

# Monitoring Social Channels

William L. Savastano

The image shows a screenshot of a social media monitoring dashboard. The interface is divided into three main columns: Home, Mentions, and My Tweets. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation options. The Home column displays a tweet from Capgemini about IoT solutions, a video thumbnail, and a tweet from Hired. The Mentions column shows tweets from Scott Puritz, Robin Powell, mysteriously unnamed, VerhandlungWerkstatt, and Farbod Saraf. The My Tweets column displays several tweets from William L. Savastano, including one about 'The New Goonies' and another about 'Five Alarmingly Calm Men Stand Under an Exploding Atomic Bomb'.

## Introduction

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Your brand's reputation is made up of many different elements. Customer experience with your products and services, interactions with your staff, partner relationships and what employees say about your company when you're not within ear shot all can have either positive or negative effects on your brand's reputation. While you may think your brand's reputation is stellar, there could be a ticking time bomb out there because someone has had his or her own personal bad experience with your brand.

This could be the experience of a customer, a vendor, an employee, or just someone who has heard this story about your brand second hand and feels compelled to strike out against you. This could also be someone who is just going to lash out at your brand for absolutely no other reason than the fact that your brand exists and they have the time and desire to destroy all you've worked hard to build.

Therefore, it is imperative to monitor social channels and industry forums, set up Google Alerts on your company name, key executives, product names or any other unique terms, and most importantly, make it very easy for customers to reach you when they have a negative issue to discuss with you. This may sound like a lot of work, and it could turn out to be time consuming, but you must spend at least a little time every day monitoring your online presence and how others interact with that presence, or you could find yourself getting blindsided by a reputation-killing, business-killing rant.

If you are a one-person shop, this can be a real struggle, but with just a few concentrated minutes throughout the day, you can successfully monitor your brand's reputation in the digital world. If you are a medium-sized business or huge multi-national, the process can be just as painless, and fortunately, you probably already have a few team members on board that have the right skills to get the job done.



Monitoring social media channels and responding quickly can make the difference between having happy customers or furious customers.



## Do It Yourself Or Delegate?

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As you begin this project, the very first task you will need to undertake is to determine who is going to monitor the social channels and forums for your enterprise.

If you are a one-person shop or a very small business, this task may end up falling to you or to your entire small team. What is most important for the small business is that those who are going to monitor these channels set aside some time each and every day, at least once a day, to bounce into the social platforms and industry forums. You don't want an inquiry, a message, or worse, a negative comment or feedback from a customer to sit out there without a response for longer than a single business day.

The good news is, in our modern 24-hour social world, the time you spend monitoring social channels each day does not have to be during normal business hours when you should actually be concentrating on your business. You can pop on to monitor the channels and interact with customers while you're eating lunch, or while you're watching TV or lounging in the evening. Customers will understand that you are responding at off-hours because you actually spent the day working, but you must always be mindful of that one business day response window to which you should always adhere. Go much longer than a day to respond or interact, and customers can be unforgiving.

If you're a one-person shop and are unable to monitor these channels yourself, turn to your friends, family or network. Chances are you know at least one social media butterfly that would be willing to help you out with this task. You'll be pleasantly surprised at how willing folks might be to help you out, especially if you can provide them easy access to you should they have questions or concerns about how to respond on your behalf.

If you're a small business, see who on your staff is the most adept at social media and see if they are willing to take on the task. Make yourself available to them for questions and the process can be pretty painless. If no single person stands out as the obvious choice, ask each team member to take a certain day or days of the week to spread out the work. Sharing the task among the team may lead someone to step up and ask to take on the task entirely on their own, or perhaps give you better insight into who on your team really should be handling this responsibility on your behalf.

## Do It Yourself Or Delegate?

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Mid-size and larger businesses can undertake the same experimentation to find the social media needle in their haystack as well, though chances are your current marketing team will be your best bet for locating the right person for the job.

Again, whatever the size of your business, just make sure that each and every day someone is monitoring social channels and relevant forums on your behalf. Assign backups for redundancy should someone be ill or out on vacation. Most importantly, remember to never let more than a business day go by without responding and to always make sure whoever is handling social media and industry forum monitoring for you has an easy way to reach decision-makers should they need to in order to properly address a customer issue.



Chances are there is a social media needle in the haystack somewhere within your organization or network - someone who will be more than willing to help you address your social media tasks.

## Determining Which Social Channels & Getting Started

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Before you begin monitoring social channels, you are going to need to determine which channels you should be using. Without a doubt, regardless of your industry, you should have a Twitter account and a Facebook page for your business. These two social media platforms are imperative simply because of the number of people who use them each and every day.

If you don't already have a Twitter account, create one with as close a handle as you can to your business name or a handle that is as relevant as possible. You are going to want to tweet news about your business, special offers, or any other relevant content at least once every business day. Be sure to use Twitter's hashtag feature and be sure to find and use hashtags that are relevant to your industry, especially the hashtags used frequently by your competitors and customers. Remember that the more you tweet, the greater the chance for interaction with your customers. Be sure to follow any relevant industry accounts such as trade associations, trade journals, and industry leaders. This will give you insight into industry developments. Also, be sure to follow your key customers, as this will give you insight into what is going on with their endeavors as well.

Be sure to also create a Facebook page for your business if you have not already done so. Everything that you post on Twitter, you should also post to Facebook. When you are pressed for time, feel free to duplicate your Twitter posts to Facebook exactly as is, but also keep in mind, that if you have the extra time, while Twitter still limits your posts to just 140 characters, Facebook gives you up to 2,000 characters, so you have the chance to tell a much more in-depth story on Facebook.

Once you have these two accounts established, determine which other social channels are relevant to businesses within your industry. Conduct Google searches on what companies in your industry are doing on social media and you should be able to compile a solid list of the platforms you should be using and monitoring. If you are a B2B company, you'll definitely want to establish both a personal and business presence on LinkedIn. It is also a good idea to establish at least a business presence on Instagram as well, especially if you have image-heavy content to share. If you're a B2C company, LinkedIn is not as imperative, but you should establish a presence on Instagram, and you'll want to list your business on Google Maps and any other local online directories people might use to find you. Conduct research to discover which local directories or social

## Determining Which Social Channels & Getting Started

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platforms other B2C businesses in your area use for promoting their business and begin promoting your business on those directories and platforms as well.

Then, when you know the channels you should be monitoring, be sure that you or your assigned social media monitor pop on and check each channel at least once each business day, and that you are responding to any interactions within one business day.

Be sure to personalize your interactions and never rely on pre-formatted messaging. You can use templates and have standardized responses, but be sure that each response seems like it was well thought out and as personal as possible.

Also, be sure to place linked icons for the social media platforms that you are using on your website's footer, on your website's contact page, as well as in your company email signature. You want to let people know that you have a social presence so they will feel comfortable interacting with you via social media if that is the method they prefer. Remember the importance of putting your social media presence to work building customer loyalty and satisfaction. Plus, this is a great way to begin seeing a return on investment on the time and effort you are spending on social media.



Invest time up front determining which social channels are worth your efforts by discovering the channels your competitors and customers use most.

## Using A Social Media Management Tool

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Simultaneously monitoring multiple social media channels can be overwhelming and time consuming, but it is definitely a necessary step for any enterprise. Fortunately, there are some great tools out there that can help with the process. These social media management tools streamline your efforts by allowing you to post to multiple channels at once and providing dashboards that allow you to view multiple social media channel feeds in one convenient location.

While there are a number of different tools out there, Hootsuite remains the best one for social media novices and seasoned professionals alike. Hootsuite is easy to learn, easy to use, and the best part is, the free version is usually more than enough for most businesses.

Go to [Hootsuite.com](https://hootsuite.com) and set up a free account. You can then link your Hootsuite account to your social media profiles on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and Google+, as well as to your WordPress sites. Hootsuite allows you to simultaneously post to all or a customized selection of each of these platforms. You can send your posts out immediately, or schedule them for later. You can also set up customized dashboards that display a streaming feed of your posts, when others post about you, your live news feed, and even other interactions such as retweets and likes.

Hootsuite's scheduling feature is fantastic for busy professionals because you can spend some time on the weekend or off-hours and set up your posts for the entire following week, month, or even further out into the future. By scheduling some non-time-sensitive posts far in advance like this, you can maintain a social presence automatically even when you are too busy working to post during the workweek. It is important to remember that you'll still need to monitor social channels for what's being posted about you by others each day, but at least your content, thought leadership, and possibly even some news and insight posts can be scheduled in advance when things are slower and you're not as pressed for time.

I definitely recommend using Hootsuite to assist in your social media efforts.



## Monitoring Industry Forums

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Once you have your social media monitoring in place, it is time to dig a little deeper and begin monitoring industry forums as well.

Industry forums are websites, usually created by either a trade association or similar entity, or maybe even actual businesses or business leaders in your industry, on which people can post questions, comments, thought leadership and other content. These industry forums can provide a great means to stay in contact with customers, find new customers, and showcase your talents as an expert and thought leader in your industry by properly responding to posts.

Conduct a Google search for popular forums in your industry and begin reviewing the top five or so. Monitor them for a couple of weeks and you will get an idea of which of them you should actually be monitoring and participating in. Add these forums to your regimen of daily social media channel monitoring. If the forums you are monitoring allow participants to post original content or links, you should begin sharing any relevant posts you are putting up on your social channels on these forums as well.

Be sure to keep your posts and answers positive in these industry forums as it is easy to get baited into making negative comments or getting into a virtual shouting match by some of the customers and professionals who probably spend way too much time in these forums, or may just be looking for a fight to pick. As long as you stay positive and provide usable information, your industry forum presence will be worthwhile. Allowing yourself to be lured into making negative comments or getting involved in long, heated exchanges will not only be a waste of time, it may also end up having a negative impact on your business and reputation. My intention is definitely not to deter you from using these industry forums, but to just be sure you are aware that like everywhere else on the Internet, you must exercise caution, be calm, and think twice about what you post.



Many industries have at least one well-known online forum which enterprises should monitor and participate in to establish credibility, display leadership, and foster customer loyalty.

## Setting Up Alerts

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Google Alerts are amazing. You set up a Google Alert on a term, which can be pretty much any word, series of words, or even names, and when Google's search algorithms, which are constantly searching, come across that term, you will get an email alerting you that a page out there has been published that contains that term.

You should set up Google Alerts for your company name, any other entity names you use, the names of your top leadership, the names of your products and services, the names of your competitors and their leadership, the names of your top customers and their leadership, as well as certain industry key words. If you have time, open and screen these Google Alert emails as they arrive, but if not, you can check them during the time you have set aside to monitor your social channels.

Be sure to not only read the alerts, but act upon any that are relevant. If you find a post or a page that directly addresses you or your business, be sure to respond as quickly as possible while still taking the time to formulate a proper, non-reactionary response. Sometimes alerts will yield some great posts where people are singing your praises, but they also can yield posts where people are saying some pretty negative things about you and your business. It is important to remember to stay calm and professional when responding to posts like these.

Also, you will find that you receive some alerts that really don't have much to do with your business directly, but may still address topics within your industry or area of expertise. You should feel free to comment on any posts to which you can provide any relevant information or insight. Check back for any responses and try to stay as engaged as possible in any conversations that may arise. Alerts like these can also sometimes provide great industry information that you can in turn share through your social media channels.



Set up Google Alerts on your company name, products and services names, key team members, key competitors, key customers, and industry terms to stay current on what is being discussed online.

## Making It Easy To Contact You

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There is nothing more frustrating for a customer than not being able to reach someone they have done business with when the need to interact arises. While customers can be more forgiving of the time of day at which you respond, today's always-connected world has also reduced the length of time in which you have to respond. As discussed earlier, if you are taking longer than one business day to respond, you will find customers feeling that they are receiving poor service. The last thing you want is a frustrated customer that cannot reach you turning that frustration into an online effort to tell people that you do not care about your customers.

Customers will find a way to reach you, even if it takes them posting a wild rant about you and your business on an industry forum or on social media, so why not make it as easy as possible for them to reach you so they don't have to get creative?

You should have a phone number and an email address that are monitored throughout the day. Both the phone number and email address should be posted in prominent locations on your website and your social media profiles. You should also be mindful when responding to posts on industry forums or other sites that you end your responses with contact information. Any time a customer is interacting with you somewhere, they should not have to go searching for your contact information.

The prospect of an increase in the volume of interactions, emails or calls may be a little frightening at first, but giving customers an easy way to reach you will be a much better benefit to your business than them publicly expressing their frustrations at not being able to reach you.



If customers have a hard time reaching you, they may lash out on social media or industry forums, so save yourself from having to remediate by making it extremely easy to reach you.

## Using Social Channels & Industry Forums For Marketing

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If you've reached this point in my guide, you might be a little overwhelmed at the amount of time that you are going to need to put into monitoring social channels for your business, but this is the section where I reveal the secret ROI of this undertaking. Sure, you want to address every inquiry you receive via social media, whether positive or negative, as quickly as possible. Sure, you want to make yourself available and provide the best service possible, but the hidden gem of monitoring social channels is discovered when you also use those social channels and the interactions they provide to market your products and services.

Both Twitter and Facebook provide you with profile pages that have space for a banner at the top. Why not use that space to highlight a new product, or a new service, or better yet, a special limited-time offer? When you run across an unhappy customer on social media or on an industry forum, and you use your customer service skills to turn that customer around, why not follow up by providing them with a special offer on something they have yet to purchase? When you are monitoring an industry forum and see a post from someone who is looking for a product or service you provide, be sure to not only take the time to let them know you can provide it, offer them a discount on your service. Others may see your offer and reach out to you as well.

And, if you see someone on an industry forum complaining about a business challenge you can solve, be sure to jump in and let them know that your business can address that challenge and offer to provide that product or service at a discount to incentivize them and others on the forum to reach out to you.

Monitoring social channels does not have to simply be a time-consuming, costly chore, it can also be a great way to market your products and services, and reach a wider audience. When you are looking for content to post on social media, always remember to consider your marketing materials and company news as potential posts.



Enterprises can easily turn monitoring social media channels from a cost center into a profit center by transitioning those customer interactions into sales through incentives and special offers.

## In Conclusion

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With each passing day, social media is becoming more ingrained in our lives, and in turn, our businesses and our shopping habits. If you don't keep up with your social presence, you really could be missing out on some great customer interactions, potential new business, and the chance to respond to and mitigate potentially negative comments that could hurt your business.

With just a few minutes a day, you can ensure nothing being said online about you and your business gets past you. With a slightly larger investment of your time, you could actually use social media to grow your business. If you're a small shop, you can take on this task yourself, but small or large, any business most likely has a great pool of resourceful helpers that can assist in monitoring and taking advantage of social media.

By following the steps outlined in this guide, you can get started down the path to having a strong, positive social media presence that not only has the potential to save your business from being blindsided by a negative experience, but also the potential to grow your business and turn social media followers into advocates for your business.



## About

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William L. Savastano is a business professional and two time Society for Technical Communication Award Winner with over two decades of experience in the corporate arena. William trained extensively in advertising and marketing copywriting, technical writing, journalism, and both print and electronic publishing. William's body of work includes a large volume of marketing content, collateral materials, websites, operating manuals, technical manuals, as well as inclusion in national publications and a number of published poems and short stories.

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