

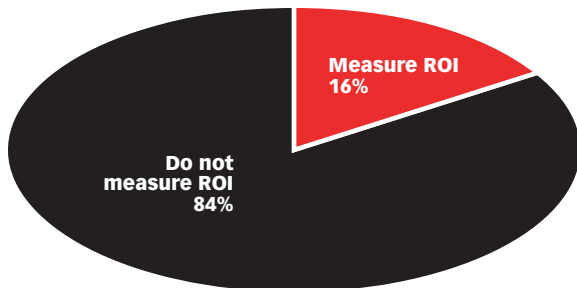


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Seven Guidelines for Achieving ROI from Social Media

Executive Summary: Ever since its inception, social media has dazzled marketers with the allure of connecting brands with consumers on a deeper, wider level. While many companies have evolved from the toe-dipping, experimental phase and are now formulating strategies to create social interactions online, only recently has there been a serious focus on justifying the dollar and time expenditures involved. Discovering true social return on investment (ROI) has been elusive.

Professionals Worldwide Who Measure the ROI of Their Social Media* Programs, August 2009 (% of respondents)



*Note: *includes blogs, chat, discussion boards, microblogs, podcasts, ratings, social networks, video-sharing, wikis, etc.
 Source: MZinga and Babson Executive Education, "Social Software in Business," September 8, 2009*

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This eMarketer Insight Brief looks at the current state of online social media measurement and ROI metrics, and how these critical indicators of success will evolve in 2010 and beyond.

Marketers who take the time and money to not only hone their social media strategies but tie those efforts to bottom-line results stand to gain significant competitive advantage.

In this Series:

- [10 Best Practices for Success with Social Media](#)
- [Slideshow: Social Media Marketing by the Numbers](#)
- [Five Reasons Why Marketers Need to Have a Social Media Strategy](#)
- [Where Does Social Media Fit Within an Organization?](#)
- [What You Need to Know About Earned Media](#)
- [Seven Guidelines for Achieving ROI from Social Media](#)
- [Social Media Misfires: How to Head Off Trouble Before It Hits](#)
- [The Future of Social Media Marketing](#)



Fewer Than 1 in 5 Marketers Measure Social Media ROI

A survey by Mzinga & Babson, conducted among marketing professionals worldwide, found that only 16% were measuring the ROI of their social media efforts as of summer 2009.

Comparative estimates from other sources confirm this low incidence of formal ROI measurement. Fewer than one in five marketers are actively linking their social media efforts to financial performance:

- **Marketing Executives Networking Group (MENG).** 12% of US member marketers measure social ROI all or most of the time (October 2008).
- **Aberdeen Group.** 18% of “best-in-class” global marketers link results of social media activities to increased revenues and other financial outcomes (February 2009).

Further, as reported in the aforementioned Mzinga/Babson study, more than 40% of marketers do not even know whether the social tools they are using have ROI measurement capabilities.

In fall 2009, when Forrester Research asked marketers to rate their own ability to measure the impact of their social media initiatives, the average self-awarded grade was 4.5 out of 10.

In a global study conducted among e-mail marketers in early 2009, Econsultancy found that while 78% rated e-mail marketing as “excellent” or “good” for determining ROI, only 35% gave those ratings to social media.

Why ROI Measurement Is So Rare

There are three basic reasons why less than one-fifth of marketers calculate ROI or some other form of hard financial metrics for their social media efforts:

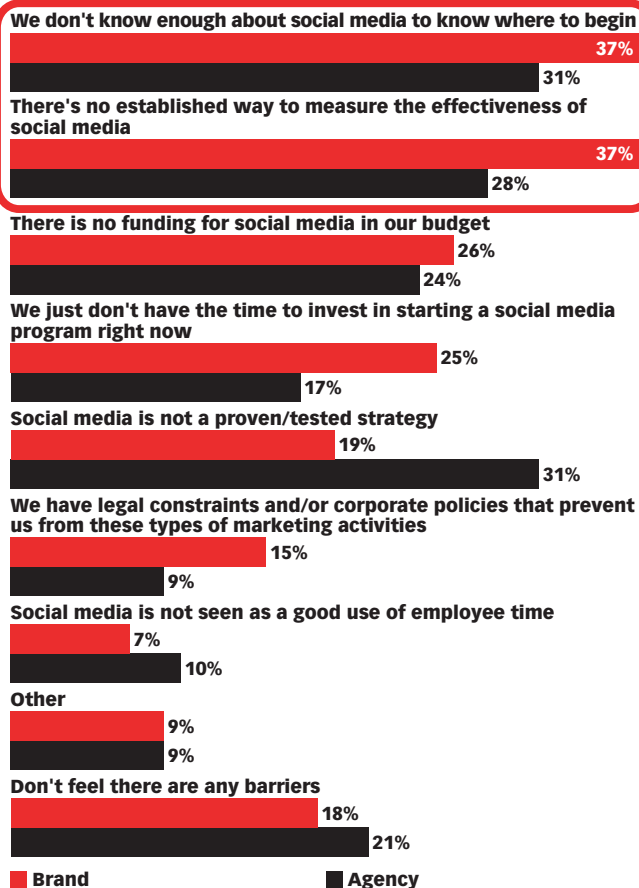
- Marketers believe that measuring true ROI for social media is difficult.
- There are so many metrics available that it is difficult to choose which ones are the most important.
- Marketers do not start with clear objectives for using social media.

Difficult Measurement

In a February 2009 Aberdeen Group survey, 59% of marketers worldwide said that social media was difficult to measure, and 20% claimed it was “very difficult.”

A June–July 2009 survey by Equation Research dug deeper, finding that 37% of brand marketers felt that they did not know enough about social media to begin using it, and an equal 37% said there was no good way to measure social media effectiveness.

Barriers to Social Media Adoption According to US Brand Marketers and Ad Agencies, June–July 2009 (% of respondents)



Note: n=85 brand marketers; n=85 ad agencies
Source: Equation Research, "2009 Marketing Industry Trends Report," August 18, 2009

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The same lack of ROI visibility is found among online retailers. According to a 2009 Shop.org/Forrester study, the most prevalent attitude toward social media marketing among US online retailers is that “the return on investment is unclear.”

Attitudes About Social Media Marketing Among US Online Retailers, 2009 (% of respondents)

The return on investment is unclear

66%

Now is a great time to experiment with it prior to the 2009 holiday season

63%

The primary ROI is in listening to and understanding customers

58%

We are pursuing it now to avoid being latecomers

54%

We are pursuing it because of the buzz surrounding it

50%

We use a specific set of metrics to measure social marketing initiatives

36%

It has helped to grow our business

34%

We are pursuing it because our competitors are

28%

We are pursuing it to satisfy senior management

15%

Source: Shop.org, "The State of Retailing Online 2009: Profitability, Economy and Multichannel" conducted by Forrester Research as cited by Internet Retailer, October 6, 2009

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Too Many Metrics

Complicating matters for marketers looking to prove the value of their social media efforts is the fact that there are an overwhelming number of metrics at their disposal. Many marketers say they are confused by the hundreds of metrics available for measuring social media success.

In fact, one influential blogger, David Berkowitz, senior director of marketing and innovation at ad agency 360i, provided [a list of 100 ways to measure social media](#) on his blog. The list ranges from soft metrics, such as the number of fans, followers or friends, to more substantial measurements such as impact on online and offline sales, market share and leads generated.

Other experts, including a few online marketers, believe that striving after ROI at all costs can be a distraction from the true value of social media—listening to consumers.

“We typically measure [ROI] success by looking at metrics including the number of friends or followers; the time spent with the brand across all touchpoints; the number of comments, posts or uploads; and the types of content that are forwarded to friends. All of these metrics go into an ROI calculation that is measured against marketing tools.”

—Stacy Taffett, brand manager, Aquafina, in an interview with eMarketer, July 2009

Unclear Objectives

It is impossible for marketers to measure success if they do not know what their objectives are before they start a social media marketing initiative.

In their haste to jump on the social media bandwagon, a certain percentage of marketers have likely launched a Facebook fan page, a user-generated video contest or a Twitter account without knowing exactly what they were hoping to achieve. Perhaps they assumed they would learn as they went along.

In truth, learning while doing may have been a perfectly fine way of proceeding a year or two ago, when social media was still relatively new and there was more opportunity to do a quiet test and gauge response before moving on. But today’s consumers are far more social-media-savvy than they have ever been before, and it is not likely that they will tolerate a cautious approach.

This means that marketers need to have objectives in mind during the planning stages. The clearer the objectives, the easier it will be to find metrics to support those objectives.

Social Media Measurement Today Is Rudimentary

For the few marketers who do attempt to apply quantitative measures to their social marketing efforts, the metrics they use are not terribly sophisticated. Most marketers today do not invest sufficient time, effort or money on social media measurement.

Measurement on the Cheap

According to a September 2009 MarketingProfs survey among global marketers, the most prevalent tool for measuring social media was "free analytics software," chosen by 74.5% of respondents; the second-most-popular choice was "free buzz-monitoring services," selected by 51%.

Analytics/Measurement Tools Used by Social Media Marketers Worldwide, September 2009 (% of respondents)

Free analytics software (e.g., Google Analytics, Quantcast or YouTube Analytics)

74.5%

Free buzz-monitoring service (e.g., TweetDeck, Facebook Stream Search or Google Alerts)

51.1%

Tracking Twitter clicks and retweets (e.g., Bit.ly)

47.5%

Polls of social media friends/fans/connections to estimate effectiveness

37.8%

Paid analytics software (e.g., Omniture)

30.8%

Scientific control/exposed surveys of friends/fans/connections to determine effectiveness

29.8%

Paid buzz-monitoring service (e.g., Nielsen Buzz Metrics, Cymphony or Radiant 6)

19.7%

Note: n=1,513

Source: MarketingProfs, "The State of Social Media," provided to eMarketer, December 10, 2009

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Website Traffic as the Default Metric

There is also a widespread tendency for social media marketers to focus on Website traffic as their default measurement tool. In several independent surveys and studies, Website traffic was deemed the most popular way of measuring social media marketing efforts. On a consensus basis, about two-thirds of marketers use site traffic as their primary measurement metric.

Comparative Estimates: Leading Metric Used by Marketers to Measure Social Media Marketing Success, 2009 (% of respondents)

| | #1 measurement method used | % of respondents |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Bazaarvoice and The CMO Club, Dec 2009 | Site traffic | •76% of CMOs worldwide |
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Source: various, as noted, 2009

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For additional information on the above chart, see the Endnotes section.

Clearly, site traffic can be an important barometer of consumer interest for a brand, but on its own it cannot justify heavier investment in social media. Most marketers would agree with this statement, but they have yet to make the transition to more effective, relevant metrics; instead, they are clinging to what's easy and fast to measure.

"[One of the most common mistakes companies make is] not understanding the difference between non-financial impact and financial impact. Non-financial impact is a precursor to ROI. For example, 1,000 net new daily visitors to a Web site attributed to Facebook fans is of immense value to the digital team, but unless these new visitors transact as a result of their visit (or their recommendations result in a transaction), the value of that traffic is limited (and irrelevant to the sales manager)."

—Olivier Blanchard, brand strategist, BrandBuilder Inc., as cited in *SmartBrief's SmartBlog on Social Media*, November 17, 2009

A September 2009 MarketingProfs survey of US B2C and B2B marketers shows a divergence between actual metrics used and those deemed most effective. While the most commonly used marketing tactic for Facebook and Twitter was attempting to drive traffic to marketing Webpages, this was not judged to be the most effective tactic. Ironically, the tactics deemed most successful—creating a Facebook application around a brand, or monitoring Twitter for PR problems—were used far less frequently.

"Consultants often use buzz as their dominant currency, and success is defined more often by numbers of Twitter followers, blog mentions, or YouTube hits than by traditional measures, such as return on investment."

—*"Beware Social Media Snake Oil,"* in *BusinessWeek*, December 3, 2009

The Changing Tide: Social Media Has an ROI Mandate

If 2009 was the year that marketers dove into the social media marketing pool, 2010 is the year they'll need to measure how well they are doing there.

The continued economic drought, combined with the inexorable fixation on accountability for corporate marketing efforts, is forcing companies to get serious with their social media investments. Indeed, a new level of scrutiny should be applied to the money—and staff time—spent on social media marketing this year.

Why do companies need to measure social media?



Forrester Research: "[2010 is] the year social marketing gets serious."

—Augie Ray, analyst, Forrester Research, in *MediaPost*, December 22, 2009



Imaginatik: "Companies no longer have fluff money [to experiment with social media]. Now it's all about outcomes."

—Mark Turrell, chief executive, Imaginatik, in *BusinessWeek*, December 14, 2009



Del Monte: "How we pulse [social] media through the year and how we track that is a challenge for us, because at the end of the day, what did you do for market share—what did you do for sales volume?"

—Doug Chavez, senior manager for digital marketing, Del Monte, in *Online Media Daily*, May 2009



Brand Builder Marketing: "'Engagement,' 'increasing brand awareness' and 'having more conversations' are not real objectives. Soft goals create soft strategies. Soft strategies turn to weak tactics. Weak tactics turn into bogus metrics. The more specific the goals, the more likely it is that organizations will see real (and quantifiable) results every month, every quarter and beyond."

—Olivier Blanchard, brand strategist, BrandBuilder Inc., in *SmartBrief's SmartBlog on Social Media*, November 17, 2009

As proof of the increased attention on social media accountability, a September 2009 survey of 133 CMOs, conducted by Bazaarvoice and the CMO Club, found that 72% of marketers who did not attach revenue expectations to their social media spending in 2009 plan to do so in 2010. The survey also revealed that, in 2009, only 29% of companies tracked the impact of social media on conversions, and only 16% on revenues. However, in 2010, those proportions will increase to 81% and 71%, respectively.

The Bazaarvoice and CMO Club survey also stipulates that 2010 will bring about a gradual shift in emphasis for the measurement of social activities—from the softer, Web-centric metrics such as traffic, fans and volume of buzz, to harder metrics that are linked directly to business results, such as conversions, sales and average order value. It should be noted that the sponsor of the study, Bazaarvoice, is a company that monitors social media activity.

Leaders in Measurement Have a Competitive Advantage

Marketers who invest the time, money and strategic thinking to perfect their social media strategies, and tie those efforts to bottom-line results, stand to gain significant competitive advantage over those in the purely experimental stages. Two independent studies bear this out.

According to an October 2009 [study by the Aberdeen Group](#), which surveyed 250 enterprises worldwide and categorized them based on their social media prowess, the top 20% of companies—characterized as “best-in-class”—greatly outperformed those barely or rarely using social media. In fact, the best-in-class companies were 87 times more likely to see higher returns on marketing investment than were laggards. Further, among these companies:

- 68% had a process for monitoring social media.
- 58% had devoted resources to social media marketing.
- 61% engaged customers in online communities.

Another compelling case for social media’s payoff comes from the Altimeter Group, in conjunction with Wetpaint. In their joint study looking at the top 100 global brands, they found there was a financial correlation between those companies that are “deeply and widely engaged” in social media and those that significantly outperform their peers in terms of both revenue and profit performance.

“Social media engagement and financial success work together to perpetuate a healthy business cycle: a customer-oriented mindset stemming from deep social interaction allows a company to identify and meet customer needs in the marketplace, generating superior profits. The financial success of the company, in turn, allows further investment in engagement to build even better customer knowledge, thereby creating even more profits.” —Altimeter Group

and Wetpaint, *“EngagementDB: Ranking the Top 100 Global Brands,” July 2009*

Seven Guidelines for Achieving ROI from Social Media

For marketers who want to go beyond the toe-dipping stage and actually quantify their social media marketing efforts, the following guidelines provide a framework for success.

1. Establish clear marketing goals for your product or brand, and then identify social measurements that directly support those objectives.

What marketers do with social networks and other online community platforms should be determined by the end result they are trying to achieve.

If a company sells gardening supplies and its primary marketing goal is to reinforce brand loyalty among its core customers, it might create a community platform that allows customers to exchange ideas, stories and tips about gardening with each other. The company could also offer them special discounts at retail or free samples of new products.

With this program, success could be measured through online customer loyalty surveys, the frequency and intensity of interactions on the community platform, and a Net Promoter score survey, which would ask customers if they would recommend the company's gardening products to others.

“We use online social communities as a tool to drive business results and [to gauge] the long-term health of the brand. We also use them as a customer insight tool.”

—Clare Bennett, senior vice president of global marketing, American Express, *in an interview with eMarketer*, January 30, 2009

Importantly, marketers must resist the urge to use every metric and measurement tool that comes their way. Just because marketers can measure something, and it's easy to do, doesn't mean they should. It's better to look at a few carefully chosen metrics—particularly those tied to corporate objectives—than to be overwhelmed by a dizzying array of measurements that offer little or no insight.

Similarly, marketers should not be looking for a silver bullet—a one-size-fits-all panacea for social ROI. Each firm's unique business objectives will dictate the appropriate set of metrics for measuring return on investment from social interactions.

2. Organize your measurements and metrics in a logical framework.

Given the great abundance of choices, marketers should establish a framework for organizing their social media metrics. Generally, these metrics fall into three broad buckets:

■ **Exposure**—metrics that quantify the reach of social media efforts

■ **Engagement**—metrics that capture active interactions and intentions

■ **ROI/outcomes**—metrics that quantify the return on investment or business outcome of the social media activity

The above three categories fall along a continuum, with exposure being the least closely tied to business performance and ROI/outcomes the most directly linked to business success. Further, each set of metrics provides a foundation for the next level, and all metrics should be as closely connected to the others as possible.

“To be successful, companies must have a firm foundation and understanding of how social networks can help them accomplish their overall marketing goals. Determine success metrics before starting a social network marketing initiative, not after.”

—Debra Aho Williamson, senior analyst, eMarketer, in the eMarketer report, *“Marketing on Social Networks: Branding, Buying and Beyond,”* August 2009

3. Take a long-term outlook with social media interactions and measurements. It's a commitment, not a campaign.

Social media is about relationships, and relationships of any kind need to be nurtured (and measured) over a period of time. From a business performance standpoint, marketers should seek to establish baselines from which they can track the progress of key metrics on an ongoing basis.

“The one thing people need to remember when it comes to social media and consumer engagement is that it can't be a one-time hit when you're trying to get involved with consumers. The whole purpose of getting involved is you're trying to build a relationship with the consumer. Building a relationship with a consumer is like building a relationship with anybody.”

—Rudy Wilson, director of marketing, Doritos, PepsiCo's Frito-Lay North America, *in an interview with eMarketer*, March 2009

Moreover, marketers risk damaging their brands if they suddenly back out. In the Altimeter Group/Wetpaint white paper, Denise Morrissey, online community manager for Toyota, said: “If you are going to engage, you have to have a plan and make sure that resources are available. Because you can't gracefully exit—once you're in, you're in. The days of walking away from a campaign are over—once we engage, we have to commit to it.”

In summary, whatever marketers choose to measure on social platforms must be tracked consistently and over a sufficient period of time to observe subtle, slow-moving trends.

“CEOs are demanding ROI right away, and they don't understand that you have to build an audience and stickiness before you can go to the next level. It's the social media platforms that are having problems monetizing, but brands are monetizing social media every day.”

—Ted Rubin, vice president of marketing and business development, e.l.f., *in an interview with eMarketer*, March 2009

4. If hard ROI metrics are difficult to track directly, consider a range of softer metrics that can be linked back to desired business outcomes.

While most companies will ultimately want hard ROI metrics (such as those tied to revenues, profit or cost per lead), soft metrics, such as the number of friends or followers can serve as valuable proxy measures when the harder metrics are elusive—if the soft metrics are linked to business outcomes correctly. For example, a marketer could offer a coupon on a social network and then monitor its redemption rate in order to weigh social engagement.

Alternatively, an emphasis on softer metrics might be entirely appropriate given the strong branding benefits marketers attribute to social interactions. As noted in a December 14, 2009, BusinessWeek article, “Many argue that a relentless fixation on hard numbers can lead companies to ignore the harder-to-quantify dividends of social media, such as trust and commitment. A Twittering employee, for example, might develop trust or goodwill among customers but have trouble putting a number on it.”

Blake Cahill, a social media blogger and senior vice president of corporate marketing at Visible Technologies, a social media measurement firm, suggests that marketers create a “social dashboard” composed of both hard and soft metrics.

“Measuring the success of social media can be a challenge, but using a variety of hard and soft ROI metrics can absolutely be accomplished. I would offer that volumes of conversation over competitors, sentiment (the good, the bad, the neutral), the level of reach and influence of those who are interacting with your brand, the amount of community involvement, downloads, registrations, donations, etc., are but some of the measures that can be used to construct a dashboard of success.”

—Blake Cahill, senior vice president of corporate marketing, Visible Technologies, *on his blog*, September 28, 2009

Another option for quantifying the softer impacts of social media marketing comes from Razorfish. The digital ad agency created the [Social Influence Marketing \(SIM\) Score](#), which measures the share of consumer conversations online that are about a particular brand, as well as their sentiment—how much consumers like or dislike a brand when they talk about it online.

Some companies will achieve a larger share of voice through their social media efforts, while others will benefit from accumulating strong positive sentiment. Achieving both, of course, is ideal.

5. Determine a dollar value for customers who choose to opt in and engage with your brand via social networks.

Marketers should develop clever ways to assign monetary values to so-called soft metrics, such as number of fans, friends or followers, as a means to measure ROI. That is what Papa John's International did. Jim Ensign, VP of marketing communications at the pizza chain, [told eMarketer](#), "We look at the percentage [of Facebook fans] that convert to customers, the percentage increase in their frequency [of visits], projected increases in their average ticket and what their tenure is with us. ... We can project their future value. Are we 100% right? No. But are we directionally correct? Absolutely."

Savvy marketers could take this approach a step further and develop sophisticated models to estimate the lifetime value of a customer, and then determine what kinds of social engagement bring in new customers, and, more specifically, which engagements drive long-term loyalty to the brand.

"Assigning monetary values to different social actions—commenting, becoming a fan, following, links back—is a good start. It would take any organization time to refine it and iterate. It'll never be a perfect science, because human behavior is inconsistent, and we change with technology." —Michael Brito, social media strategist/author, Intel/Britopian.com, [in an interview with eMarketer](#), August 7, 2009

6. In your ROI calculations, don't overlook the value of cost savings that can result from ongoing social listening and tracking.

Social media channels provide marketers with a treasure trove of information and insights about consumers, including their attitudes, perceptions, feelings, behaviors, pain-points and passions. If marketers are willing to tap into the social sphere, there is much learning to be gained about their products' and brands' positions, as well as those of their competitors. Consequently, when evaluating the ROI of social media, marketers should factor in the potential cost savings related to research and development time and custom market research.

Children with Diabetes Inc., a Johnson & Johnson company, uses social networks as platforms for polling consumers. It systematically taps into and learns from the consumers congregating on these sites. According to Joseph Natale, vice president of new media, [in an interview with eMarketer](#), "I think there's a huge opportunity as marketers look at social networks and how they evaluate success and ROI. They should think about doing market research, polling and surveying on the network. They can create a category of market insights through this channel. Those insights are extremely valuable, and securing that information is much more valuable than traditional advertising metrics. We do polls and surveys all the time."

7. Build the technological capabilities to measure your customers' complete digital footprint—in real time.

This is arguably the holy grail of social media measurement, and one marketer who articulates this approach well is Michael Mendenhall, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Hewlett-Packard.

"Marketers have clickstream and e-commerce data, but the difficult part is the qualitative part in between. I think the challenge for marketers is to begin to build technological capabilities that allow you to see the complete digital footprint that a given customer leaves when they engage with your brand. You need to be able to understand that behaviorally and/or contextually and address that consumer in a relevant way. ... You need a sophisticated CRM platform that allows you to...recognize consumers when they come back."

—Michael Mendenhall, SVP and CMO, Hewlett-Packard, [in an interview with eMarketer](#), May 5, 2009

Marketers who want to capture a 360-degree, holistic view of their customers can also develop attribution models for their marketing communications efforts. These models are designed to identify and quantify the value of every media touchpoint along the purchase funnel. Because attribution models provide a relative weight for each marketing component, including interactions on social platforms, marketers can make future decisions about media allocations.

Importantly, marketers should strive to systematically monitor social media interactions and use this valuable “listening/learning” data to inform their online and offline media and creative messages. One of the biggest challenges will be to measure the sharing activity among social consumers, including online video ads and widgets, which can affect a marketer’s reach and engagement levels.

Among other skill sets, this will require a real mastery of Web analytics. However, those who are able to connect *all* the dots will enjoy a significant competitive advantage.

Endnotes

Endnote numbers correspond to the unique six-digit identifier in the lower left corner of each chart. The charts from the report are repeated before their respective endnotes.

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| Shop.org and Forrester Research, Oct 2009 | Click-throughs to a retail site | •60% of US online retailers |

Source: various, as noted, 2009

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Extended Note: According to MarketingSherpa, the phases of the social media marketing lifecycle are defined as "Phase 1: Trial"—no process, platform-centric; "Phase 2: Transition"—informal process, randomly performed; "Phase 3: Strategic"—formal process, routinely performed.

Citation: Econsultancy and bigmouthmedia, "Social Media and Online PR Report," provided to eMarketer, November 25, 2009; Equation Research, "2009 Marketing Industry Trends Report," August 18, 2009; MarketingSherpa, "2010 Social Media Marketing Benchmark Report," December 11, 2009; Shop.org, "The State of Retailing Online 2009: Profitability, Economy and Multichannel" conducted by Forrester Research as cited by Internet Retailer, October 6, 2009

More Information and Analysis from eMarketer

For related information, see these eMarketer reports, articles and interviews:

[How Do You Measure Success?](#)

[10 Best Practices for Success with Social Media](#)

[Using Social Media Strategically](#)

External Links

[100 Ways to Measure Social Media](#)

[EngagementDB: Ranking the Top 100 Brands](#)

[The ROI on Social Media Monitoring: Why It Pays to Listen to Online Conversation](#)

[Why Social Media Measurement Needs to Catch Up to Adoption](#)

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