

# Delucchi Plus Digital Trends Report

Vol. 4: The 2016 State of Engagement

## Introduction

Thank you for downloading this Delucchi Plus Digital Trends Report, a bimonthly educational product from our Strategy + Insights team.

The crowded conversation around digital trends can make it difficult to distill the chatter into actionable insights, and the goal of our Trends Reports is to provide exactly this: A matter-of-fact exploration of the opportunities, cautions, and takeaways for marketers and brand champions to make the most of the latest trends.

## The Trend: The 2016 State of Engagement

The term engagement emerged in recent years and has since become omnipresent in the marketing industry. *Engagement* is used both as a description of strategic online communications efforts, as well as the intended results of those efforts. When a brand has effective online communications — whether through clever social media content, thoughtful ads, or perfectly timed emails — the result is strong engagement: A responsive, appreciative, and even loyal audience. For some brands, cultivating good engagement is becoming as important as the actual products and services they sell.

But engagement has been a term of note for some time now, begging the question: What's new? In this report, we take a look at the 2016 state of engagement, including current best practices, the latest opportunities and obstacles, and where engagement is headed this year and beyond.

## No Matter the Medium, Make It a Dialogue

Effective online communications should be based on dialogue, or what industry pros may call *dialogic engagement*. Dialogic engagement holds that no matter the medium, brands should be listening, analyzing, and responding thoughtfully and consistently to their customers to foster engagement and strengthen relationships. Here are two key steps towards effective dialogic engagement:

### Monitoring

*captures what's being said;*  
*listening*  
*considers*  
*what's not being said.*

### Stop and Listen

A big part of having a dialogue, of course, is listening. This might seem obvious, but many brands get this surprisingly wrong.  
  
Plenty of companies with an online presence monitor social mentions relevant to their company or products,



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but few engage in the more thoughtful, nuanced exercise of *social listening*. How does social listening differ from monitoring? While monitoring automatically tallies every social mention, social listening requires analysis and reflection. Social listening goes beyond simple notifications: Analysts monitor long-term conversations to identify opportunities to weigh in; they find untagged mentions of their brand; and they analyze the tone and context of the post to determine its true meaning. In a nutshell, while monitoring captures what's being said, listening considers what's *not* being said. In 2016, social listening will become a must-have for any brand with an online presence.

The need for this more thoughtful approach to listening is clear: According to a 2015 study by social analytics powerhouse Sprout Social, a shocking 30% of Tweets mentioning a brand don't include the brand's Twitter handle. Even more concerning, the study shows that just 9% of Tweets *related* to a brand are actually directed *at* that brand.<sup>1</sup> This creates a tremendous risk of missing important conversations and tarnishing a brand's online image by being unresponsive.

At Delucchi Plus, we conduct social listening using tools like Sysomos and Spotlight, which measure conversation trends through social media mentions and search engine volume, respectively. We track brand social handles, common variations of the brand name, brand hashtags and, when relevant, campaign or product hashtags, to ensure no mentions go unseen.

### ... and Be Sure to Respond

Of course, the main value of diligent listening is being able to respond effectively. As far back as 2012, Oracle found that 43% of social media users were engaging brands to get direct responses to questions or problems.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it still seems few brands are responsive enough, at least in comparison to the volume of brand-focused content they produce. According to Sprout Social, brands create an average of four times as many posts as replies. Which industries are the biggest offenders? While utilities and retail brands are closing the gap between posts and replies, media/entertainment and real estate still struggle to find a healthy balance.

Industry	Post: Reply Ratio
Utilities	1.4:1
Retail	2:1
Media & Entertainment	8.5:1
Real Estate	11.7:1

Further, a generic "thank you for your feedback" response won't do the trick anymore: Customers have come to expect thoughtful, useful dialogue from brands in exchange for their loyalty.

## Continuous Engagement

On top of responding to customers consistently and helpfully, brands are under growing pressure to respond *quickly* in order to maintain quality engagement.



This approach, often referred to as *continuous engagement*, requires that brand social teams be active and responsive (and even proactive) 24 hours a day.

Still, few brands are responding fast enough: Sprout Social found that about 88% of social messages to brands go unanswered for three days or longer.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is a major opportunity for brands to make a greater impact with their customers and, in doing so, to gain a competitive advantage.

## **Immediacy Driven by Mobile**

What's causing the increased urgency of online engagement? Mobile of course. More than ever before, online engagement strategies must start, not end, with a mobile focus.

The reasons are many: First, Millennials, the fastest-growing U.S. consumer segment, are increasingly mobile-dependent; Second, mobile devices recently became the primary screen for younger users; Third, last year mobile traffic overtook desktop traffic in 10 countries, including the U.S. and Japan.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, brands can no longer slap on a mobile strategy as an afterthought: It must be their primary focus. Websites must be designed for mobile experience first, social content must be created and scheduled around the needs of mobile users, and mobile sharing must be effectively incentivized.

## **Actionable Advice for Marketers**

What are the takeaways for marketers? In our view, there remain several major opportunities for brands to improve and distinguish themselves through strong online engagement.

### **Decide Your Limits**

Continuous engagement isn't for every brand: Not all companies have the resources to conduct social listening and rapid response efforts 24/7. So it's important to determine your brand's needs, assess its capabilities, and implement guidelines that foster consistency in how it responds to users online.

A limited approach might not be ideal — again, users expect quick, quality responses to their inquiries — but these engagement guidelines go a long way in establishing a consistent and credible online presence.

### **Use a Playbook**

Delucchi Plus helps clients create such guidelines through our Social Media Playbooks, which structure everything from standards responses to crisis communications. Playbooks allow brands to maintain the spontaneous, authentic



tone necessary on social media (and other platforms) by defining general topics and tones, but never being so explicit that it restricts creativity.

## Mobile First

We've said it already, but it bears repeating: Engagement is now all about the mobile experience. In addition to designing your brand's website around mobile users first, these two tips will help improve engagement through mobile:

1. **Schedule and geotarget content:** In deploying content (including social posts, emails, and ads), consider your user's timing and location according to when and where you want a user to take an action. Doing so will increase the relevance and engagement of your efforts. Also, be sure to provide a strong incentive and call to action for users to act immediately. For example, an effective incentive could be a virtual coupon delivered at a certain time or within a certain radius of a store.
2. **Encourage social sharing to give your content legs:** A recent study from ShareThis showed that users are three times as likely to share content via their iPhones than on their desktops.<sup>5</sup> By making sharing easy and appealing, mobile users will organically extend the reach of your campaigns.

## Conclusion

By taking these recommendations into account in creating an engagement strategy, we believe brands can gain a competitive advantage and strengthen customer relationships.

If you're interested in learning more about how changes in engagement will affect your company, you're in luck: Delucchi Plus recently introduced a suite of products to help our clients maximize their marketing investment with our analytical and actionable approach to data. Please [contact us](#) to learn how the Strategy + Insights team can help your team and your business grow, whether it's through data-driven research, a custom trends report, or a webinar or lunch-and-learn.

As we said, the intent of our Trends Reports is to arm clients, colleagues and partners with the latest thinking in the digital space. We hope you learned something and will continue to join us on our educational journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Sprout Social, 2015. <http://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> Oracle, 2012. <http://www.oracle.com/us/products/applications/commerce/live-help-on-demand/oracle-live-help-wp-aamf-1624138.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Sprout Social, 2015. <http://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/>

<sup>4</sup> Google, 2015. <http://adwords.blogspot.com/2015/05/building-for-next-moment.html>

<sup>5</sup> Sharethis, 2013. <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/mobile-desktop-social-sharing/488213>