

Not all social media returns can be quantified

 By [Andre Steenekamp](#)

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As businesses start to dedicate more resources to managing their social media channels, the question that they are asking is how they should measure return on investment. There is no simple formula for creating a rand-and-cents metric for measuring social media. But social media does offer you the flexibility of setting up the metrics that make sense for your business and its objectives.

This demands careful thought in terms of what your business goals are and how these can be measured to give you actionable information that you can use to improve business performance.

Here are some metrics worth considering:

1. Customer service trends and impact

Today, few brands can afford not to be on the more popular social media channels with some sort of customer service presence. Track the amount of queries you receive, what the most common complaints and issues are, and your success rate in resolving customers' problems.

Many brands try to usher a person who is complaining on social media to another channel such as the contact centre or email. I think it's better in most cases to resolve the case across social media so that other users can see your good customer service in action.

2. Quality and volume of conversation

Content marketing is the new buzzword. Many brands are publishing massive volumes of content on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and every other channel in the hope that it will mean something to someone somewhere.



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Rather than publishing for the sake of it, publish to start conversations. Sparking conversation is about asking people what they need and want. And it's about adding value to their lives. Track what people in your market are talking about and

create content tailored to their interests. Competitions and incentives also work well.

Also, be thoughtful in creating engaging and useful content that will support your product and service launches. Social media can be a great way of driving adoption. If you're launching a banking app, for example, ask people if they are using it. If not, why not? Then address their concerns.

To measure success, look at who is talking about you, what they have to say about your content, and what sort of actions they are taking. For example, are you getting app downloads or website visits? Look beyond mentions and retweets - also try to look at the sentiment that lies beneath them.

3. Share of voice

Don't underestimate the impact that gaining share of voice can have on your business. Benchmark how your social media efforts enhance your share of voice, as well as how positive or negative the conversations around your brand are. An efficient presence on social media can vastly improve your brand's visibility and reputation among consumers.

And it can be important in winning trust from the younger generations who see social media as their preferred channel for communication and their first stop for news, information, and product recommendations.

4. Customer conversion and acquisition metrics

Social media's most important role, I would argue, lies in customer retention and building a great brand experience (here, I'm leaving aside social media advertising, which can be a powerful direct marketing tool).

That said, it can also play a supporting role in your sales strategy. You could, for example, track your audience growth rate and see how it maps into the growth of your business. And you might be interested to track customers who arrive on your website from social media and see how their engagement and conversion activity compares to those who arrive via search.

5. Social media as a way of measuring other business metrics

In addition to measuring social media ROI, many marketers are using social media to keep track of other elements of their businesses' performance. By monitoring social channels, you can learn a great deal about what customers are saying about your brand, your products, and your advertising campaigns.

Social media is a powerful and cost-effective way to do market research, and in near real-time. Some interesting things to measure, using social media monitoring and listening tools, might include:

- Are people talking about our multimillion Rand brand campaign and is their sentiment positive or neutral?
- How much are they talking about our products and those of our competitors?
- What are their feelings about them?

- Are we seeing a lot of complaints or praise for our customer service? What are the trends over a month or a year?

Closing words

Social media can be a highly effective business tool if driven by a senior executive who aligns it to real business goals, and then uses meaningful metrics to gauge progress.

Not all of social media's value can be measured, however, returns such as earning consumer trust, opening a channel for conversation, and improving your customer experience can be differentiators for your brand, as challenging as they might be to quantify.

ABOUT ANDRE STEENEKAMP

As CEO of 25AM, Andre Steenekamp leads the company's expansion in South Africa's fast-growing digital marketing and advertising space. His 25-year career has seen him work in a range of sales, marketing and management positions for leading traditional and digital publishers and agencies. Steenekamp was appointed to his current role following the acquisition of a 50%-stake in Acceleration Media by Times Media Limited.

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