Customer Intelligence Professionals



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Converseon, Nielsen, And Radian6 Lead A Fragmented Market

by **Zach Hofer-Shall**

with Suresh Vittal, Emily Murphy, and Michael J. Grant

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the past year, listening platforms continued their evolution beyond basic brand monitoring tools into integral technologies that inform a variety of marketing and business functions like campaign measurement, market research, customer support, and sales enablement. In Forrester's 76-criteria evaluation of listening platform vendors, we found that Converseon, Nielsen, and Radian6 led the pack because of the range of product functionality and ability to meet businesses' needs beyond reactive brand tracking. The market has many strong performers: Cymfony with its strong services offerings, Visible Technologies with its myriad features, Alterian with its preferred dashboard, evolve24 with its strong data analysis, and Dow Jones Insight with its strong data coverage. Our evaluation uncovered a sole contender in Collective Intellect, an up-and-coming vendor with strength in its data processing technology.

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NOTES & RESOURCES

Forrester conducted lab-based evaluations in May 2010 and interviewed more than 25 vendor and user companies: Alterian, Collective Intellect, Converseon, Cymfony, evolve24, Dow Jones, Nielsen, Radian6, and Visible Technologies.

Related Research Documents

- ["How To Make Social Media Data Actionable"](#)
April 28, 2010
- ["Defining Social Intelligence"](#)
March 12, 2010
- ["How To Choose A Listening Platform"](#)
May 5, 2009

LISTENING PLATFORMS POWER SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Businesses have new opportunities to improve their strategies through Social Intelligence — the concept of informing marketing and business decisions with insights found in social media data.¹ Social Intelligence is not possible without a technology platform: As more businesses build out their strategies, listening platforms — technology and analytics infrastructures that mine and analyze social media to deliver insight — become essential tools within the enterprise.²

The Fragmented Listening Platform Landscape

The listening platform market remains in relative infancy. Vendors come in all shapes and sizes, rolling out new features and tools enabling customers to turn social media data into actionable insight. But all players face one significant challenge: They sit trapped in a constant stage of reactive development, due to the ever-moving target of social media, pervasive spammers, and buyers with constantly growing demands for their varied use cases. As a result, vendors bring a variety of products to the market and firms remain confused tools to power their Social Intelligence strategies.³ Buyers face more difficulty than ever choosing listening platforms because the landscape includes:

- **A plethora of startups.** The listening platform market contains hoards of social media monitoring and analytics tools, with dozens of competitive offerings. Social media startups keep popping up, claiming a low barrier to entry into the space. Although they infrequently compete for enterprise business, the listening platform landscape has a long tail of smaller vendors that obscure, confuse, and commoditize the landscape.
- **Software heavy weights.** The software business giants grasp the enormous implications of social data and its impact on analytics, business intelligence, enterprise resource planning (ERP), and customer relationship management (CRM). Not surprising then that giants like IBM, Microsoft, and SAS enter the playing field and give the market instant credibility. The downside? The software giants' presence further complicates the procurement process.
- **Experts in text analysis.** Listening platform buyers across the board demand high-quality insight from social media data but find that most of the leading vendors' insights do not meet their expectations.⁴ Customers complain about sentiment analysis accuracy, an abundance of spam, and too much irrelevant information. This increased demand for high-quality information brings text analytics companies — like Attensity, Clarabridge, and Overtone — to the listening platform market, offering competitive data analysis through superior text mining. However, these vendors, while well equipped for the linguistics job, face problems of their own: access to the requisite social media data sources, lack of social mindshare, and higher price points without comparable functionality.

- **Vendors specializing in specific functions.** As listening platforms expand across the organization, vendors either push toward becoming a horizontal play like the vendors included in this evaluation, meeting most of the business needs, or a vertical play, specializing deeply in one business segment. For example, with market researchers gaining interest in social media, the listening platform landscape experienced growth in more research-focused technologies, such as ListenLogic and NetBase.

LISTENING PLATFORM EVALUATION OVERVIEW

To assess the state of the listening platform market and see how the vendors stack up against each other, Forrester evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of top listening platform vendors.

Buyers' Needs Vary

After examining past research, user need assessments, and vendor and expert interviews, we developed a comprehensive set of evaluation criteria. We evaluated vendors against 76 criteria, which we grouped into three high-level buckets:

- **Current offering.** We evaluated each vendor's existing product to determine how well it meets today's market demands. First, we looked at the vendors' data source coverage — their incoming data's breadth, depth, and cleanliness. Then we evaluated the vendors' text analysis, to determine how well their technology processes unstructured data. Next, we examined the vendors' dashboard functionality across many different standard feature sets like influencer identification, social media outreach tools, and customized report creation. Finally, we evaluated each vendor's consulting and analysis services to determine the strength of their professional service teams.
- **Strategy.** We evaluated each vendor's overall strategy, determining how well each addresses enterprise-level Social Intelligence needs. We reviewed the current management team and overall corporate strategy, to see how dedicated the vendor is to the listening platform space. Then we evaluated the vendors' road maps and partner strategies to score their future plans for competing in the listening platform market and proactively meeting customers' evolving demands.
- **Market presence.** We evaluated the vendors' footprints in the market, measuring their penetration of enterprise installations. We investigated each vendor's customers, including the number of currently active installations, customer retention percentage, and customer satisfaction. Then we evaluated each vendor's financial information — revenue, growth, and overall financial stability. Lastly we looked into the vendors' employee base — both the overall number of employees and the split between different teams, such as engineers, support, or consulting.

Evaluated Vendors Meet Enterprise Demands

Forrester included nine vendors in the assessment: Alterian, Collective Intellect, Converseon, Cymfony, evolve24, Dow Jones, Nielsen, Radian6, and Visible Technologies. Each of these vendors has (see Figure 1):

- **Products that scale across multiple business functions.** Listening platforms enable many different tasks across the enterprise, including marketing measurement, market research, customer support, crisis identification, and more. There are plenty of vendors in the fragmented market that apply strongly to one or two use cases, but for inclusion in this analysis, we looked for vendors that apply their tools and services broadly to meet many different business cases. When many CI professionals evaluate listening platform vendors, they do so with specific function in mind. However, most businesses will eventually grow their Social Intelligence initiatives throughout the organization. This growth requires a vendor with flexible offerings that meet the broader applications of social media data.
- **Leading software dashboard and services teams.** Listening platforms combine software and services. The vast landscape of tools includes many technology-only vendors, as well as a variety of services players, like agencies and consultancies. We limited our analysis to vendors that offer their own proprietary dashboard and analytics technology along with in-house consulting teams. Social Intelligence strategies require both ongoing and one-off support from external parties — leading listening platforms deliver both in one package.
- **Considerable presence in the enterprise market.** In an effort to evaluate the most relevant vendors to the market, we included vendors that focus on enterprise customers — those with more than \$1 billion in revenue. We evaluated vendors with more than 85% enterprise customers or more than 200 current enterprise customers. We also determined vendors' market presence based on Forrester client demand, vendor recommendations, and the size of the vendors' current revenue.

Figure 1 Evaluated Vendors: Product Information And Selection Criteria

Vendor	Product evaluated	Date evaluated
Alterian	SM2	Q2 2010
Collective Intellect	Social CRM Insights	Q2 2010
Converseon	Conversation Monitor, Conversation Miner, and Conversation Manager	Q2 2010
Cymfony	Cymfony Maestro Platform	Q2 2010
Dow Jones	Dow Jones Insight	Q2 2010
evolve24	The Mirror	Q2 2010
Nielsen	BuzzMetrics	Q2 2010
Radian6	Radian6 Dashboard, Radian6 Engagement Console	Q2 2010
Visible Technologies	truCast Suite	Q2 2010

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

MARKET DEMANDS BEGIN TO MATURE

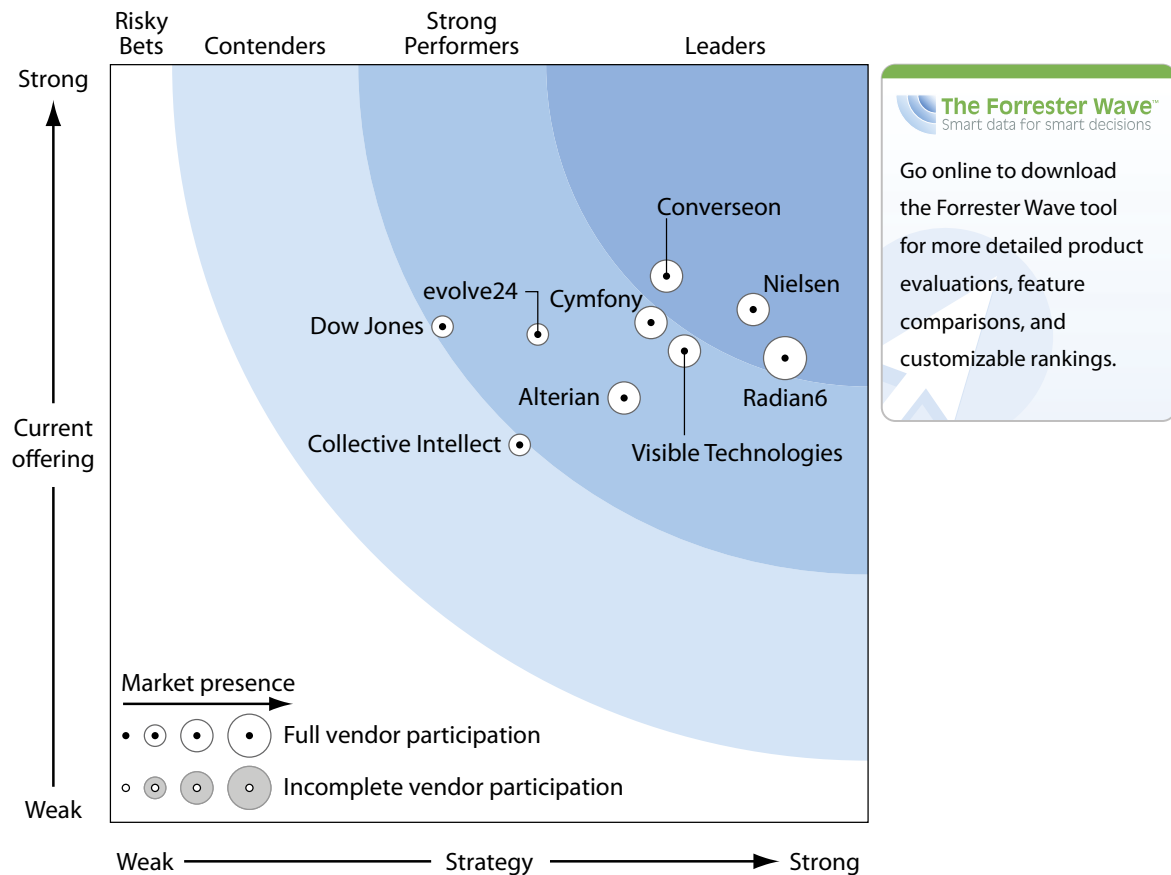
What were once basic brand tracking tools for PR teams now inform marketing budgets and messaging, guide product development life cycles, support large market research initiatives, measure the spread of campaigns, and assist global customer support strategies.⁵ To keep up with the market's growing demands, listening platform vendors now offer more tools to serve professionals across the organization. Our evaluation of the listening platform market uncovered a landscape in which (see Figure 2):

- **Nielsen, Radian6, and Converseon lead the market.** Nielsen, Radian6, and Converseon sit as Leaders because they combine the best current offering and go-to-market strategy. But the three vendors differ from each other based on their balance of technology and services. Radian6 is a much more software-focused vendor with very few consulting offerings. Converseon resides on the other end of the spectrum with heavy services offerings on top of moderate technology. Nielsen leads by offering a middle ground, with a strong combination of both technology and services.
- **Alterian, Cymfony, evolve24, Dow Jones, and Visible Technologies offer competitive options.** Each of the strong performing vendors has its own unique characteristics but delivers a competitive product throughout many of the evaluated criteria. Alterian's SM2 product offers a strong dashboard, Cymfony is a leader in services offerings, evolve24 excels in data analysis, Dow Jones shows strength with its data source coverage, and Visible Technologies offers myriad functionality options.

- **Collective Intellect is a strong Contender.** Collective Intellect is the sole Contender as an emerging vendor with a strong overall strategy but has some limitations around its current offering. Its most notable attribute is data quality through text analysis, in which it currently leads the field. Collective Intellect furthers its focus on data quality by focusing development time and budget on text processing technologies but lacks some of the current dashboard functionality its competitors offer.

This evaluation of the listening platform market is intended to be a starting point only. We encourage readers to view detailed product evaluations and adapt the criteria weightings to fit their individual needs through the Forrester Wave Excel-based vendor comparison tool.

Figure 2 Forrester Wave™: Listening Platforms, Q3 '10



The Forrester Wave™
 Smart data for smart decisions

Go online to download the Forrester Wave tool for more detailed product evaluations, feature comparisons, and customizable rankings.

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 2 Forrester Wave™: Listening Platforms, Q3 '10 (Cont.)

	Forrester's Weighting	Alterian	Collective Intellect	Converseon	Cymfony	Dow Jones	evolve24	Nielsen	Radian6	Visible Technologies
CURRENT OFFERING	50%	2.80	2.49	3.60	3.31	3.27	3.22	3.38	3.06	3.11
Background information	0%	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Data sources	10%	3.08	2.89	2.70	3.68	3.35	3.18	3.55	3.04	2.56
Text analysis	15%	3.30	2.85	3.90	3.65	3.35	3.75	3.60	2.85	3.55
Functionality	45%	2.80	2.18	3.27	2.48	2.84	2.46	2.65	3.79	3.23
Consulting and analysis services	30%	2.45	2.65	4.25	4.25	3.85	4.10	4.30	2.10	2.90
STRATEGY	50%	3.39	2.70	3.67	3.57	2.19	2.82	4.24	4.45	3.79
Strength of management team	10%	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Corporate strategy	30%	3.50	4.00	4.50	3.50	3.50	4.00	4.00	3.50	4.50
Product strategy	60%	3.40	2.00	3.20	3.70	1.40	2.20	4.40	5.00	3.40
Cost	0%	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
MARKET PRESENCE	0%	3.62	2.43	3.47	3.47	2.86	2.90	3.81	4.29	3.40
Customers	50%	3.90	2.75	3.05	3.25	2.25	2.75	3.60	4.05	2.95
Financials	30%	3.90	2.10	4.40	3.80	3.30	3.40	3.70	5.00	3.80
Employees	20%	2.50	2.10	3.10	3.50	3.70	2.50	4.50	3.80	3.90

All scores are based on a scale of 0 (weak) to 5 (strong).

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

VENDOR PROFILES

Leaders Provide A Suite Of Social Intelligence Tools

- **Nielsen.** With a strong current offering, strategy, and market presence, Nielsen offers a leading listening platform that combines an equal combination of much of the evaluated criteria. Nielsen already delivered competitive professional services but recently launched a joint venture with McKinsey — NM Incite — to add industry leading consulting to its strong technology offering.⁶ To remain on top, Nielsen will have to continue to improve upon its dashboard interface and functionality, an area that drew negative customer preferences based on the overall user experience.
- **Radian6.** Radian6 delivers one of the most popular listening platforms in the market, with

the largest market presence of any vendor. Radian6 also leads the market with its dashboard functionality — providing more features and tool sets for a broad range of use cases across many business lines. With the recent addition of its Engagement Console — a social media outreach tool — and continued developments for data integration options into CRM and existing analytics systems, Radian6 ups the ante for what features listening platforms must provide. But Radian6 is not without flaws. Customers across the board complain of data quality issues and the vendor's service team is relatively new and untested. To remain a Leader, Radian6 must address its text analysis issues and build up its consulting practice.

- **Converseon.** Converseon offers a leading product with its “customized for your needs” mentality. There is no standard Converseon installation, the vendor builds a tailored dashboard for its enterprise installations and offers professional services around every step of the Social Intelligence process. Converseon's model of starting with technology and adding human analysis makes for highly effective data quality, leading custom reports, and strong functionality. But its customized approach also hurts its long-term strategy, as it increases the overall costs and slows down the pace at which customers can act on social media data and focuses more on an outsourced model of Social Intelligence.

Strong Performers Combine Software And Services

- **Cymfony.** Cymfony combines its Maestro dashboard and its team of consultants for a competitive listening platform. Cymfony, through Kantar Media, is a WPP entity, giving it firm backing to focus on the social media space. The vendor's customers praise the dashboard's ability to manage multiple topics and profiles, something customers find cumbersome with most other vendors. Cymfony is especially well suited for large enterprise-level installations, with many existing customers using the technology and service offerings across many business lines with hundreds of end users. But to remain competitive, Cymfony must address its current offering's weaknesses, mainly around its social media outreach tools and influencer capabilities.
- **Visible Technologies.** Visible Technologies offers the truCAST product suite, an array of offerings for nearly every Social Intelligence function. The vendor increased its customer base quickly during the past year and sits well positioned for continued growth in the listening platform market. Visible Technologies' customers share positive reviews about the data quality and support experience. But to move from a Strong Performer to a Leader, Visible Technologies must turn its separate products into a connected platform, to give businesses a more consistent

experience between modules. It must also improve its data source coverage and expand its international offerings, two areas that may have led to its below-average customer retention.

- **Alterian.** Alterian purchased Techrigy in mid-2009, giving the marketing technology company a foothold within social media. Techrigy evolved into SM2, and with the backing of Alterian's string channel partners, is now one of the more popular listening platform dashboards in the market. SM2's real strength is its potential within the Alterian umbrella by integrating the social media data it collects and analyzes directly into Alterian's existing marketing technology platform. But for Alterian to remain competitive in the listening platform market, it must figure out how to integrate the product, as well as address its current shortcomings — its service offerings and consulting team, much of which Alterian currently sends out to its partner channels.
- **Evolve24.** Evolve24 is a competitive listening platform offering that specializes in reputation management but offers a full technology dashboard and services to meet many Social Intelligence functions. Evolve24 is a smaller player in the market with only about 20 customers but generates comparable revenue to its competitors with almost its entire customer base being large enterprise-level installations. In its current form, evolve24's primary strength is data quality through its text processing, but to remain competitive in the market, it will have to improve its overall dashboard interface and continue to build out tool sets for marketers.
- **Dow Jones.** Dow Jones Insight delivers a solid product through its impressive data sources and feature sets. As part of the Dow Jones brand, owned by News Corporation, Dow Jones Insight has strong financial backing and access to impressive data sources. This makes Dow Jones Insight best fit for a combination of social and traditional media monitoring. The vendor excels in its international offerings, touting a wide array of languages and geographies, as well as a large existing footprint globally. For Dow Jones to remain competitive in the market, its main focus must be improving its overall data quality issues and improving its online interface, two areas its customers specifically called out. The vendor must also evaluate its future strategy to determine whether it will compete — and likely lead — in the media monitoring space or push more deeply into the Social Intelligence market.

Contenders Show Real Promise

- **Collective Intellect.** Collective Intellect is not new to the social media space but is emerging as a competitive listening platform for the enterprise this year. The vendor is a small, independently funded company that has picked big name customers, such as General Mills and NBC Universal. Collective Intellect's real strength is its data quality. It applies leading spam management techniques and text analysis to clean data sets, delivering customers rich insights. Collective Intellect focuses on becoming a leading social analytics data provider and has potential to drive future integrations with CRM, analytics, and marketing technologies. To keep growing in the listening platform space, Collective Intellect must address its dashboard's shortcomings and continue to build its consulting offerings.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Online Resource

The online version of Figure 2 is an Excel-based vendor comparison tool that provides detailed product evaluations and customizable rankings.

Data Sources Used In This Forrester Wave

Forrester used a combination of three data sources to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each solution:

- **Hands-on lab evaluations.** Vendors spent one day with a team of analysts who performed a hands-on evaluation of the product using a scenario-based testing methodology. We evaluated each product using the same scenario(s), creating a level playing field by evaluating every product on the same criteria.
- **Vendor surveys.** Forrester surveyed vendors on their capabilities as they relate to the evaluation criteria. Once we analyzed the completed vendor surveys, we conducted vendor calls where necessary to gather details of vendor qualifications.
- **Product demos.** We asked vendors to conduct demonstrations of their products' functionality. We used findings from these product demos to validate details of each vendor's product capabilities.

The Forrester Wave Methodology

We conduct primary research to develop a list of vendors that meet our criteria to be evaluated in this market. From that initial pool of vendors, we then narrow our final list. We choose these vendors based on: 1) product fit; 2) customer success; and 3) Forrester client demand. We eliminate vendors that have limited customer references and products that don't fit the scope of our evaluation.

After examining past research, user need assessments, and vendor and expert interviews, we develop the initial evaluation criteria. To evaluate the vendors and their products against our set of criteria, we gather details of product qualifications through a combination of lab evaluations, questionnaires, demos, and/or discussions with client references. We send evaluations to the vendors for their review, and we adjust the evaluations to provide the most accurate view of vendor offerings and strategies.

We set default weightings to reflect our analysis of the needs of large user companies — and/or other scenarios as outlined in the Forrester Wave document — and then score the vendors based on a clearly defined scale. These default weightings are intended only as a starting point, and we encourage readers to adapt the weightings to fit their individual needs through the Excel-based tool. The final scores generate the graphical depiction of the market based on current offering, strategy, and market presence. Forrester intends to update vendor evaluations regularly as product capabilities and vendor strategies evolve.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Social media presents businesses with vast amounts of customer information, as well as a lot of irrelevant discussion. But by harnessing social technologies, mining for insights, and informing their marketing decisions, brands have opportunities to make the most from social media. Source: Zach Hofer-Shall, “What Is Social Intelligence?” *Zach Hofer-Shall’s Blog*, March 12, 2010 (http://blogs.forrester.com/zachariah_hofer_shall/10-03-12-what_social_intelligence).
- ² Without the four P’s — people, purpose, platform, and process — Social Intelligence plans will fail. Teams embarking on Social Intelligence strategies must evaluate their preparedness within each P, to ensure they can turn social media into actionable insight. See the April 28, 2010, “[How To Make Social Media Data Actionable](#)” report.
- ³ When selecting a listening platform, buyers must begin by selecting their goals around Social Intelligence and then evaluate the vendors’ source coverage, text analysis, and insight delivery methods. See the May 5, 2009, “[How To Choose A Listening Platform](#)”
- ⁴ Based on the vendors’ customer reference surveys, we found that listening platform users report unsatisfactory data quality and insights. Although the data complaints vary between vendors, the complaints are consistently below a satisfied level across the majority of vendors.
- ⁵ Social Intelligence applies to many business functions, as well as proactive and reactive strategies. For example, PR teams use social media data for tracking their brands across social channels and identifying influential sources, customer service uses this data for identifying dissatisfied customers and potential product fixes, and marketers use social data to measure campaigns and research their messaging. See the March 12, 2010, “[Defining Social Intelligence](#)” report.
- ⁶ In June 2010, Nielsen and McKinsey launched a joint venture under the name NM Incite, focusing on “Social Media Intelligence.” This combination of technology and services brings together data from Nielsen’s My BuzzMetrics dashboard with McKinsey’s business consultants. Source: Zach Hofer-Shall, “Nielsen Joins Forces With McKinsey For Social Intelligence Consulting” *Zach Hofer-Shall’s Blog*, June 14, 2010 (http://blogs.forrester.com/zach_hofer_shall/10-06-14-nielsen_joins_forces_mckinsey_social_intelligence_consulting).

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Making Leaders Successful Every Day

Headquarters

Forrester Research, Inc.
400 Technology Square
Cambridge, MA 02139 USA
Tel: +1 617.613.6000
Fax: +1 617.613.5000
Email: forrester@forrester.com
Nasdaq symbol: FORR
www.forrester.com

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Listening 2.0

LEVERAGING SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE TO DRIVE BUSINESS RESULTS

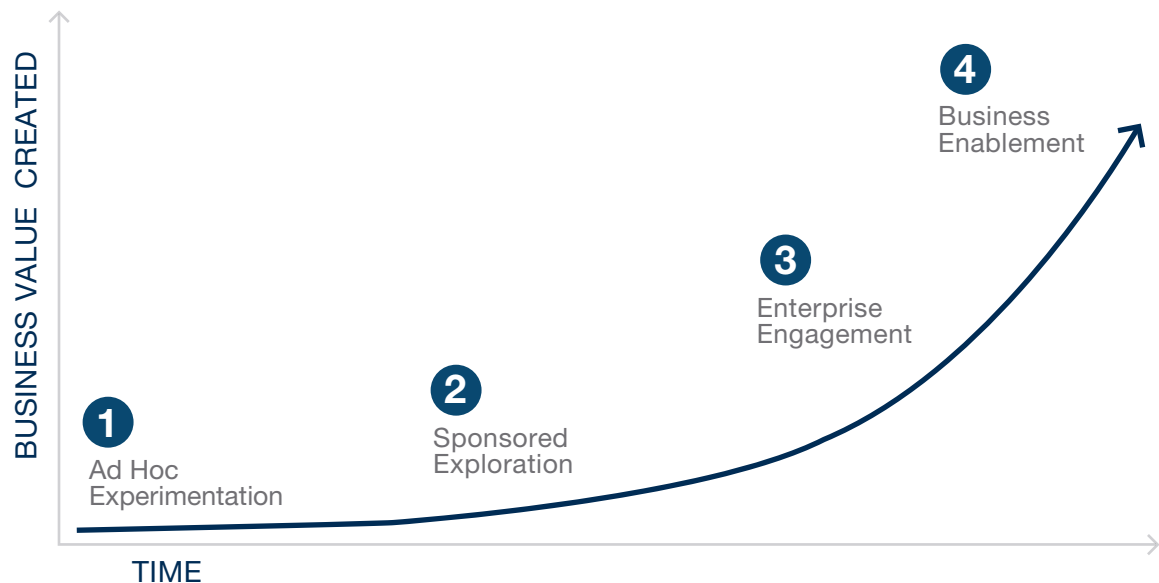


1 LISTENING: FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO BUSINESS ENABLEMENT

With nearly 73% of consumers participating in social media, and 56% of them expecting brands to have a presence, social media is enabling brands to infuse streams of intelligence into their organization for unprecedented collaboration and competitive advantage. In fact, social intelligence through Conversation Mining is breathing new life into R&D, campaign development, customer care, crisis management, product lifecycle management, risk management and more. To be sure, most companies now realize that PR and marketing were only the beginning of social media in the enterprise, and social media is becoming indispensable in creating competitive advantage and driving business transformation.

During 2007-2009, we saw leading companies evolve from *ad hoc* experimentation to sponsored, but siloed exploration, often supported by a specific brand or business unit. Among a vanguard of companies, we believe 2010-2011 marks the next shift — the beginning of enterprise adoption and eventually business enablement. As a result, basic social monitoring — or what we refer to as “listening 1.0” — is giving way to more sophisticated analytics and corresponding organizational frameworks that infuse social intelligence across the organization.

MATURITY OF ENTERPRISE SOCIAL CAPABILITIES



¹ Source: A Global Update Of Social Technographics, Forrester Research, September 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.forrester.com>

² Source: 2008 Cone Business in Social Media Study, retrieved from <http://www.coneinc.com>

However, as organizations evolve toward a more strategic embrace of social media and social intelligence, they face several challenges, as follows:

First, the data is very complex. Capturing, synthesizing, cleansing, appending, sharing and finding actionable meaning and ROI from the vast unstructured, unprompted consumer conversations can overwhelm many organizations. First-generation monitoring solutions have been high on irrelevance and low on data intelligence.

Second, once the data is tamed and meaningful insights extracted, most organizations find they are simply not organized to take advantage of the insight. In fact, some organizations have halted listening to the conversation because their internal teams simply are not prepared to take appropriate action based on the insights. Of course, those organizations ultimately suffer as their competitors reorganize and take advantage of social intelligence.

As we pass from 2010 into 2011, social media in the enterprise is reaching a tipping point. For many brands, social engagement is no longer seen as a set of small experiments on the fringe of the organization. Instead, social media are becoming core components of business strategy. As such, we are witnessing a rapid evolution from *ad hoc* and sponsored exploration to a desire for enterprise enablement, whereby social media and social intelligence become competitive advantages that enable critical business performance. For organizations who will participate in this evolution, four important areas must be addressed:

- 1 Determining how and where listening can significantly impact business outcomes and objectives.
- 2 Understanding how to manage the vast rivers of data, find meaningful insights, and support business processes and use cases — for today and tomorrow.
- 3 Determining what should be automated and the role that people need to play; and determining the balance of internal versus external resources and capabilities.
- 4 Creating frameworks to infuse social intelligence into the far reaches of the organization and ensuring timely action with a systematic, best-practice approach that includes performance measurement based on impact to the business.

The organizations that overcome these challenges will create significant business value through deeper customer insight, improved product development, more efficient costs of sales, richer customer service, reduced redundancies, improved compliance, higher-quality recruiting, and much more.

They will begin to truly harness the value of *social intelligence* as they transform into *Listening (and eventually “Social”) Organizations*.

The good news is that a new generation of listening solutions (Listening 2.0) is evolving to help meet these challenges and supersede the basic, 1.0 monitoring solutions. These new solutions provide deeper intelligence that aligns with business goals. They address the challenges above, and they help social media and social intelligence flourish across organizations.

This whitepaper explains how leading brands address the four challenges above to harness social intelligence as they evolve toward social business capabilities at enterprise scale.

② THE LISTENING IMPERATIVE

Listening to what people say online used to be simple when the Web was mainly a collection of HTML pages, message boards and discussion groups. Despite the variety of online communities, their numbers were — in retrospect — minuscule.

AS WITH ALL HUMAN COMMUNICATION, THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IS, OF COURSE, LISTENING.

Such is no longer the case. Since blogs started in the mid-1990s, free, off-the-shelf Web publishing software emerged in the early 2000s and unleashed the worldwide growth of social networks, video- and photo-sharing sites, micro-blogging and livestreaming services, social bookmarking and social news venues. The profusion of these services now lets people create and expand their online footprint across multiple websites, creating personal social graphs that interlink and intertwine in nuanced ways.

Together, these services create a vast social media network, and their impact is profound. As of this writing, there are approximately 190 million users of Twitter, 500 million members of Facebook and more content is uploaded on YouTube in 30 days than all of the content created by the three major television networks during the last 60 years. Even so, we are only scratching the surface of the power and influence of social media. In fact, social media are far more than a new communications channel; they are the evolution of human communication.

As with all human communication, the foundation of social media is, of course, *listening*.

Free and paid monitoring services first launched around 2002, and, for the following couple of years, a small number of companies dominated the space. In the past two years, new companies launched, and the larger analytics companies started to offer monitoring solutions to meet the torrent of demand for such services.

Today, some form of *listening* is almost ubiquitous at brand-sensitive companies. Many companies have, over the last two years, tested and adopted some form of basic listening to determine *what people are saying about their company or products right now*. Most of these listening solutions focus on monitoring, i.e., quickly identifying relevant conversations as they happen and passing them on to their users, often through a basic dashboard.

These monitoring solutions resemble Google Alerts on steroids. Specifically, someone identifies several keyword phrases that might return relevant conversation about areas of interest, and the system does the rest. Automated algorithms take the words entered into a tool, then return all of the conversations that match, in charts, tables and verbatim conversations. Typically, these tools display the following data:

- > Volume (for your brand, competitors, and category)
- > Venues and authors
- > Basic influence
- > Automated sentiment (in some cases)

That seems pretty easy, right? It can be, sort of.

³ Source: The official YouTube Blog, retrieved from <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2010/11/great-scott-over-35-hours-of-video.html>

Monitoring is an important process for managing social media in the enterprise, but its uses are limited to cases where:

- 1 You are searching for a very limited number of keywords.
- 2 Those keywords are truly unique (e.g., your brand is not Apple, or “Discount Tires”).
- 3 You are simply looking to answer the question, “*what are people saying about my company or products right now?*”
- 4 You have low requirements for data intelligence or meaning.
- 5 You have ample internal resources to separate the wheat from the chaff.
- 6 You do not need to tie social media efforts to business KPIs or business outcomes.

Although useful, the use of such monitoring solutions can lead to some significant challenges. First, someone on your team must learn to create advanced Boolean queries, and you will need someone dedicated to wading through the spam and irrelevant data as they search for the meaningful “nuggets” in the conversation. In reality, these two challenges alone often result in false conclusions, such as the following:

- 1 **Misleading buzz volume:** Brand A wants to determine the amount of buzz around the launch of their new product relative to an industry-leading competitive product. But because both of the product names are fairly related, they discover that the majority of the conversations in their listening tool are not actually about either product and are instead just uses of the keywords in different contexts. They are forced to sort through thousands of records to get a sense of the true volume of conversation and must do this every week to produce accurate numbers.
- 2 **Irrelevant influencers:** Brand B wants to determine influential authors in a fairly niche conversation around a technical B-to-B product, to ensure that they concentrate engagement resources on the conversations that have the most resonance. But, because their listening tool employs a popularity-driven algorithm to determine influencer scoring, all of the real influencers in their conversation are ranked low, and any casual mentions of their category by large blogs, though irrelevant, are ranked as “highly influential” to the conversation. They are left to determine influencers manually and then screen each conversation record against their own list of influencers.
- 3 **Inaccurate sentiment scoring:** Brand C wants to determine the general sentiment of consumers toward a recent change in pricing for a popular product. Their listening tool indicates that overall brand sentiment has become slightly more positive since the price change, which seems counterintuitive. When they begin to manually evaluate the sentiment scoring of individual posts, they realize that the people who consider purchasing the product are actually quite negative about the price change. In fact, the positivity reported in their automated tool is due to automated sentiment scoring of comments about a popular YouTube video that mentions the product, and an increase in positivity about the product related to a new online support forum. They are forced to hand-score hundreds of records to find accurate sentiment scores for the product of interest.

Because of those very real scenarios above, many brands report dissatisfaction with their listening efforts. That dissatisfaction largely occurs due to the following:

- 1 **Insufficient analytics:** The entire process relies on automated, and often unreliable, analytics. Automated sentiment analysis, geo-location, influence and more are notoriously and demonstrably inaccurate.
- 2 **One size fits all:** Off-the-shelf tools often provide an overwhelming quantity of features and metrics, but little business insight. For example, one may be able to see how conversation volumes changed over time, but automated solutions cannot show why the change is happening. In addition, every user sees the same features, regardless of their use case or functional area.
- 3 **Unreliable sentiment:** Existing automated sentiment solutions yield 60% sentiment accuracy at best, despite vendor claims to the contrary. And that's for conversations they can find and analyze, which also is quite limited. Automated solutions are also incapable of understanding sarcasm and slang. The simple reality is that automated tools that claim greater than 60% accuracy almost always calculate that number based only upon their analysis of the most obvious records, and they simply do not include the very significant portion of records which their tool scores as "neutral" where it was unable to determine sentiment. And anyone who has sat in front of a river of records in an automated tool can tell you, those neutral records are usually a very large portion of the records.
- 4 **Missing data coverage:** Most solutions have very limited data coverage. For example, the Twitter public API provides only 5–15% of total Twitter conversations. Only solutions with a validated Twitter Firehose partnership can mine the entire dataset. (Converseon is a Twitter Firehose partner).
- 5 **Generic metrics:** Off-the-shelf listening platforms have to provide every user the same set of metrics, which means you are only able to measure what the software provider decides you can measure. They are not tailored to specific industries or business models. The most basic metrics cannot provide the level of granularity and insight required to make meaningful business decisions.
- 6 **Isolated data:** Inability to integrate enterprise internal data, such as web analytics, means companies have a lot of work to do if they want to understand how social media behaviors relate to behaviors on their e-commerce properties.
- 7 **Functional silos:** A few people see the data, but most people either never have access to it, or they are not sure how to use it to support business decisions.
- 8 **Lack of standards:** Every tool reports metrics based on its own methodology, so if two business units buy different listening tools, the metrics almost never match. The fact that each tool uses its own spam suppression approach also contributes to this problem. For example, if you open two different listening tools, from two different vendors, and enter the same search terms into both tools, "you will nearly always see different volume counts.

⁴ Source: Forrester Research analyst Suresh Vittal, quoted by Destination CRM, retrieved from <http://www.destinationcrm.com/Articles/ReadArticle.aspx?ArticleID=60218>

- 9 **Questionable ethical approach:** Recently, major media organizations have raised questions about the ways that some social listening vendors gathering social data. This includes monitoring within private communities, and harvesting data against a web site's terms of service. Until ethical standards are defined for industry, brands must conduct their own diligence into the data practices of their listening providers, and Converseon is actively involved in working with leading industry organizations to help ensure the most ethical of practices.
- 10 **Inadequate relevance:** Depending on the category, brands are typically mentioned in 5-30% of the total conversation within the category. As a result, monitoring efforts that focus on branded keywords (e.g., "Dell laptop", instead of simply "laptop") typically miss the majority of relevant conversations. While it is necessary and useful to monitor and get insights from what people are saying about brands, the most insightful and useful contributions are not necessarily brand-focused.
- 11 **Standalone analytics:** Listening solutions typically do not integrate social media activities and behaviors with web analytics and on-site behaviors. This is starting to change, but has a long way to go.

A majority of Listening 1.0 solutions were designed to capture data in near real-time with limited intelligence. Far too often, users are simply left asking themselves, *"What do I do with this? How do I make this actionable?"*

As enterprise requirements have evolved, brands are demanding deeper levels of intelligence layered on top of the social data. Marketers, customer service staff, engineers, recruiters and others need to support a wide array of business processes to drive business value, far beyond simple monitoring. As such, the raw pipes of social data are only the first layer required to bring social intelligence to leaders and managers across the company.

BRANDS ARE
DEMANDING
DEEPER LEVELS
OF INTELLIGENCE
LAYERED ON TOP OF
THE SOCIAL DATA

3 THE RISE OF LISTENING 2.0

To support evolving brand requirements for social intelligence, a new generation of Listening 2.0 solutions has emerged that addresses the deficiencies of Listening 1.0. The new solutions imbue deeper intelligence into ongoing, persistent listening, and integrate the intelligence into enterprise environments to support business outcomes. These solutions — which transcend just “tools” — are built for infusion across the organization, to reach the people who can best understand and act upon the information.

Listening 2.0 goes far beyond just providing monitoring tools — they are full-fledged *listening solutions*, characterized by the following dimensions:

- 1 Deep intelligence:** Machines do what they do best, and humans do what they do best. In Listening 2.0, machines scale human intelligence rather than replace human intelligence. While natural language processing and machine learning are getting better every day, machines simply can not clearly and effectively understand human language, and that will remain true for quite some time. New approaches utilize human intelligence, supported by advanced technologies, to capture the nuances and insights required for meaningful understanding and action. These types of solutions include the application of social sciences such as cultural anthropology, sociology and linguistics to understand both the explicit and implicit meanings in the conversation.
- 2 Multiple use cases:** Where 1.0 approaches often focused on PR and customer care, 2.0 approaches satiate the needs of multiple (and proliferating) use cases across the enterprise. They do so via custom configuration, advanced analytics and integrated workflows. These advanced solutions do a far better job of supporting R&D, campaign measurement, product lifecycle management, risk management, compliance and more.
- 3 Greater accuracy:** Advanced approaches address the limitations of machine intelligence by integrating human analysis. Machine/human hybrid solutions enable greater accuracy in analytics while also providing tremendous scalability in the solution. While human coding of sentiment, topics and voices is far more accurate than automated scoring, human analysts also help to discover unexpected findings that the brand did not explicitly seek in the data, and which pure algorithmic approaches simply cannot provide. Where 1.0 tools let you “only finding what you look for”, 2.0 solutions let you find whatever is relevant in the conversation — whether you already knew about it, or not.
- 4 Custom metrics:** Basic metrics give way to new advanced metrics and insights that monitoring tools simply cannot provide. In fact, they align to a brand’s unique business requirements because the metrics are determined based on the needs of the individual business. As a result, the social media metrics and analytics can integrate into existing business KPIs and performance reporting. Such metrics can measure “voices” in the conversation based on your existing customer segmentation, or differentiate between what your employees are saying versus your competitor’s employees. The advanced solutions can model intent and more. In addition, the advanced solutions measure sentiment against the topics that matter to you: your pricing, packing, naming, locations, features — whatever you want to know. And you can know all of that for each of your customer segments. The simple reality is that it’s no longer enough to know your general sentiment because overall sentiment simply is not actionable.

- 5 **Comprehensive data:** Listening 2.0 solutions help eliminate conversation blind spots by incorporating full datasets such as that from the Twitter Firehose.
- 6 **Cross-functional infusion:** Data and insights are infused across the organization to reach the constituencies that can best understand and act upon this intelligence. In this model, social intelligence is rapidly becoming the impetus for business process redesign because social intelligence is useless without the operational agility to rapidly synthesize, share and act upon the data.
- 7 **Performance framework:** Organizations are embracing a single performance measurement framework for social media across the enterprise. Rather than letting each business unit, functional team or geographic team determine their own metrics for social media, a centralized or shared team determines a single performance measurement framework that ties social efforts to business KPIs across the organization. Metrics are consistent, and they work together from customer service to brand marketing to recruiting. Emerging enterprise entities — often organized as Centers of Excellence — ensure that companies create and enforce consistent measurement and reporting frameworks and follow established best practices.
- 8 **Ethical practices:** Brands and listening vendors must adhere to the highest of ethical standards in how they harvest social data, process it and protect consumer privacy. This includes assurance that brands meet all terms of service provisions, do not unethically mine venues that are password-protected without approval, and protect privacy in private venues. Some organizations like CASRO are working to set standards to ensure protection of consumers and ethical approaches.
- 9 **High relevance:** Advanced machine learning and other technologies are significantly increasing the relevance of the datasets. Influencer scores are evolving based on specific verticals and companies, as opposed to generic scoring.
- 10 **Integrated analytics:** Social data cannot exist in a vacuum. Advanced approaches merge social media analytics with web analytics and customer data (unified analytics) to better inform business decisions.

LISTENING 1.0 VERSUS LISTENING 2.0

LISTENING 1.0		LISTENING 2.0
Insufficient Analytics	>	Deep Intelligence
One Size Fits All	>	Custom Configuration
Unreliable Sentiment	>	Reliable Sentiment
Generic Metrics	>	Custom Metrics
Isolated Data	>	Integrated Data
Functional Silos	>	Cross-Functional Infusion
Lack of Standards	>	Performance Framework
Questionable Ethics	>	Ethical Practices
Inadequate Relevance	>	Complete Relevance
Stand-Alone Analytics	>	Integrated Analytics

4 THE CHALLENGES OF LISTENING THE RIGHT WAY

With these advancements, Listening 2.0 solutions can now answer the most pressing business questions posed to social intelligence providers, as follows:

- 1 How can social intelligence move the business?
- 2 How do we answer questions beyond “what are people saying about us right now?”
- 3 What is the balance between internal and external capabilities and resources?
- 4 How can we choose a solution for today and tomorrow?
- 5 How do we organize and infuse social intelligence into the far reaches of the organization so our people can take timely action with maximum impact?

Let’s take the time to dig deeper into each of these questions.

1 How can social intelligence move the business?

Over the past two years, many organizations purchased tools to “listen to the conversation” without any particular business goal or desired outcome. The most common stated goal was to “test and learn.” But most of the time, it was unclear exactly what they were “testing” and what they hoped to “learn.” As a result, for too many leaders — including the C-suite — listening remains an abstraction. Expectations are unclear, use cases are limited, and ROI is cast as an impossible exercise. This is Listening 1.0 territory, where listening efforts are reactive and driven by a desire to “see what we can see.”

Listening 2.0 takes a different approach. It begins by establishing a purpose for listening efforts, based upon the organization’s key performance indicators. Then, it sets listening objectives and custom metrics to support those KPIs.

In short, Listening 2.0 involves *listening with purpose — business purpose*. For example:

- > A large computer services organization reported \$10 million in call center savings by integrating listening into customer care.
- > A leading global software manufacturer captures real-time conversations and identifies patterns to improve lead generation and conversions.
- > A global company reports that 50% of its innovation development will come from outside the company over the next few years.
- > A major pharmaceutical company utilizes social listening to help ensure risk management and compliance with FDA regulations.
- > A major automobile manufacturer increased communications effectiveness by understanding the specific causes of positive and negative sentiment among key audiences during a large-scale product recall.
- > Leading organizations are using conversation mining to decrease the costs and increase the timeliness of customer satisfaction measurement.

In all of these examples, the organizations focus first on business metrics that matter. When determining the goals for your social media listening, brands must begin with specific operational goals that social intelligence can address. After use cases, it is important to identify the important KPIs that will tell when you have achieved those goals. Only then are the solutions configured, and social metrics defined, that logically support those KPIs.

The challenge here is to focus on activities that are core to the organization's success and that can be measured. We often advocate choosing several pilot projects. Boiling the ocean with too many requirements typically leads to little or no real progress.

Once those KPIs are set, social listening can be configured to those objectives which many require custom, brand-specific metrics and configuration. This upfront work is important to demonstrate the value of social intelligence through successful business outcomes.

2 How do we answer questions beyond what people are saying about us right now?

Where 1.0 tools often focused on keywords, 2.0 solutions are based on answering key business questions, including:

- > What is it about my new product that they like and don't like specifically? What can I do better?
- > Who are the people that matter most in the conversation?
- > How does sentiment toward my brand differ by regions or demographics?
- > How am I contributing to the conversation?
- > What new features and functions would my most avid customers like to see in a next product release?

Data intelligence — the application of advanced analytics — is a core part of the social listening arms race. Leading organizations — including Converseon — are investing significant resources to push the limitations of algorithms to understand human language. The reality simply is that machines cannot effectively capture the nuances and insights of a conversation as well as humans do.

WE ARE MANY YEARS AWAY FROM ALGORITHMS BEING AN EFFECTIVE SURROGATE FOR HUMAN SYNTHESIS AND UNDERSTANDING — NOT TO MENTION SLANG, SARCASM & IMPLICIT SENTIMENT.

The challenge to effective social listening is the same challenge faced by the semantic web: How to utilize technology and algorithms to do what they do best, while enabling humans to identify, capture and report on the nuances of human communication that machines simply cannot find or effectively categorize.

Extensive testing on automated sentiment solutions has found that, on their best days, natural language processing technologies can accurately identify sentiment 60% of the time — about the same as a coin flip. *Buyer beware* of any automated solutions that claim higher results; it is far too often the result of flimsy testing methodology.

One big reason that algorithms fail to understand human language is that human language is constantly and rapidly evolving. There are an estimated 1,000 new words added to the Urban Dictionary daily. Google reports that 20% of searches in a particular month have never been searched before. This is because human language is not static — it is highly fluid. Slang, sarcasm and implicit sentiment only make it harder for automated solutions. While algorithms can do some heavy lifting around topic identification and simple expressions of language, we are many years away from algorithms being an effective surrogate for human synthesis and understanding.

⁵ Source: Bing Liu - Sentiment Analysis. Keynote talk at the 5th Annual Text Analytics Summit, Boston, USA, June 1-2, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.cs.uic.edu/~liub/>

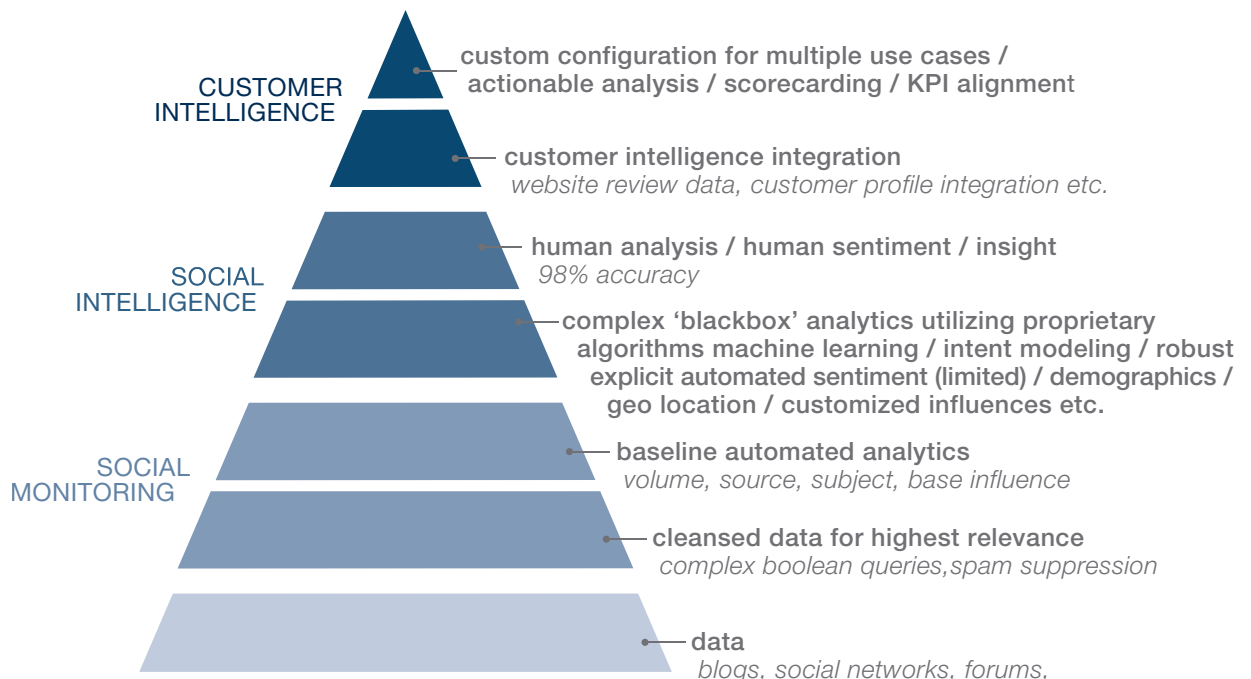
Algorithms may do quite well in simple declarative sentences (“I hate my smartphone”) but are understandably baffled with metaphor and slang (“my smartphone is a dog”). They can quantify the amount of words used in social media venues, report the total replies to a blog post, and correctly identify the type of venue, but truly understanding the nuance of language requires human analysis.

Where Listening 1.0 approaches heavily leveraged technology to replace human insight and intelligence with highly doubtful results, Listening 2.0 approaches scale human intelligence with technology to deliver higher levels of accuracy and data integrity. In short, *humans matter*.

Listening 2.0 requires understanding your business purpose, use cases and outcomes, which then informs the level of intelligence/analytics required to meet those objectives. If you simply need to listen in real time to what people are saying about you right now, then machine intelligence can do most of the heavy lifting.

If you require deeper insight, then you need advanced analytics informed with human analysis. Effective listening requires choosing a solution that provides the right level of basic and advanced analytics. In addition large organizations should seek solutions that will evolve to meet their future analytical needs, in addition to the current, basic requirement. In the past, brands relied on multiple solutions for different functional areas, or to support analytics versus real-time monitoring. As a result, the data from those solutions did not match, and it was difficult to answer questions across the business. New, advanced solutions – such as Conversation Miner from Converseon – provide a unified platform that can fulfill all use cases from basic to advanced.

The image below illustrates some of the intelligence levels required to truly use social media in the enterprise. While the list is not exhaustive, it helps to define how social data becomes social intelligence. More advanced uses tend to require deeper intelligence, and when embarking on a 2.0 approach, it’s important that all uses are considered to ensure the chosen solution can meet those requirements. The best solution providers will work with your teams to identify the business processes you need to support, the levels of social intelligence required, and the functional requirements that will best support your needs.



A good solution provider should help work with your team to work through scenarios and requirements in advance:

As you think about the levels of social intelligence required to support your business processes, you should also consider the social media metrics that will provide the greatest value within those processes. Below is an initial list of metrics that you should consider, organized by business process or capability:

- > **Crisis management:** Domains, Topics and subtopics, Volume over time, Meme tracking, Influencer and author identification, Sentiment, Brand symbolism, Shared content, Location
- > **R&D:** Sentiment, Topics and subtopics, Purchase decision process, Customer tribes, “IWOTs” — “I want one of those” conversations
- > **Campaign development:** Voices, Influencer and author identification, Venue types, Domains, Vocabulary, Shared content, Gender, Location, Topics and subtopics, Sentiment, Customer tribes, etc.
- > **Campaign effectiveness:** Category share of voice, Volume over time, Vocabulary, Topics and subtopics, Campaign sentiment, Brand sentiment, Shared content
- > **Brand management:** Category share of voice, Vocabulary, Topics and subtopics, Brand and competitor sentiment, Emotions, Brand personality, Brand symbolism, Customer tribes
- > **Search marketing:** Vocabulary, Meme tracking, Shared content.
- > **Risk management:** Domains, Topics and subtopics, Volume over time, Meme tracking, Voice (e.g. employee, competitor, etc.), Sentiment, Shared content, Location
- > **Customer care:** Influencer/author identification, Voice, Meme tracking, Sentiment, Topics

3 What is the right mix of internal versus external resources and capabilities?

Social listening technologies are evolving rapidly and require constant investment and innovation to ensure the greatest possible intelligence and data sourcing. While some organizations have tried to cobble together internal tools, the reality is such solutions often become obsolete rapidly and cannot incorporate the latest innovation in the space. Brands need to consider whether it is realistic to make the ongoing, sustained investment required and whether they have access to the expertise required to make this an effective approach. A key motivation cited for this internal build approach — integrating with internal data — is also rapidly being addressed by more flexible listening platforms that can securely and effectively integrate (and share data with) internal solutions.

A second question is *where the analysis is generated*. Some companies with very robust internal analysis teams have been able to effectively churn through analyzed data (data that has been coded with sentiment, influence, tone, etc.) to glean meaningful insights. In those cases however, there are several key challenges:

- > **Internal bias:** The elimination of internal bias (*“Is an internal employee really going to understand conversations the same way as an average consumer would?”*)
- > **Context:** Insular views lack contextual understanding (*“I have 62% positive sentiment, but is that good or bad? How does that compare to my industry peers?”*)
- > **Bandwidth:** Most organizations are already drowning in data and have limited time and experience to dedicate to the level of robust analysis required to find meaningful insights in the data

These challenges are compounded when brands try to classify or code social media records themselves, in addition to performing the analysis on the coded records.

Best practices generally utilize neutral, non-vested, external resources to synthesize the conversation data and provide it to internal teams who — via their in-depth knowledge of the organization and category — refine and enhance the insights into actionable recommendations.

4 How do I Choose a Solution for Today and Tomorrow?

Once you identify the level of intelligence required to meet your business needs, and you choose a solution that can help meet those needs, you should also consider the following factors for a long term solution:

Consider data coverage: Social listening solutions mine the public conversation areas in social media that are vast and expanding. This includes blogs, microblogs, newsgroups/forums, video and more.

As companies review listening vendors and solutions, it is important to understand the full dataset they make available. There is a common misperception that all datasets are created equal. Data coverage of Twitter offers a great example of this challenge. The public Twitter API provides only about 5% of the 90 million daily tweets (and rising). That is a very small slice of the conversation.. It's important in evaluation to clearly understand datasets to help eliminate conversation blind spots, especially if crisis communications and customer service are important use cases.

Evaluate language requirements: Although you might start mining conversations in one language, you want to make sure that the listening solution you choose is going to provide data from all of the countries and continents where your brand, products and competitors are discussed. Providing one solution across all languages is important in terms of ensuring a uniform analysis of the data.

Technology integration: The future of social intelligence will require deeper levels of technical integration. This means infusing social intelligence into CRM initiatives, integrating social intelligence with other datasets, including internal customer profile data, web analytics, media data, sales data and more. It's important that your solutions have the flexibility to integrate and iterate with your organization over time.

A good rule of thumb is to evaluate not just the *here and now* but also the record of innovation and development and product vision of your provider to ensure that the solution can evolve and mature with the needs of your organization.

5 How do we organize and infuse social intelligence into the far reaches of the organization so our people can take timely action with maximum impact?

It's a common syndrome. You have found the solution that provides the robust data coverage and the level of intelligence required to meet your business cases. You have aligned the effort with business KPIs. Workflows have been set up, and the arteries of social intelligence are flowing across the organization.

But nothing happens.

⁶ Converseon is among the very few listening solutions with access to the full Twitter Firehose

⁷ Data as of September 14, 2010. Source: TechCrunch, Twitter Seeing 90 Million Tweets Per Day, 25 Percent Contain Links. Retrieved from <http://techcrunch.com>

You rapidly find that the organization does not have the agility to move quickly enough to capitalize on the opportunities. PR doesn't talk to Search, which doesn't talk to Legal or Compliance. "Social" is everywhere — and nowhere. There is little-to-no consistency in understanding, let alone activation, of the social media data.

You are not alone.

No matter how effective the flow of social intelligence is, effective ROI cannot happen without an accompanying fertile enterprise environment designed to leverage and act on the intelligence. Listening 2.0 recognizes that effective social listening is not just a technical issue, it is also a cultural and business process one.

In fact, social intelligence is rapidly becoming the platform for business process redesign.

As a global automotive manufacturer told us:

"Our social media intelligence group has discovered a host of basic organizational dysfunctions that are relevant not only for effective social media engagement, but to the basic business functions in general ... The social media world has simply uncovered the truth that we are no longer able to get away with operating in silos the way companies have traditionally worked — the world is no longer forgiving of that ..."

Listening 2.0 helps address this challenge by helping to create a single social media and intelligence performance framework, specifically to:

- > Create or optimize specialized social media capabilities, processes and resources to provide services that enable and support social media success across the enterprise
- > Deliver value to the larger enterprise by developing core competencies and resources that are best deployed in a centralized manner

Clearly, certain capabilities can be delivered more efficiently and effectively when delivered through a focused team of specialists. Activities such as creating a measurement framework should be consistent across the enterprise, and are more easily managed through a central team. They simply cannot be achieved through independent efforts by different product country teams. Centralizing and sharing such efforts helps reduce redundancy and while creating higher consistency and quality of e-commerce efforts, greater efficiency and scalability of social media efforts, faster speed to change of social media capabilities, and lower total cost of engaging in search and social media.

CONVERSEON'S
METHODOLOGY
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LETS US VERY
QUICKLY IDENTIFY
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OPPORTUNITIES AND
NEEDS OF OUR
CLIENTS BASED ON
THEIR BUSINESS

As all great journeys begin with the first step, it is good to begin by clearly understanding where you are today versus best practices. Whether you're ready for enterprise engagement in social or not, it is increasingly essential to understand these vital health signs for your organization — if only for risk and compliance management purposes.

At Converseon, we often provide a comprehensive Social Capability Diagnostic™ that takes a quick but deep dive into our clients' organizations to clarify where they stand competitively and versus leading practices. In addition, our diagnostics determine how the organization should address key capability gaps and create a prioritized plan that ensures sustainable growth for the organization.

Our methodology serves as a comprehensive checklist that lets us very quickly identify the specific opportunities and needs of our clients based on their business objectives. Our Social Capability Architecture™ framework has been developed by combining the years of social media experience possessed by our highly diverse team including:

- > Digital and traditional agency professionals
- > Cultural anthropologists, linguists and text analytics experts
- > Business transformation experts with deep CRM experience
- > Listening platform and digital advertising engineers
- > Online product managers and product strategists

The outcome of these diagnostics can often be not only enlightening and motivating but also spur enterprise approaches through social media centers of excellence, comprehensive training, better agency integration and more.

To begin preparing for the diagnostic process on your own, we suggest asking yourself and your colleagues a number of questions. Few organizations can answer all of these questions today, but simply beginning to seek the answers will begin a process that will help you to determine a clear path for your organization in time. These questions include:

- > What are the key business issues that are keeping management up at night? Where can social intelligence answer questions that help to address those issues?
- > What use cases are most important for this effort, and which ones are most accessible?
- > Which measurable business KPIs can we use to guide a social intelligence initiative that could support specific business objectives?
- > What level of intelligence do we need to meet those objectives? Is simple monitoring enough, or do I need more sophisticated measurement? Or do I need both to fulfill multiple use cases?
- > What level of accuracy is acceptable? Is algorithmic, directional accuracy sufficient, or do we need human insight and analysis for greater levels of accuracy and reliability?
- > Are we anticipating our evolving needs and planning for a solution that will satisfy those needs over time? Can the solution iterate and evolve with us as our requirements evolve?
- > What are the language requirements for today and tomorrow? Do we feel comfortable that we will have those languages covered?
- > How complete does the data harvesting need to be? Does our provider capture the broadest range of social conversation available?
- > How will we get the information into the hands of the right constituencies so they can take action on the data — continually, as a regular part of their business?

- > Are those constituencies ready to take action on the intelligence? Are the proper governance, policies, training, workflow and outcome measurements in place?
- > What processes/approaches belong in corporate, and what are those that belong in business units/products/geographies?
- > Are internal processes ready for all of this, or do we need assistance to create the organizational agility required to take advantage of real-time and more deeply insightful social intelligence?
- > What other datasets can be utilized in conjunction with this activity for more robust insight? Do our Voice of the Customer programs fully integrate social data and insights with other sources of customer insight and input?
- > Do we have the resources required to conduct all of the analyses we will need, or do we need assistance wading through the vast amount of data for effective reporting and insights? Or is it a combination of internal and external?
- > Is this something we plan to do periodically, or is it core to our organization? Should it be “always on” given the nature, fluidity and unpredictability of social conversations?

As you complete your diagnostic and begin to evolve your social capabilities, we suggest employing the following Ten Rules for Listening 2.0 Success (presented in Appendix C, as well):

- 1 Listen with a purpose: Begin with business objectives and configure your listening accordingly.
- 2 Ensure that your data coverage and intelligence capabilities are appropriate to support your intended use cases (e.g., customer service, crisis management).
- 3 Beware of metrics proliferation and dashboard fixation. More metrics are not necessarily better. Ultimately, you should tie a handful of metrics to business KPIs.
- 4 Determine the right mix of internal and external analysis resources.
- 5 Think about and plan for use cases occurring today and in the future.
- 6 Consider how you will cover all of the languages your business serves.
- 7 Think enterprise — don't just focus your efforts on one functional area. Think about efficiently supporting the needs of the broader enterprise.
- 8 Don't try to boil the ocean; start with a focus and a goal, then evolve and expand.
- 9 Stand on the shoulders of giants. Don't try to create everything yourself. Instead, determine, prioritize and create social media management capabilities via best practice frameworks from people who have already worked out the kinks.

- 10 Embrace the change that listening will bring inside your organization, and set a consistent plan to address it.

A social intelligence diagnostic and benchmark report is critical to then understanding the current state of the landscape and how you compare to the industry at large. Such a diagnostic can tell you:

- > How are your social vital signs? Are they healthy. In what areas are you weak.
- > How you compare to competitors?
- > Who the influencers in your conversation are?
- > What you need to do specifically to move from laggard to leader?
- > How people feel about your brand and products? What topics are they most often discussing.
- > Whether the conversations are aligning with what is important to your brand?

Answering these questions requires an important discovery process between the brand and the solution provider. The power of social intelligence for brands organized to take advantage of it is profound. We are at the cusp of the next generation of social intelligence that will impact all aspects of organizations, and brands are only beginning to scrape the surface of this potential.

5 CONCLUSION

Science fiction author William Gibson once said, “The future is here. It’s just not widely distributed yet.” Nowhere is that more true than in the adoption of listening in modern enterprises. Many companies have embarked on listening programs somewhere within the enterprise, but few possess enterprise-wide capabilities. In fact, larger companies tend to have more pockets of people engaged in social media, with different tools, goals, success metrics, training and skills. However, as we move into 2011, we are seeing strong momentum towards more thoughtful and effective enterprise approaches.

We hope that this white paper gives you ideas for preparing your organization to leverage the opportunities you should expect from Listening 2.0. In addition, we hope that you choose listening solutions that meet immediate and future requirements, rather than listening tools that simply meet your current requirements. Clearly, this is an exciting time where social intelligence is becoming well recognized as an essential tool that can help provide competitive advantage and drive positive business transformation. Because the industry is still quite young and will continue to rapidly evolve over the next several years, brands should seek flexible solutions designed not just for today, but also for years to come.

For more information on Listening 2.0 and how Social Intelligence and Social Media can specifically help your organization, please feel free to contact us at info@converseon.com. We look forward to the opportunity to join you in conversation.



ABOUT CONVERSEON

Founded in 2001, Converseon is a leading international full service social consultancy that helps brands harness the power of social intelligence/media across the enterprise. We do so by providing the advanced listening/intelligence technologies, organizational consulting and award winning socially-infused activation services designed to provide an “end-to-end” solution. Among our many recognitions is the 2009 SAMMY Award for Best Social Media Agency.

Combining the best of automated and human analysis, Converseon’s Conversation Miner™ social intelligence suite of solutions is utilized by a wide range of leading global brands to help map, monitor, understand and engage with the vast social media conversation. These listening 2.0 solutions are designed to be customized to meet specific enterprise environments to provide a central, robust and highly configurable “listening platform” across multiple languages, regions and organizational use cases to help create “listening organizations.”

Converseon was recently recognized as a “leader” in a recent independent report by Forrester Research: “The Forrester Wave™: Listening Platforms, Q3 2010” (July 2010). Converseon is also a Twitter Firehose partner, enabling it to provide the industry’s most robust data coverage.

With nearly a decade of leading edge experience, Converseon’s Social Management and Social Activation Groups help leading brands organize around and activate on social media in a best practice manner. Converseon is the only leading provider of Conversation Mining with robust organizational management and activation capabilities.

Headquartered in New York, Converseon’s team extends to Austin, Detroit, San Francisco, London, Switzerland, Copenhagen, Australia and China (via partnership). For additional information please contact Converseon at info@converseon.com or learn more about Converseon at www.converseon.com, www.twitter.com/converseon or blog.converseon.com

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