The CMO's Guide to Social Media
What business leaders need to know about social media in 2018
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It's hard to believe that Twitter and Facebook have been with us for more than a decade and, yet, it's also difficult to fathom just how much change those, and other social channels, have wrought on the business world in that time.

In 2007 social media was in its infancy and businesses were still wary of investing in this nascent channel that was at the same time booming in popularity but deeply confusing to many people. In 2018 almost everybody gets it. It's hard to imagine any consumer brand or public-facing organization not using social media these days. Even in B2B markets, social is widely used, defying initial assertions that it was only useful for reaching consumers.

But unlike, for example, the invention of radio which, once invented, offered virtually unchanged functionality, social media has constantly evolved. Not only have we had to overcome an initial seismic shift in the way we work, we've also faced almost yearly aftershocks that just keep adding to the complexity of social.

So consider this report as a 2018 State of the Social Nation – an update on what social media means for businesses today, and what you need to be paying attention to if you want to stay ahead of the curve.
Facebook & Instagram

Despite many predictions of its demise over the years, Facebook is still here and bigger than ever. Quite simply, it's the 800lb gorilla of social networks. Along with Google, Facebook is one of two digital properties that completely dominate the online advertising industry and, combined with continued user growth and booming profits, means that the company has become all but unstoppable. The astonishing success of Facebook has been compounded by its 2012 acquisition of the enormously popular image sharing platform, Instagram, which it still operates as a separate (and highly successful) social network rather than absorbing it into the main Facebook product. Simply put, it's inconceivable that any consumer facing organization would not include Facebook in its marketing communications strategy.

Twitter

Twitter's path has not been as smooth as Facebook's, its user growth has not been strong and despite improving revenues it has still not managed to become profitable. But there's no denying Twitter's importance as a communications channel. The presidency of Donald Trump has cemented Twitter's position in the spotlight thanks to his heavy use of the platform to communicate with the public and, even though the business case is still to be proven, it's clear that the channel isn't going anywhere soon.

Alongside Facebook, Twitter is one of the two social media channels that are absolutely essential for all organizations to pay attention to, even if only in a listening capacity.

Snapchat

The platform for sharing ephemeral content enjoys cult status, especially with younger users, but many businesses are struggling to see the value in Snapchat. If you're not familiar with Snapchat, it's an app that lets users share video or images that are automatically deleted forever after a short time. This was originally intended to appeal to privacy-conscious users, but the app has achieved wider success amongst millennials simply by being fun to use and consistently adding innovative features. While some brands have found innovative ways to use the channel to connect with a younger audience, it's fair to say that many are still unsure of how they can use it. Launched in 2011, Snapchat is a relative newcomer to the social playing field compared to the better established channels but, equally, it's been around long enough to prove it's a serious contender.
**YouTube**

While it's still a hugely important destination for video content YouTube faces growing competition as all of the other majored social media channels add increasingly sophisticated video capability to their own platforms. Nevertheless, YouTube remains the platform of choice of a new generation of video-focused online influencers (colloquially, YouTubers), and is also used by broadcast media brands to distribute their own content. It was recently announced that the ratings company, Nielsen, will include YouTube views in its viewing figures.

If video plays a large part in your content strategy, or you're looking to work with influencers, YouTube is important, and it's also a key channel for advertising.

**Pinterest**

Often overlooked in social media discussions, Pinterest has quietly become an image sharing powerhouse. The site grew especially popular amongst women, who used it to curate image collections on topics such as fashion, crafts, home decor, and wedding planning. Because of this, Pinterest has proven fertile ground for retail brands in those kinds of markets, and the site has introduced innovative features to help businesses generate sales.

**Reddit**

On the surface Reddit might look like nothing more than an old-school discussion forum, but this vast online community, which describes itself as the Front Page of the Internet, has become one of the web's most important sites. Reddit is where you'll find all of the most popular content being shared online, along with a buzzing discussion amongst users. If there's something going viral on Twitter or Facebook today, chances are it surfaced on Reddit last week.

Unlike the other social channels we've covered in this report, Reddit isn't really a space where it's advisable for brands to build a presence (the community doesn't welcome intrusive marketing) but it is a goldmine of consumer insight.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Monthly Users</th>
<th>Founded in</th>
<th>Brand Potential:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>2 Billion</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Owned brand pages for publishing content • Engage with consumers • Mine insight from billions of consumer conversations and behaviors • Boost organic reach with paid content promotion and highly targeted display advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>700 Million</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Owned brand account for sharing images • Use image analytics to identify your brand in UGC • Native advertising - ads in user feeds look like organic content • Pay to boost your brand’s organic content reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>328 Million</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Owned brand account for publishing content • Engage for brand mentions and respond where appropriate • Mine billions of tweets for insights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>255 Million</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Brand account to share ephemeral video clips and images in real time • ‘Stories’ are collections of clips and images that last longer than 24 hours • Work with influencers who already have a large following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>1.5 Billion</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Brand account for sharing video content • Engage with consumers through video comments • Numerous options for advertising on popular content • Pay to boost the visibility of your own content on the platform • Use social listening to identify UGC featuring your brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>175 Million</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Brand account for sharing image-based content • Pay to boost the visibility of your own content • ‘Rich Pins’ provide brands with tools to help drive commerce and engagement through the platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>234 Million</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Little opportunity for direct brand engagement on Reddit • Consider it as a data source - use listening tools to understand conversations around your brand • Engage directly with caution - the community does not welcome overt marketing • Use the platform’s native advertising tool to target display ads at groups of users</td>
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Powerful Word of Mouth

If a consumer loves your brand enough to follow it in a social media channel, there’s a strong chance that person will be an advocate for you. Your brand pages on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are a direct line to the hearts and minds of your super-fans – keep them engaged with news and content, and they’ll help spread your message to their own networks, both online and offline.

Efficient Customer Support

Increasingly consumers turn to social media as their first port of call when they want to talk to a business, whether they are looking for more information or, especially, when they have a complaint. By plugging Facebook and Twitter into your existing customer support processes you can address these enquiries before they are escalated, and this increases customer satisfaction because they got the help they needed easily and quickly.

It also reduces support costs by deflecting enquiries away from more time-consuming channels like phone and email. Another benefit is that most of the interactions on Facebook and Twitter are publically visible, and that means your excellent customer service is on show for the world to see.
Laser Focused Ad Targeting

Because people share so much about themselves on social media, the platforms are able to build up incredibly detailed pictures of who their users are. This in turn means they are able to provide advertisers with the ability to target audiences at a very granular level, not just using demographic data, but also based on the interests and behaviors they have expressed.

Facebook is particularly strong in this area. What this means for brands is that they are able to stretch their advertising budgets further by ensuring that every cent they spend is used to reach an audience that is much more likely to be interested in the message. In addition to this, social platforms and tools like Sysomos are giving businesses far greater transparency over their advertising spend, making it easier to optimize campaigns in real-time instead of having to wait for weekly reports.

Gain Deep Customer Insight

Social media can be thought of as the world’s most powerful focus group. Hundreds of millions of people go online every day and share their opinions on any number of different topics, including what they think about your brand and products.

All businesses want to understand their customers (and their competitors’ customers) better, and social media data provides the best way of doing that. Data from Twitter, blogs and discussion forums has been available to businesses for a long time, but the newest development in this space is Facebook data. Through Sysomos, businesses are able to access the vast well of insight offered by Facebook data, without ever compromising the privacy of its users, because the data is all aggregated and anonymised.

This relatively new development is already providing businesses with a level of understanding about their customer’s attitudes and behaviours that was previously unimaginable.
Earned, Owned and Paid Social Media

Much like conventional media, social media has developed into three main threads which each have to be managed differently.

**Earned**

This is where your brand is discussed in social channels by independent third parties without any material incentives (financial payments or otherwise), either consumers or influencers (i.e. journalists, bloggers, YouTube stars, etc). To identify earned social media, you’ll need a listening tool that can monitor social channels for mentions of your brand and (if the volumes are high) help you to analyze what is being said.

**Owned**

This refers to your brand’s own social media profiles, Facebook Pages, Twitter Profiles, YouTube Channels, etc. These profiles are populated with content that your brand creates and need to be pro-actively managed. Fresh content needs to be regularly posted, comments from fans need to be moderated and responded to, and this activity (often referred to as “community management”) can become a complex and time consuming task in organizations that have a large number of social channels and a high number of fans. It’s common for organizations to use a social media management tool to simplify this process.

**Paid**

It’s harder than ever before to get your content noticed in social media. As the channels seek ways to monetize their platforms, they have tweaked the algorithms which govern what users see in their timelines. To cut a long story short, if you want your brand to make an impact on social, you’re going to have to spend money on promoting your content – we’re living in a pay-to-play world now.
There is a large overlap between Owned and Paid social media, since quite often they're exactly the same content and the brand has simply paid to promote content that has been posted on its social profile. This is still a rapidly evolving space as channels like Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram are developing increasingly innovative ad formats and new ways for brands to reach consumers through their platforms.

As brands spend more money than ever before on paid social media, they are demanding a higher level of transparency for that budget. The platforms are responding by providing improved metrics and brands are increasingly turning to third-party paid social analytics tools (such as Sysomos Analyze) which help them to understand and optimize their spend.

**Visual is Getting Bigger and Smarter**

It’s hardly news that social media is heavily used for sharing images, Deloitte estimates that over 3.5 million photos are shared online every minute of every day⁴. But what’s changing is the way we can analyze and understand all of those photos. Most of those shared images are not tagged and have no descriptive text associated with them, so it’s almost impossible to know whether your brand features in them.

With improvements in AI technology, that’s all changing. It’s now much easier for us to automatically identify images which feature logos and trademarks, and so much more. We can understand what other objects are in those photos, what kind of environments they're taken in, and much more. This means that now we can extract the same kinds of insights from images as we can from text. In fact, because of the sheer volume of information an image can convey, visual analytics can provide far richer insights than text analytics. Visual analytics are now available in the Sysomos platform with the Discover component.
Live Streaming Video

One of the biggest leaps in social media over recent years has been the success of live streaming video. First Twitter acquired the streaming tool, Periscope, and absorbed it into its platform as a native feature, Facebook soon added its Live feature, and YouTube and Instagram also got live streaming capabilities.

This opened up a new world of possibilities for individual users and brands alike. Not so long ago the ability to broadcast a live video stream to a potentially global audience would have required a lot of expensive infrastructure, but now it's possible with a simple smartphone. Broadly speaking marketers are still finding their way with live streaming, but there are already numerous examples of brands using the technology to provide their social media fans with exclusive content.

AI on the Horizon

Recent improvements in machine learning technology have ushered in a new era of Artificial Intelligence. Algorithms are getting a lot better at analyzing data and finding answers more effectively than humans can, and this applies just as much to the huge volumes of data produced by social media.

By applying machine learning to large volumes of social data, we will be able to spot trends and patterns earlier, and this should help marketers identify risks and opportunities faster. When you log into your social dashboard at the start of the day, as well as being presented with a report, the algorithm will be smart enough to tell you what activities require your most urgent attention, and even suggest the best course of action.

It's still early days for AI in marketing, but as innovation accelerates you can expect to see a lot happening in this space in the near future.
Social now has such a broad impact across a business that it can be difficult to get a handle on the bigger picture of how it all fits together. Social can be used in lots of different ways across multiple business functions and it’s not uncommon to find a spaghetti of different tools and policies across an organization as separate teams work in silos to achieve their objectives.

At Sysomos we have identified six distinct types of social media activity that businesses typically need to carry out, and we have built our platform to perform each of these activities as standalone functions or joined up as an integrated suite.

A Strategic Approach to Social

1. Listening
2. Historical Research
3. Visual Analytics
4. Publishing Content
5. Engagement
6. Paid Social Analytics
01. Listening

The most basic, and essential, activity that brands need to carry out in social media is listening to what is being said about them, their competitors and their market. Social is a focus group on a global scale. Listening to discussions that are relevant to your business will help you to spot and react to potential crises quickly, understand how your customers really feel about your products, and identify new opportunities. If you’re not using a listening tool to monitor mentions of your brand in social, you’re a decade behind your competitors.

02. Historical Research

People often think of social media as being completely focused on the now, but all of those millions of archived social posts from months and years ago can offer valuable insights. If you want to know how consumers feel about a brand, product, technology, or any other topic, social data can help you get to the truth. This data isn’t available natively in Twitter or Facebook, you need a third party social media research tool like Sysomos to get access to the data, and provide you with the analytics tools to make sense of it.

03. Visual Analytics

Consumer brands increasingly make use of visual content in their owned social media channels, and also want to understand how their trademarks and products are being featured in user generated images. Visual analytics, with image-recognition technology to automate the discovery and classification of relevant images, helps marketers to do this more efficiently. This means being able to see which relevant images are going viral, how your visual content is performing, and understand more about how consumers use your products by analyzing the photos they share of them.
04. Publishing Content

Most consumer brands have a social media presence, and for businesses that own multiple brands in multiple markets, managing all of the social channels can easily become a complex problem. It’s not uncommon for global businesses to have thousands of social channels with multiple teams (and agency partners) responsible for keeping them fed with fresh content. The days of simply logging into your social media channels natively and posting updates are long gone. Large businesses need enterprise grade social media publishing tools to simplify and streamline both the management of their channels and the reporting of metrics.

05. Engagement

Social media is now the preferred channel for consumers to communicate with brands. Whether they want to make a complaint, share a suggestion, or just get some information, people are more likely to contact a brand on Facebook or Twitter than any other channel these days.

And when you have social channels with hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of fans, you need enterprise grade tools to make sure that all of those comments are dealt with appropriately. Some will require a customer services response, some will need to be moderated (if they contain inappropriate content), others may just need a snappy response from a community manager, but they all need to be acknowledged and routed to the correct person. And you need reporting tools to make sure that the process is working and nothing is falling through the gaps.

06. Paid Social Analytics

As budgets for paid social increase, greater transparency and accountability is necessary. While the platforms provide native analytics tools, these tend not to work very well for large organizations which run a large number of social channels for multiple brands. Third party tools, such as Sysomos Analyze, make it easier to understand the performance of your paid social media across all of your brands, channels and international markets. This enables you easily understand which activity is performing well, which is struggling, and where best to allocate your budgets for maximum return on investment.
Over the past decade social media has changed marketing beyond all recognition, and the change hasn’t stopped yet as the technology and user behavior continues to evolve. Consumer brands especially understand that social needs to be at the heart of their marketing activity, but it’s hard to identify a single winning strategy when the goalposts are constantly shifting. What works this year may not work next year.

This is why we’ve built Sysomos to be a comprehensive, integrated suite of tools that constantly evolves with the social media industry. As new channels, features and behaviors develop, they are built into the Sysomos platform so that while social media never stands still, you can at least be certain of a familiar, reliable toolkit that will help you to stay ahead of the curve.

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6. 3.5 million photos shared every minute in 2016 – Deloitte, 2016.
Sysomos is a unified, insights-driven social platform that empowers marketers to easily manage earned, owned, and paid media at scale.

Powerful stand-alone apps; even better when used together

sysomos.com