

Silver Bullet: Manage all social media with a single tool

By Joe Dysart

Rinks looking for a single tool to manage their social media presence across all networks can take heart: dozens of all-in-one solutions are available that will make the most of your presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn et al.

Even better: market research firm Forrester conducted a rigorous study of la crème de la crème of these social media dashboards, and has come up with a list of what it considers 'strong performers.' Essentially, Forrester has done all the advance shopping and legwork for you. So if you're looking for a single tool that will handle virtually every aspect of your social media needs, Forrester suggests you investigate the following:

Sprinklr (<http://www.sprinklr.com/>)

Hearsay Social (<http://hearsaysocial.com/>)

Spredfast (<http://www.spredfast.com/>)

Shoutlet (<http://www.shoutlet.com/>)

Salesforce.com's Buddy Media (<http://www.salesforcemarketingcloud.com/products/social-media-publishing/>)

Adobe Social (<http://www.adobe.com/solutions/social-marketing.html>)

"The days of letting the intern manage the Facebook page are long gone," says Nate Elliot, lead author of the Forrester report on social media dashboards, "Social Relationship Platforms, Q2 2013

(<http://www.forrester.com/The+Forrester+Wave+Social+Relationship+Platforms+Q2+2013/fulltext/-/E-RES94761>). "Most larger marketers now maintain at least ten Facebook pages," Elliot adds. "And marketers aren't just on Facebook anymore. More than 90 percent maintain a presence on Twitter, nearly as many use LinkedIn, and more than half even use Google+." Adds Aaron Everson, president, Shoutlet, "Social marketers continually face a building list of challenges — from execution to analytics — and the pressure to prove market return-on-investment to the C-suite is mounting."

While Forrester stresses that none of the dashboards on its "strong performers" list can be considered perfect, most do go a long way towards pulling together and managing virtually all the elements of a highly effective, and highly interactive, social media presence.

Specifically, most of the products Forrester puts at the front-of-the-pack automate the scheduling and posting of text and multimedia across a wide array of social media networks.

Most also enable a rink to monitor how its brand is faring on social media — both among casual users of Facebook and other networks, as well as more engaged influencers, like bloggers. "And once they've tracked customer questions and comments, these tools help marketers analyze which require attention and then allow them to respond

to those posts," Elliot says.

Moreover, most of the strong performers also help rink staff greatly automate the processing of social media — including reading and analyzing, and sorting out who at the rink should respond to a specific post.

In addition, these "social relationship platforms" help rink marketers manage all their social accounts as well as all the employees permitted to post to those accounts. And most of the solutions "can assign different permission levels to different employees, and offer workflow tools for routing inbound posts to the right teams," Elliot adds. Plus, most of the dashboards can also ensure that select — or even all — outbound posts are reviewed by appropriate staff. A rink owner may want a gander at some posts before they go live, for example, and the special events coordinator may want to fine-tune others.

All told, Forrester evaluated social media dashboards using a 49-point checklist. It also surveyed each vendor about its product, asked for product demos, and interviewed three-to-five actual users of each product. Here's how the "strong performers" Forrester presents as front-runners stack up:

Sprinklr: "Sprinklr offers the most powerful technology on the market," Elliot states flatly. "Sprinklr set out to build a potent technology, and it succeeded." Forrester especially liked how Sprinklr can both auto-analyze inbound posts, and auto-trigger reactions to those posts. On the downside, Forrester found the learning curve for Sprinklr relatively steep.

Hearsay Social: Rinks especially interested in leveraging social media for sales will want to take a much closer look at Hearsay Social, according to Forrester. "It offers sophisticated content sharing and seeding features, and its permissioning and oversight tools are among the best we evaluated," Elliot says. "The future of selling is social," adds Clara Shih, CEO, Hearsay Social. "There is an enormous opportunity for sales leaders to help reps sell in the new way that customers want to buy, drive sales productivity through the roof, and help organizations stay relevant and competitive in the social era." On the downside, some clients were disappointed with Hearsay's reporting, according to Elliot. Plus, the tool is unable to create or post rich content to social media.

Spredfast: "Clients were most pleased with Spredfast's measurement and reporting capabilities," Elliot says. It also helps users monitor posts on a number of sites, and is available as an iPhone app. The downside: While the tool can monitor posts, it cannot analyze those posts. Nor can it automatically tag



Scott Doniger, a vice president at Sprinklr — the most powerful social media dashboard on the market, according to Forrester, a market research firm.

those posts, or route them.

Shoutlet: "Shoutlet doesn't have any one feature that'll steal your heart," Elliot says. "But its long list of very good functionality adds up to our top score for current offering." On the downside, "the company's focus is squarely on tactical social solutions, rather than on helping social media provide broader business value to marketers," Elliot says.

Salesforce.com's Buddy Media: Overall, Forrester found this tool easy-to-use. Plus, Buddy offers one of the better tool sets for posting marketing content to social networks, Elliot says. On the downside, the product has limited monitor-and-respond functionality, and its client satisfaction scored lagged those of the other vendors Forrester evaluated.

Adobe Social: "Adobe gets the basics right," Elliot says. Unlike many of the tools evaluated, Adobe Social is more about measuring social success than creating it, he adds. Still, the product "monitors a broad list of sites and analyzed posts for sentiment and influence," Elliot says. "And it offers good post scheduling and targeting tools." On the downside, the product is no standout in comparison to any of the other tools evaluated.

Says Brad Rencher, a vice president at Adobe, "The ultimate aim is to help social media as a marketing channel mature and prove its worth alongside other digital marketing investments."

Bonus: For companies that want to dig deeper and do extremely detailed comparisons of the strong performers, Forrester also offers a "vendor comparison tool," which enables companies to adapt Forrester's criteria weightings to fit their specific needs.

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