

CHAPTER 8

HOW TO MEASURE INFLUENCERS AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

“Dominant coalitions tend to value and support communicators who first demonstrate their worth.”

—David Dozier

In the good old days, influencers were recognized leaders in business, media, Wall Street, or academia. Today, an influencer can be anyone who knows something about your product, your market, or your business. It can be someone with 10,000 followers on Twitter or 500 friends on Facebook. All that matters is whether they recommend your product or service.

NEW INFLUENCERS, NEW THOUGHT LEADERS, NEW RELATIONSHIPS

It used to be that a good communications program functioned like a food chain. You would educate key spokespeople and influencers on your message, and, assuming it was a credible message, it flowed down through the chain of media and ultimately reached your publics through a variety of credible sources. This top-down process of message control seemed reasonable, but was probably only a

convenient illusion. Social media has proved it wrong and officially signed its death certificate.

Today, to mangle the metaphor a bit, the minnows are feeding on the sharks. Influence is no longer held by one large analyst firm or even a single credible individual, but rather resides in whatever community, Facebook page, or Twitter list that is talking about your marketplace. The proliferation of low- or no-cost tools to create communities has sparked a proliferation of highly specialized groups of people that are interested in very narrow topics. These groups are essentially newsgroups that have come of age: They are the former teenagers who have moved out of their parents' basements and now own the party houses. Whether it's small farmers, fans of a particular product, or parents of children with a specific disease, there's now a group for it. And that group has members and the members have friends and all of them can influence your market and your market share.

I used to tell people to treat bloggers like influential industry analysts. Now I advise the opposite: Treat industry analysts just like you would a blogger. That is, engage in a conversation. Not in a "here's the message I'm shoving down your throat" way, but rather, a two-way dialog that focuses on what the individual has been blogging about. Talk with the blogger about something that you know he is interested in—just as you'd woo an interesting person at a cocktail party. Woe to those who haven't devoted some serious time to determine what the blogger's hot buttons are. Not only do you risk annoying the blogger, but you might be labeled as a spammer. And the blogger is likely to tell all his friends to shun you as well.

So throw out all your old assumptions and put in place a measurement and evaluation program for your influentials. Don't get me wrong, the thought leaders, early adopters, industry analysts, financial analysts, key customers, academics, and political leadership still play an enormous role in shaping opinion. The difference is that they can no longer be seduced with a corporate subscription to their services.

Many of them have simply left to start their own consultancies; others are so fiercely independent that they automatically shun any hint of complicity with an organization.

So let's be specific in our definitions. In every industry, there are influential figures who write more, say more, and spend more. These are the people who others turn to for advice and recommendations. In hair care, it's the hairstylists. In high tech, it's the key industry consultants. In automobiles, it's the car enthusiasts. Every industry has them, and if you don't have a good relationship with them, it will be very hard for your organization, your products, or your job to survive.

How to Build a Custom List of the Top 100 Influencers in Your Marketplace

You can probably name the 25 or so most important influencers in your marketplace already. The problem this next section will solve is how to determine all the *other* people who may be influencing purchasing decisions within your industry. It may seem to be a very cool thing to be able to tap into the entire social media universe to hear what people are saying about you. And it is. But 90 percent of what you find is likely to be noise. So how do you sort out the noise from who and what matters?

First, you need to understand that who and what matters is very specific to your target audiences. NPR's Planet Money blog may be hugely influential to business, but if you're selling video games to teenagers, then T.E.E.N. Diaries blog is far more important. If you are a consumer goods company selling toilet paper, then product management may need to focus on mommy bloggers, while corporate communications might be far more concerned with environmental-action.org.

Here's how to build your own list of the top 100 who matter in your marketplace.

Au: Please check shorted running head. Is it Ok?

Step 1: Search for Blogs That Mention You or Your Marketplace Most Frequently

If you are already using a listening tool like SM2, Google News, or Radian6, it very probably has an algorithm built in that purports to determine key influencers. In reality, it's just counting up the number of times people write about your brand or your marketplace. Still, it's not a bad place to start. The most important thing is to look for more than just your brand. Make sure you are searching for the competition and that you include the entire market space that you are in or want to be in.

You'll need three to six months worth of data to start. Capture the source of a mention and the number of times that source has written about your brand and/or the competition or the market space you are in. If you're using Google News or some other free source you'll need to do searches on a regular basis. Once a day use Google Feedfetcher or just manually collect everything that Google finds about you and put it into an Excel spreadsheet. Be sure you:

- Delete the duplicates and anything that is irrelevant. Watch out for faux blogs that exist only to push coupons or ads on unsuspecting readers. Check the comments section and the writer's authority and history to make sure there's a real person behind the blog.
- Put the date in the first column, the source in the next, the author in the third, and note the subject in the fourth column.
- Then note number of comments for each one.

Step 2: Verify That the Blogs and Bloggers Are Actually Important

At the end of six months you'll have a list of those blogs that mention you or your marketplace most frequently. Rank them in terms of numbers of mentions—first for your brands, then for the competition. Pare the list down to 100. Now analyze those publications to determine which sources their editors, bloggers, or reporters turn to for advice and information. Use a database or

spreadsheet to record—for every article about you, your industry, or your competition—the name of the publication, the name of the reporter, and the names of everyone quoted. This will give you a list of the most frequently quoted sources. Also record several other details about each item:

- Was it entirely about you or your industry or category?
- Did the influencer quoted refer directly to your organization, or was the quote about someone else?
- And finally, did the article and/or quote contain one or more of your key messages?

Now, take the 100 sources who have mentioned you most frequently and any others you have identified as important and run each through Blog Grader and Twitalyzer and rank them in order of their scores. This will give you an indicator of the reach of the individual blogger. Now calculate the Conversation Index for each one (that's the ratio of comments to posts). Rank them from highest (the most comments per post) to lowest (the fewest comments per post).

Add the three ranks (the ranks, not the scores) together and sort them from high to low. Get online and check the top 50 to verify that they really are relevant to your brand and your market or your client.

Now you've got a list that is truly yours and truly valuable. Keep it that way by repeating this process on a biannual basis.

HOW TO MEASURE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR INFLUENCERS

As with journalists, the ultimate measure of a successful relationship with analysts and influencers is whether they recommend your product, service, or company to reporters, editors, investors, and customers. The methodology for measuring your results is similar to

that for measuring the media with one key exception: Periodically assessing the health of your relationships with them is absolutely critical, because understanding what they *think* about you is just as important as understanding what they *write* about you.

Here's an example of how it can benefit a business. The beauty care division of a major consumer packaged goods company was trying to figure out how to improve its overall awareness and preference with its target customers: women between the ages of 18 and 35. It knew that this audience read the top 15 beauty magazines for advice, but it wasn't sure how to influence those publications. My firm conducted a share-of-ink study to determine how much coverage each of our client's product categories (hair care, facial care, sunscreen, etc.) received during the course of the year. We looked at all the articles about those products and quickly established that hair stylists and salon owners were most frequently quoted.

This media analysis effort yielded a valuable database that allowed our client to spot trends in product recommendations, and tie those recommendations to promotional efforts. Our client could also establish its share of recommendations against other firms in the industry. Our client made an effort to reach out to the most-quoted groups, both in industry-specific trade publications and with events and specially tailored programs. The final, ideal result would be to tie the firm's share of recommendations to market share data.

Let's address the elements of influencer measurement one at a time using the steps introduced in Chapter 3 as a guide.

Step 1: Define Your Goals

Influencer or analyst relations (AR) programs are typically developed with the ultimate goal of getting the analyst to recommend your product or at least to defend it from competitive attacks. But AR programs are also essential to any successful entry into a new marketplace and to any change of positioning your organization may be attempting.

So define a list of measurable objectives for your influencer outreach program.

Step 2: Define Your Audience

The more specifically you can define your audience the better. In Chapter 3, you defined what your target audiences were for all of your marketing programs. In this exercise you will need to define which specific influencer groups you are targeting. Typical influencer groups might include:

- Government officials
- Bloggers
- Nongovernmental organizations
- Professors and academic experts
- Investment analysts
- Technology analysts
- Market analysts
- Anyone else quoted frequently in national media

Step 3: Define Your Benchmark

Measurement is a comparative tool, so you need to be clear about who or what you are comparing your results to. Is your program designed to pit your CEO *mano a mano* against the CEO of a rival company for share of quotes? Or are you trying to get industry influencers to love your company more than that upstart across the street? In either case you need to be clear about the benchmarks you are trying to reach, and what you will be comparing your success against.

With opinion leaders it is particularly important to compare your organization to your peers and competitors, since all of you will be pitching competing messages and stories to the same opinion leaders. Be sure to ask them how your organization ranks in their minds relative to others in the industry.

Step 4: Define Your Key Performance Indicators

The key performance indicators by which to judge your influencer relations program should include one or more of the following (listed in order of preference):

- Percent increase in Grunig Relationship Survey scores, specifically in the areas of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and exchange versus communal relationships. (See Chapter 4 and Appendix 1.)
- Percent increase in share of recommendations.
- Percent increase in share of desired positioning.
- Percent increase in share of desirable quotes.
- Percent increase in coverage containing desirable quotes from key influencers.

Step 5: Select Your Measurement Tool

Tools to measure influencer relations range from the simple to the highly complex, and accuracy increases accordingly. At the most basic level you can use Excel or Access to track what key influencers are saying and writing about you in the media. You can also use your web analytics program to determine how much traffic is coming from your key influencers' sites.

A slightly more labor intensive but far more important tool is a content analysis of all of your media mentions to determine if they are saying or writing what you want them to. On a weekly or monthly basis collect all the items referencing you and the organizations against which you are benchmarking. Analyze them for the number and nature of the quotes.

To truly get the most useful data about your key influencers I recommend regular biannual relationship surveys, conducted by phone or e-mail. The purpose is to determine the extent to which these influencers understand your strategies and mission, the extent to which they believe in your management's ability, and their overall image of—and trust in—your organization. We recommend developing a

standard survey instrument based on the Grunig Relationship Survey. (See Appendix 1.)

Typical questions would be: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
- In dealing with people like me, this organization has a tendency to throw its weight around.
- I would rather work together with this organization than not.
- Most people enjoy dealing with this organization.

It is also important to integrate your research with other developments within your organization. Here's an example: Tracy Eiler, formerly at Business Objects (now SAP), had been tracking analyst relations for a number of years. When budgets got tight a few years ago, she was forced to eliminate a position that was specifically charged with maintaining analyst relations. The following reporting period saw a dramatic decline in how the analyst community viewed Business Objects, particularly on the subject of responsiveness. Without the extra person, the company just couldn't be as responsive as it had been in the past. She charted the drop and subsequent decline in quotes in the media, presented the results to her boss, and the position was reestablished.

Tracking analysts can also help identify new opportunities for influence. At one time a few years ago, we were tracking a core list of key analysts that a major computer company had established. As it turned out, some of the members of that list were seldom quoted, and from time to time there were quotes from new names. By providing our client with an update of active influencers each month, we were able to continuously improve the effectiveness of the analyst relations effort.

The final steps for thought leader measurement follow steps six and seven as outlined in Chapter 3.

CASE STUDY: INFLUENCING SALES BY TARGETING KEY INFLUENCERS

Kami Huyse's 2007 Journey to Atlantis social media campaign for SeaWorld San Antonio has become a classic case study on how to use social media to target key influencers (<http://overtonecomm.blogspot.com/2008/04/case-study-roi-of-social-media-campaign.html>). SeaWorld wanted to launch its new Journey to Atlantis roller coaster with the help of buzz from influentials in the coaster community. So it identified 22 coaster enthusiast blogs and created content to suit their needs. Video and photos of the coaster and its construction were posted on sites like YouTube and Flickr. Coaster enthusiasts and bloggers were invited to attend the media launch day and be among the first to ride the coaster.

Results showed impressive success: 12 of the 22 blogs covered the ride, and the campaign received 50 links from unique websites, 30 of which were from coaster enthusiast sites. The American Coaster Enthusiasts group brought 30 of its members to ride the coaster on media day. An exit survey showed that the cost per impression for the social media campaign was \$0.22, versus \$1.00 for television. The online efforts represented more than \$2.6 million in revenue.

CASE STUDY: NEW HAMPSHIRE INFLUENCES THE INFLUENCERS TO CHANGE ITS POLITICAL IMAGE

Tracking influencers and carefully tailoring your messages to them can have a major impact on reputation. One study of New Hampshire's reputation in the media revealed that it appeared to be populated by flannel-shirted hicks, citizens who didn't

deserve their unusual political influence as voters in the first-in-the-nation presidential primary.

A group of state leaders headed by former governor Hugh Gregg decided they needed to change this perception. The New Hampshire Political Library (NHPL), which Gregg founded, conducted a detailed media analysis of New Hampshire's presidential primary coverage. After reading and analyzing some 3,000 articles that referred to the State of New Hampshire's attributes and failings, they had a list of the reporters and journalists who were most likely to visit or write about the state. Additionally, they were able to isolate two dozen influencers who journalists regularly went to for information about the state or the primary.

They then provided those influencers with facts and figures about the state, such as:

- New Hampshire has the highest per capita number of high-tech jobs in the country.
- There are over 200 languages spoken in the Manchester school system.
- New Hampshire citizens participate in politics with greater frequency than citizens of any other state in the union: 75 percent have voted in the primary, 74 percent have watched a debate or have otherwise paid attention, and 13 percent have attended an event.
- One in 10 New Hampshire residents has shaken the hand of a candidate.

The NHPL also worked with the leaders of both political parties (who were on the list of top influencers) to change candidates' photo opportunity venues. Prior to the 2000 election

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Figure 8.1

Graph of the dramatic change in tone of New Hampshire's coverage from 1992 to 2000. The graph illustrates how improving relationships with influencers can positively affect coverage.

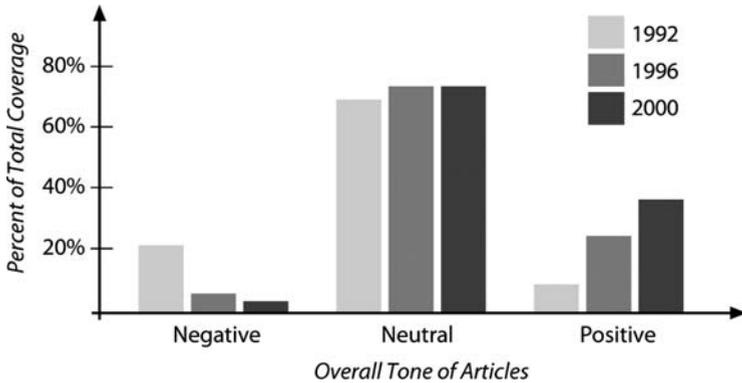


Figure 8.2

Endorsement of New Hampshire as a desirable place increases, 1995 to 2000.

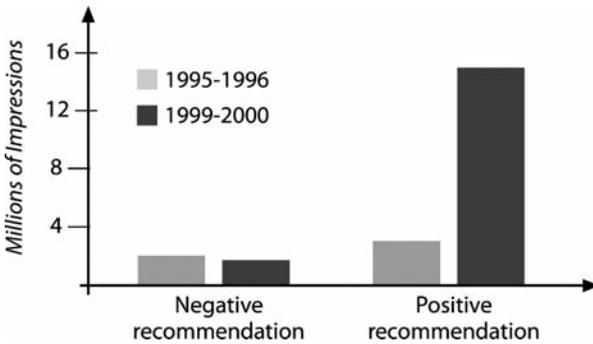
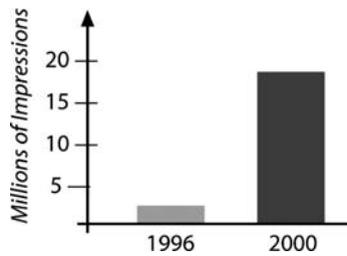


Figure 8.3
First-in-the-nation key message is communicated more frequently in 2000 than 1996.



year, most presidential candidates' photos had been staged around maple trees and in diners. As a result of the efforts of NHPL, most of the photo opportunities in 2000 occurred in high-tech factories and manufacturing venues.

As a result of all these efforts the overall tone of coverage dramatically shifted (see Figure 8.1). Journalists who once had described New Hampshire citizens as “backward,” “quirky,” or “persnickety” were now saying that the state deserved the primary because of its citizens' intense level of political engagement (see Figures 8.2 and 8.3). Further analysis showed that the messages were frequently communicated in quotations from influencers identified in the earlier study (Gittel and Gottlob, 2001).