

white space

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Measuring ROI on Conference Marketing Via Web 2.0 *Revealing the mystery of measuring social media effectiveness.*

“We registered 50 new attendees thru our Facebook Fan page.”

“Over 80 people signed up for our conference after tweeting about the conference speakers.”

“The LinkedIn group our staff has been involved with gained us 150 first-time attendees.”

“Our Ning site re-connected us with some long-time members, and we were able to get 250 of them to register for the conference after not having been in years”

Associations are in the business of building relationships. Mission statements, publications, and annual conferences are each intentionally designed to unite like-minded people. This happens to also be exactly what Web 2.0 is about, and is the reason why we have been on our soapbox yelling about social media for months.

In addition to the compelling argument we've built on why associations should integrate social media tools into internal and external communications, and we've given list after list on how to communicate more effectively through social media. Yet, associations are hesitant to adopt Web 2.0 tactics.

The barrier to overcome now is addressing a simple lack of knowledge and understanding on how to measure ROI from social media practices.

Measuring the effectiveness of your social media strategy and determining its value to your conference marketing is crucial as consumers today are accessing information 24-7 from companies and from peers. Actively managing social media will enable you to understand whether the series of YouTube videos from last year's event have helped in giving first-timers an idea of what to expect, or whether the social media releases you've employed are driving traffic to your site.



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ROI of Social Media

Despite most social media sites being free to use, social media budgets for many businesses and organizations are expected to go up 40% next year. The reasoning behind this is that these businesses are investing their most valuable resource into social media - human capital. This should tell you two things: 1) You need to learn how to measure ROI because it's not free, 2) Many companies and organizations are finding the ROI to be satisfactory enough to warrant an increase in their investment.

Before you can identify if a social media marketing campaign is successful for conference marketing, the parameters and definition of success must be identified. To get started, let's identify six ways that social media can potentially be measured for identifying impact on conference marketing:

FIRST: Enhance brand awareness and reputation.

Will having 100 interested professionals request membership information thru LinkedIn justify the time staff puts into managing profiles?

Conference marketing is one arm of an organization's messaging for fulfilling their mission. Monitoring what social media users say about you can determine ROI by noting the tone of your "fans", and how far the information they share with their peers travels on the web. (Be sure to check out our [comprehensive guide to social media metrics for tools that make this an easy task.](#))

SECOND: Improve search engine rankings and boost website traffic.

If you are a national association looking to increase website traffic, would 25% increase hits to your website satisfy you? In addition to increasing your web presence, social media tactics can be employed to improve your search engine rankings and increase web traffic - both of which mean that more people are getting information about your organization and annual event.

THIRD: Generate referrals and leads.

If your Twitter followers recommend you to peers and you get 10 new members, will that make Twitter a worthy tool? Measuring ROI based on referrals should be calculated from the number of referrals, and also by what your fans are saying about you.

FOURTH: Increase use of products and services (or, conference registration!).

If 5% of your Facebook fans register for a conference through promotions on your Fan page, will you consider that worthwhile? Social media sites have become the most popular source for consumers to get objective information while considering a purchase.

FIFTH: Improve communication within the association members.

If your association wants to increase communication with members through social networking, would 40% participation be enough for positive ROI? Besides measuring the effect on conference registration, it's helpful to identify what portion of your membership base participates in social media.

SIXTH: Improved customer satisfaction and loyalty.

If you receive feedback from members saying they appreciate having easier ways of getting information, would that be all you want? Sometimes the most satisfying ROI is positive feedback and appreciation from your members.

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Ok, so I thought you were going to tell us how to measure ROI.

As you are gearing up for your annual conference consider what impact your social media marketing strategy (**because you will have a strategy for this, right?**), will have on the event.

Below you will find four basic strategies for measuring the impact of social media on an annual conference. We've left out the specific tools and widgets you might use to capture the data - but, don't worry, we've attached them in a special document which you can print and keep locked in the safe with all the other top-secret info.

FIRST: Increased Website Traffic

Alright, are you ready for the hard facts of measuring ROI of social media on conference marketing? In order to measure ROI you need to know your organizations current means for tracking online stats, what you actually are tracking, and determine what's missing.

From there build a strategy of categorizing the referrals that come into your website. We suggest keeping it simple at first with a handful of categories:

- Organic Search
- Online Advertisements
- Email Blasts
- Social Media
- Direct

Over time these numbers can be used to identify how to better convert social media users into conference attendees as you learn how they are interacting with the content on your website.

SECOND: Increased Attendance

Social media sites are passing company websites as to where consumers get information about products and services during the "consideration" phase of making a purchase. Interested attendees will be scouring your social networking sites looking for an unbiased, objective opinion, as compared to the subjective, informative tone on your website.

Through consumer interactions, polls and how your "fans" share conference information, you'll get an idea of how social media played a roll in converting interested attendees into registered participants.

THIRD: Increased Participation

Using Web 2.0 tools can increase engagement from attendees pre, during and post conference. Web 2.0 does not mean a specific change in technology, but instead refers to a major change in how people started using the internet and inspired the creation of thousands of tools and applications that allow users to share content and information with each other. This includes blogs, RSS feeds, videos, wikis, mashups, social-networking sites, online communities and more.

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If you've never used social media before, it will be easy and exciting to see content being shared among "fans". Track how many photos are posted to Flickr during your conference, how many tweets used the event hashtag and how far that information was shared from fans to their peers.

FOURTH: Distribution of Information

National associations can easily empower regional and local chapters with correct information and the ability to share it with prospects. (Check out our blog for a post on developing a social media policy.)

What are you doing?

Asking a staff member what so-and-so is doing about Facebook, or having your IT guy start Twittering is not a social media strategy. The hardest part to measuring ROI for social media is identifying what you want to measure. After that, the world is full of useful tools, calculators, spreadsheets, pie charts and more to help you get those beloved numbers that dictate success or failure.