

Cool Vendors in Social Marketing, 2014

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Social marketers are challenged to balance efficiency and effectiveness of their social marketing efforts. Our Cool Vendors research enables marketers to find and distribute more engaging content and obtain insights from social channels to guide strategies and tactics, and create business value.

Key Findings

- Digital marketers seek ways to take insights from social listening and apply them to marketing initiatives; two of our Cool Vendors help identify these actionable insights. Blab helps marketers anticipate the direction and velocity of social conversations, while Rival IQ helps marketers understand competitors' social and digital marketing efforts.
- Marketers are challenged to create an adequate volume of content, deployed at the right velocity, for their social marketing programs. Tools like SocialFlow help marketers identify content that will resonate with target audiences and optimize promotion of social content, while Mass Relevance provides templates and tools to create interactive content for social sharing.
- A social marketing management application can add efficiency to busy, complicated and, sometimes, delicate processes. Vendors like Falcon Social bring coordination, collaboration and workflow to your social marketing operation.

Recommendations

- Go beyond collecting insights from social listening, to seeking actionable intelligence; design ways to engage with target audiences and determine what activities will lead to measurable business outcomes based on your social analyses.
- Expand social content to include rich media, such as photos and videos, and a mix of brand, user-generated and curated third-party content to meet the daily demand for content. Amplify content with paid media at the right time, and measure the impact of published content at different stages in the customer journey, to focus content development and publishing efforts.
- Reduce labor-intensive activities by using tools to streamline and automate social marketing processes like content approval, including activation of organizational workflows that link marketing to other teams, such as customer service.

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Analysis

This research does not constitute an exhaustive list of vendors in any given technology area, but rather is designed to highlight interesting, new and innovative vendors, products and services. Gartner disclaims all warranties, express or implied, with respect to this research, including any warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose.

What You Need to Know

Social marketing has arrived at a stage in its maturity where marketers are seeking more value from their investments. Their programs have become more robust and complex, ongoing customer engagement is more challenging and business results are in greater demand. Key to overcoming those hurdles, and meeting the demand for bigger and better results, is marketers' ability to bring forward content that is relevant and engaging, at a time when that content is poised to connect with the social consumer in a way that is not an operational drain on the social marketing team.

The social marketing companies we highlight as part of this year's Cool Vendors report all offer marketers insights to better target content and conversations to customers. They also offer tools to help engage customers with that content/those conversations or ways to manage that engagement with efficiency and effectiveness.

Blab

Seattle, Washington (www.blabpredicts.com)

Analysis by Julie Hopkins

Many vendors offer social analytics listening software to identify trends, understand brand associations or assess sentiment by looking at historical conversation. Blab brings another dimension to social listening by offering predictive analytics, leveraging patented technology to find less obvious, yet contextually relevant, social conversations in real time. This gives marketers insight — up to 72 hours in advance of maximum impact — into issues that could damage their brand or present opportunities to generate revenue.

Why Cool: Blab believes conversations (both online and offline) shift according to one of hundreds of thousands of patterns that have evolved over time. Applying pattern logic, Blab models real-time social conversations against these predefined paths to predict how that particular dialogue will move, morph and grow on social networks. This technology enables marketers to identify a potential issue revealed in a social conversation, develop content or messaging in response, or secure additional support resources to pre-empt or handle the fallout.

Blab uses the context of the conversation on a topic to show how the velocity of the conversation will change if the brand does not get involved, which can help marketers decide whether to engage. After engagement, this acts as a foundation to measure the impact of a brand's action or engagement with the conversation.

In addition, Blab helps marketers identify unknown brand associations or connections revealed through conversations. Whereas other social analytics tools are equipped to answer the questions marketers know to ask (for example, "Is there a connection between my brand and luxury"), Blab is built to bubble up associations marketers wouldn't necessarily anticipate.

Blab has created an easy-to-use dashboard that makes sense of ever-changing social data. This enables the power of social data to move from the analysts to all marketers, helping drive better-informed actions.

Challenges: Marketers' ability to fully leverage Blab depends on whether they're operationally ready to quickly adjust and optimize their go-to-market strategies. Therefore, the value of the tool is dependent on a brand's available resources, agile processes, access to content and nimble approval cycles. Without the ability to make these insights actionable, Blab starts to look more like one of the many social analytics tools in the market, as its predictive capabilities may intrigue management and help contextualize social conversation, but they're less likely to create unique business advantage. In addition, over time Blab will need to demonstrate its ability to shift along with changes in social network usage and conversation patterns that are common in the evolution of social networking across different patterns and conversation styles.

Who Should Care: Marketers can use Blab to uncover real-time marketing opportunities if they already have shorter communications or sales cycles or agile marketing operations that leverage channels with frequent customer touchpoints. Public relations and crisis communications teams can use Blab proactively to emphasize ideas or messages or tweak communications.

Falcon Social

Copenhagen, Denmark (www.falconsocial.com)

Analysis by Julie Hopkins

Organizational issues can trip up social marketing teams. Falcon Social's platform is designed to help a wide range of stakeholders, including customer service, sales and agency partners, coordinate their workflow and approval processes.

Why Cool: Falcon Social competes in the high-growth social marketing management application space, where providers are rapidly building and integrating new functionality, extending their footprint and competing for the attention of growing social marketing programs (as well as investors or potential acquirers). Like other social marketing management applications, Falcon Social supports the core needs of the social media marketer with social media monitoring, engagement, publishing, measurement and management. However, Falcon Social was built as a unified platform, leveraging organic feature growth to create a connected user experience for customers and shortening ramp-up time on the platform, enabling adoption with minimal training. This is critical for rapidly growing, dispersed global teams, whose success depends on getting a solution in place, and adopted, quickly, so they can continue to engage at the speed of social.

Falcon Social has created a base of satisfied global clients, with a well-constructed, robust social media management application. While geography alone is not usually cool, Falcon Social's European location translates into a front-row seat on European data privacy regulations, a priority for global brands. This has increased the vendor's access to capital and helped speed its global growth, putting it on track for further global expansion. Armed with an international team, a capable platform and base of satisfied customers, Falcon Social is bound to disrupt the U.S. competitive dynamic.

Challenges: Falcon Social competes in an increasingly crowded category, with larger-scale social marketing management application providers, as well as startups, all quickly building functionality and experience capable of supporting complex organizations. Built from a global perspective, Falcon Social has a close eye on the needs of the global social team, although it's not guaranteed that this position can be defended over time. As the vendor expands its footprint and works to make inroads into the U.S. market, it will need to work to establish an advantage in the mind of the social media buyer over vendors that may have higher brand recognition.

Who Should Care: Digital marketing leaders, chief marketing officers, social marketing and customer support leaders should explore Falcon Social in their exploration of social marketing management applications. Brands with a global presence, especially, can find value in Falcon Social's global approach and its proven success supporting clients and engaging customers throughout Europe.

Mass Relevance

Austin, Texas (www.massrelevance.com)

Analysis by Jennifer Polk

Maintaining ongoing social engagement requires momentum and coordination, as well as a pipeline of compelling social media content. Providers like Mass Relevance take some pain out of creating and curating content and managing social experiences.

Why Cool: Mass Relevance gets credit for providing a platform that puts more of the social creative process in the marketer's hands. Mass Relevance enables marketers to find relevant user-generated content using keyword search, and extract that content from social sites using APIs. As marketers identify content, the tool also allows them to moderate user-generated content, apply

organizational workflow and connect approved content to visualization streams. Mass Relevance also enables marketers to deploy content across paid, owned and earned media channels, including websites, social sites, outdoor displays and TV broadcasting. The company offers templates that let marketers quickly create interactive polls, quizzes, leaderboards, maps and image galleries, all of which can be built with minimal support from designers or developers and integrated into websites, social sites, advertising or applications.

Recent updates to Mass Relevance's platform were designed to improve ease of use, specifically the ability to view content and conversations as part of an ongoing social feed, store branded and user-generated content and redeploy these assets as part of marketing templates. Additionally, it was announced in early April 2014 that Mass Relevance would merge with social marketing management application provider Spredfast. Although the combined company is expected to operate under the Spredfast name, Mass Relevance's content curation capabilities will persist and will remain branded as Mass Relevance Experiences. The merger has the potential to link Mass Relevance's content curation capabilities with Spredfast's social media publishing and analytics competences, possibly giving social marketing teams the ability to manage their audiences' full social experience and enrich interactions outside of social channels.

Challenges: Although the platform offers some self-service tools, it doesn't fully replace the value of an in-house creative team or creative agency; many marketers will still need to engage designers and developers to customize Mass Relevance's marketing templates, especially as not all campaign executions can be modeled through a template. Thus, Mass Relevance competes with other technology providers and still falls short of meeting the complete needs of a social marketing team.

Mass Relevance platform costs can range from tens to hundreds of thousands dollars per year. Its greatest challenge may be justifying the investment over platforms with more specialized analytics and publishing capabilities that can better support the individuality of social marketing programs.

Who Should Care: Digital marketers responsible for social marketing and focused on content marketing may be interested in Mass Relevance. This is especially true if they're looking to bring more cohesion to content deployed across channels, or struggle to get designers or developers to quickly turn content into campaigns. Existing Spredfast customers should consider how Mass Relevance capabilities could enrich and extend their existing social marketing program.

Rival IQ

Seattle, Washington (www.rivaliq.com)

Analysis by Jennifer Polk

Brands in the social space can win only by playing their own game well, but they can find "greenfield" opportunities or distinguish themselves by knowing what grounds competitors occupy. Rival IQ is a software-as-a-service company that provides competitive marketing intelligence, including social analytics, and offers organizations a quick, cost-effective way to generate insights that can help them stay up to speed on their opponents.

Why Cool: Rival IQ offers easy-to-obtain, cost-effective data on key competitors' activities across the Web, search and social media channels. Within Rival IQ, marketers can select a set of competitors, monitor competitors' posts, track changes in messaging, view a dashboard or receive notifications of breakout campaigns and content published by their rivals. This data can enable marketers to generate insights that can help justify spend based on competitors' performance, benchmark their programs against those of other brands and learn about the programs other companies are executing across channels.

What makes Rival IQ cool is it is always adding new companies to its competitor landscapes and conducting ongoing monitoring, to provide its clients with readily available and up-to-date competitive intelligence. Getting this intelligence through Rival IQ offers a more consistent and cost-effective approach than engaging agencies for periodic creative and message tracking, or tying up internal business or marketing analysts to manually track what the competition is doing and what's working. Ease of setup and ongoing access to the data mean insights can be quickly generated, updated and incorporated into social marketing strategy.

Challenges: Competitive data can be collected through a number of approaches or tools. Rival IQ makes it easy for all marketers to get access to foundational competitive data at a reasonable price and across social, search and the Web. However, it will need to continue to innovate to differentiate from other social analytics vendors in the market. A more defined product road map — reflecting how social marketing programs are expanding and becoming more robust in content and channel mix — will be essential for maintaining long-term relationships. Rival IQ will also need to distance itself from other social analytics vendors in the market that also provide competitive data or insights, and communicate a unique value proposition around the content it provides.

Who Should Care: Companies that are interested in gaining competitive marketing intelligence or a view of how their digital marketing efforts compare with those of competitors, as well as agencies that use junior talent to manually audit competitors and compile and analyze similar data, should examine how Rival IQ can support more-efficient and cost-effective analysis for business development and idea generation. Marketers relying on agencies for this type of intelligence should consider Rival IQ to enable competitive monitoring in-house, to maintain a perspective on how others are using the Web, search and social media channels.

SocialFlow

New York, New York (www.socialflow.com)

Analysis by Julie Hopkins

Instead of relying on historical data, behavioral insights or ad planners and strategists claiming to know how to get an audience's attention, the platform uses algorithms to indicate which individuals are interacting with what content, and when they are most likely to engage, which improves social marketing performance and efficiency. The platform spans both owned and paid publishing to multiple social networks, creating a technology and data connection between the normally separate disciplines of social media management and ad buying.

Why Cool: SocialFlow helps publishers in the race for relevance on social sites by using predictive analytics on Twitter, Facebook and Google+ to analyze audience availability and social conversations in real time. SocialFlow then provides guidance on which content is best for marketers to push, at what time, to drive maximum audience engagement. SocialFlow works across all of a marketers' content to suggest placement and promotion of any individual piece of content in queue, and continuously monitors engagement with the post after its publishing. Performance insights from this monitoring feed the algorithm, and help the marketer understand the ideal time to publish. SocialFlow won't make bad content good, but it will help good content reach its maximum potential, by publishing when the right marriage of content, audience and timing has arrived.

SocialFlow insights can be leveraged to improve paid media performance as well. Marketers can use this insight to decide which content to promote through paid placements, thus amplifying content reach and impact, and informing their content marketing strategy going forward.

Based on early success with publishers, SocialFlow is expanding its approach and platform to better serve a wider range of brands across industries.

Challenges: SocialFlow's early success with publishers must be proven against brands to grow the business. In addition, as other campaign management providers integrate or build additional content analytics capabilities into their solutions, the value of having another tool like SocialFlow in-house to address this singular (albeit important) challenge will need to be justified.

Who Should Care: Marketers and agencies that distribute content across multiple social platforms and leverage paid, owned and earned media to amplify results should explore SocialFlow to help optimize content placements.

Gartner Recommended Reading

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

"Agenda Overview for Social Marketing, 2014"

"Market Guide for Social Marketing Management "

"Market Guide for Social Analytics"

"Manage the Risks of Social Marketing Before They Happen"

"How to Measure Social Marketing ROI"

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