

The Cision logo is displayed in white, with the letters 'I' and 'S' featuring orange vertical bars. The background is a dark teal color with a pattern of white line-art icons representing various business and technology concepts such as Wi-Fi signals, lightbulbs, gears, charts, and documents.

CISION®

A large, dark silhouette of a megaphone is the central focus. On the left, a person is shown from the waist up, holding the handle of the megaphone. On the right, another person is shown from the waist down, standing next to the megaphone. The background is a dark teal color with a pattern of white line-art icons representing various business and technology concepts such as Wi-Fi signals, lightbulbs, gears, charts, and documents.

SOCIAL LISTENING FOR PR AND COMMS PROS

BREAKTHROUGH THE NOISE

Social listening is an incredibly valuable resource for PR and comms pros; tapping into this stream of information for any brands you're working with ensures you- and they- don't miss a vital part of the conversation around their brand.

You want to be tracking both what clients and prospects are saying on social, not only about your brand or any brand you're working with, but also about your industry and competitors.

Furthermore, social is one of the places earned media often ends up being shared and amplified. It's a place for brands to extend not only their owned media, but amplify earned media and consider a paid strategy. While it's impossible to control the conversation on social, any savvy brand wants to be part of it—or at the very least monitoring it—in order to adjust ongoing campaigns, content strategies and more.

This piece will cover the best practices around all of this (i.e. tagging the journalist and publication when posting a link to media coverage, engaging with your audience, etc.)

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA LISTENING IS IMPORTANT

The concept of social listening shouldn't be a new one to any well-seasoned PR and communications professional, but while you may be familiar with the concept you may not have had the opportunity to take an in-depth dive into its waters in a way that's more specific to the work that you do.

This eBook aims to break down social listening in a comprehensive way that can help PR and comms professionals make sure they aren't missing anything from one of the busiest, noisiest sources of information about consumer trends, tastes and preferences that's out there.

Think of social media as a giant global focus group you can tap into anytime, anywhere. Let's get started.

SOCIAL LISTENING VS. MONITORING

These terms are often used interchangeably, but they are not exactly the same thing:

- **SOCIAL MONITORING:** Monitoring direct mentions of your brand, like people tagging your brand or mentioning it by name.
- **SOCIAL LISTENING:** Expanding to include broader mentions of your industry, competitors, current customers and target audience, and more.

Social listening is therefore more comprehensive and can, over time with quality data, inform your ongoing strategy.

LISTENING VS. MONITORING

Monitoring is a part of listening, but they're not the same. Monitoring covers the most direct mentions of your brand; listening widens the scope to include more data. Let's break it down.



LISTENING

Listening = Polling

The patient accumulation of data over time from a representative sample that allows you to make informed judgements about that audience.

Long-term strategy development

Over time, listening analysis helps you understand your audience and build more effective strategies for generating returns.



MONITORING

Monitoring = Interviewing voters

Usually the loudest ones get the most attention and it's very easy to be swayed by the most recent thing you've heard.

Short-term windows of opportunity

Having your finger constantly on the pulse creates windows of opportunity to create a huge impact. Big risk, big reward.

As you can see from the breakdown, listening is something of a balancing act; you want to gather enough data that you don't jump to conclusions, but you also don't want to collect absolutely everything that you can because it quickly becomes a point of diminishing returns.

GETTING VALUE

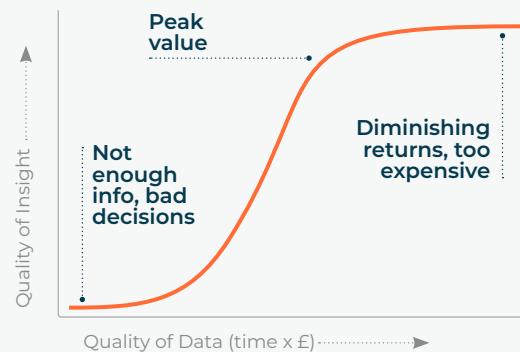
FROM LISTENING

Listening is a balancing act of collecting the right amount of data to get meaningful insights that help you with your goals.

Beware bad decisions. Too little data collected over a short time can lead you down the rabbit hole. Don't overreact.

Don't overload. It is not necessary to collect every piece of data possible. Pollsters don't survey every person in the country.

Find your peak. Ensure you're collecting enough data over enough time to make analysis meaningful.



WHAT TO LISTEN TO

AND FOR

When you're crafting a social listening plan for your brand or a brand you're working with, start with the obvious and work your way out to bigger and more nebulous concepts:



DIRECT BRAND MENTIONS

Not just your brand's direct handles, but also any branded hashtags, nicknames your brand might have, and common misspellings. Include specific products and any key company figures like executives, mascots, and influencers you have longstanding partnerships with.



COMPETITOR MENTIONS

What are your competitors saying? What are people saying about your competitors? What are people saying *to* your competitors? Also pay attention to tone of voice; how do you differentiate your brand in your industry space on social? Is your brand snarky, or formal?



INFLUENCER MENTIONS

Not just influencers you're currently working with or have a longstanding partnership with, but any well-known in the industry—especially if they're working with your competitors. Pay attention to what influencers are talking about in general, also.

Those are the basics you want to start with. Once you get a handle on those, you can widen the scope to include more:

- **INDUSTRY CONVERSATION:** Keep an eye and an ear on the current issues and trends surrounding your industry. This will also help you identify up-and-coming influencers.
- **GENERAL TRENDS:** What are people talking about in the larger business, economic, political, cultural or geographic context your company operates in? This is where you stay ahead of those big cultural moments and decide whether it's a good idea for your brand to tap into them.



LET'S DIVE IN...

TO A METAPHOR

Here's one way to think about social listening for PR and comms pros, especially if you need to convince someone else on your team or higher up in your chain of command that this is a necessary use of your resources. Think of social listening in terms of bodies of water.

When you're learning to swim, you don't (usually) just jump into the deepest part of the ocean. You start small, in a local pool.



POOL

This is the conversation about your brand (for example, Cision).



POND

The is the conversation about your specific sector or targeted industry (for example, PR technology).



LAKE

The conversation about the broader industry category (for example, marketing and marketing technology).



OCEAN

The broadest possible audience for your brand – people who may buy your products, work at your company, invest in your company, or be friends with someone who might do one of those things (for example, software and business).

HOW TO DECIDE

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

So now that you've dipped your brand's toe into the social listening waters and started collecting data, you need to decide what's important.

There is no one-size-fits-all answer, obviously, because the goals you have for your brand will be different from another brand, even another brand you might also be working with.

Those goals will most likely shift over time and any social listening strategy you help craft needs to be flexible enough to take that into account.

With that said, here's a list of good places to start and consider what fits the brand you're working with right now based on the goals they have for their overall comms strategy:

- Themes you see coming up over and over – based on repetition or volume
- Highly positive or negative sentiment
- Influencers or key people in your industry are talking about it
- Major media coverage of something
- Something shows up that's totally new or unique or just interesting
- Something that seems to be picking up steam – look for accelerations or spikes in conversation volume

If you're working with a brand that doesn't know what their goals are yet, social listening can also help craft them. You just need to have the resources to dig into the listening data collected and then turn it into something coherent, cohesive— and realistic.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

THE RIGHT DATA

Once you've got a comprehensive social listening strategy in place and you're filtering out what's important to the brands you're working with, how do you use that data to work on the goals you've established in that brand's overall comms strategy? This is where it gets tricky, but also where it gets good.

Some ideas to get started, because once again it's not a one-size-fits-all situation (the only thing that is, unfortunately, is that everyone should be monitoring their direct brand mentions at the very least):

- **MORE RELEVANT PITCHES:** Keeping an eye on general industry conversations means you're able to identify influencers- including journalists- and keep tabs on them so you can reach them in their preferred place and by their preferred methods.
- **IDEAS FOR FUTURE CAMPAIGNS OR PROJECTS:** Knowing what general cultural trends are being discussed means you'll have fresh ideas to pull into current and future campaigns— as long as you keep it relevant to the brand.
- **INTEL YOU CAN SHARE WITH COLLEAGUES IN PRODUCT OR MARKETING:** Have a general idea of what a competitor is working on? What about the product wishlist of your customers, fans and followers? Take these ideas to your wider team to help all of you thrive and keep your customers happy.

- **OPPORTUNITIES FOR ANGLES ON STORIES YOU CAN TELL ABOUT YOUR BRAND:**

Hopping on a current trend (if it's relevant or you thought of a creative angle), telling a competitive story to capture attention after a competitor shares news, finding whitespace to talk about something new for the brand.

- **STAY AHEAD OF A CRISIS SITUATION:** While this is a topic that can fill its own library, a comprehensive social listening strategy means you won't miss anything while it's bubbling up and you can even catch it and mitigate it before it snowballs into something worse.

WHAT ABOUT

DATA PRIVACY?

Data privacy has become a much more prominent issue over the past few years, and you'll find not only that consumers in general are more informed and anxious about it, but also that regulations are tightening and are more heavily and consistently enforced.

After the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018, Facebook changed the data that was available through its API, which changed the kinds of measurement social media analytics companies were able to do. This was in an effort to minimise the amount of personally identifiable information available to brands and it created a shift in strategy for the entire industry.

Twitter is the best platform to set up comprehensive social listening on because of the scope of the conversations there. However, it's still up to brands and communicators to use that data responsibly; do not use social data in a way that identifies anyone specifically. Look at data at an aggregate level as you analyse it for insights and trends, and practice good hygiene with how you handle it. When you create content and run campaigns, be clear with what you're going to do with the data you collect and always have clear CTAs that actually do what they say. Always allow people to opt out and use caution when enriching social data with any external data.

Be sure you're complying with any data privacy laws like GDPR in Europe and the CCPA in California. Remember that even if a brand you're working with isn't physically located in either of those places, the laws still apply if you have customers who are.

FINALLY

You know people are talking about the brands you work with on social media. Paying attention to these conversations is a valuable use of time. Don't go in with the intent to control the conversation- since that's impossible- but try to understand the needs and wants of your target audience and how you can best provide value to them.

Social monitoring is going to give you the most direct feedback with people intentionally naming and reaching out to any brands you're working with.

Listening will take it further, allowing you to potentially understand the reasons behind the statements being directly made to your brand. You can identify shifts in your industry and adapt as needed, not to mention tweaking any campaigns as needed with ongoing, real-time feedback to work from.

All of this allows you to make smart choices based on data, particularly if you're smart about how much data you're tracking. (And Cision can help with that.)