

Chapter 1

Social Metrics Aren't Scary; They Just Measure Value

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 - ▶ Improving your business with metrics
 - ▶ Understanding analytics
 - ▶ Discerning valuable measurements from junk
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Using social media metrics, you can measure results generated from social media and other online activities or see where results are missing. An understanding of these measurements lets you adjust your approach to social media as you go, as well as make improvements that can help you achieve your goals. These metrics may take time to set up, but a good foundation will save you time and money later on.

If you've ever run a radio spot, a television ad, or even an old-school Yellow Pages ad, then you know how difficult it is to gauge the success of those ads — that is, how much business you received from those efforts. Good social media metrics and online tracking can give you these answers. It can tell you to the penny where you need to be spending your time and money and give you constant feedback on your customers' wants and needs — pretty neat, right?

Figuring Out the Metrics and Measurement Thing

You may have heard of the term *social media metrics* but have no idea what they actually are. The term *metrics* can mean several things, but generally speaking, a metric is a measurement that allows you to quantify and evaluate something. Social media metrics, then, are simply measurements that help you understand if what you're doing in social media is working for you or for your customers — or not — in a very detailed and concrete way.

The easiest way to think of metrics is to think of them as a way to figure out *if* what you're doing online is working for you, *how* it is (or isn't) working for you, and as a road map that shows you how you can tweak and adjust what you're doing online to work *better*. Don't worry if the idea of using metrics seems intimidating. I'm not talking quantum physics here — just spreadsheets and reports and data crunching. *If I can do it, so can you.*

Because you're reading this book, you probably already know what social media is — you just want to find out how to measure the various aspects of social media and to improve the ways you use this technology. This means you've graduated from a beginner's level of social media engagement and now see the potential social media has for you. In fact, if you've already installed Google Analytics somewhere, even if you aren't really using it yet, or if you've investigated things like Klout scores, Twitter Grader measurements, or some other type of assessment value, however silly that value may be, it tells me you want to do more. That's good news!

Metrics measure what happens to the content and the conversations you create online on social networks, blogs, and websites. Each piece of content you generate, whether it is a simple comment, a long blog post, a new website, an app, or a status update, is designed to get some kind of response.

Response, however, is a hard concept to measure, so it helps to break it down into more concrete terms:

- ✔ **Attention:** Attention is a loose way of describing how people see, and how *long* people see, your content. You see this reflected in time spent on a web page, how many minutes a tweet continues to be retweeted or replied to, how long a status update stays in Facebook's Most Interesting section of the newsfeed, how long a comment thread is, how long the duration of shares lasts on Google Plus, and more.
- ✔ **Reach:** Reach sounds impressive, but it really just refers to how far your content travels and for how long. As a measurement, reach indicates a combination of quality content, high attention levels, and connectivity to appropriate influencers. A post with a decent reach value gets reshared dozens of times on various social networks and is commented on and discussed as well, especially over the course of hours, days, or months. New attention to your post's content through these shares indicates good reach as well.
- ✔ **Influencers:** I can describe influencers in many ways, but for the purpose of this book, influencers are people who share or interact with your content and by doing so inspire others to share and interact with it as well. Influencers can often affect actual sales and lead generation, so they can improve your bottom line if you find the right ones to target.
- ✔ **Interest:** Related to attention, interest helps make content both sticky and shareable. For example, 14 consecutive posts about your lunch may appeal to a small audience, but you would receive a failing grade on the

interest measurement scale. Content about your lunch in Italy on your speaking tour, however, may have a much higher interest score. Being picky about the content you generate and creative in how and where you share it will increase interest overall.

- ✓ **Views:** As you explore the world of analytics, you'll notice several different types of metrics called *views*. A view can be the first time someone looks at something you shared, or it can be each time a person visits your page. You often see views described as “unique,” “repeat,” and more.
- ✓ **Actions:** Actions is my catchall term for the way people interact with your sites and content. Sharing links, subscribing to newsletters, requesting quotes, leaving comments, clicking links, leaving reviews, and downloading files are all actions.
- ✓ **Community:** Successful online businesses develop a community around their social media activity. Measuring community may be difficult, but it's not impossible. Increasing this metric can help you with your overall success. A solid community often encourages your customers to act as a champion of whatever you do — every business needs as many champions as they can get to succeed in a tight economy!
- ✓ **Listening:** Keeping your ear to ground is the most important metric of all. If you aren't listening to what people are saying about your brand, and where they are saying it, you can't modify your business plans accordingly to make sure that your online efforts convert into sales.



Don't bother obsessing over individual metrics like page views. Sure, having a site with hundreds of thousands of views looks great, but if your visitors aren't clicking links, engaging with the site, buying your products or services, or sharing any of your content, you won't get anywhere. Cast a wide metrics net instead and evaluate many different aspects of your return on investment to see what works for you.

Applying Metrics to Business Use

Metrics, measurements, spreadsheets, link tracking, campaigns, goals — it can all be a little overwhelming. In fact, it took me a long time to get over my fears — especially my fear of math — when I first started in consulting. When I figured out that some simple bits of code, a few spreadsheets, and a handful of other tools and tricks make everything easy, I never looked back. My goal is to make metrics feel that easy for you as you apply them to your business.

One of the first challenges a business has is to figure out where to apply metrics. The most likely answer, of course, is everywhere you can. That's quite a task, however, especially if you've never used metrics, so the following sections describe some key measurements.

Your website

Your business website is the most important location for your metrics. It's the one place online that you completely own.



Third-party sites like Facebook and others own the data you place there. Not only do you get only the metrics the third party site tells you are important and nothing more, they can take the photos, notes, and other content you put on their servers and use it to make money! Now why would any savvy business want that to happen?

If you've put all your eggs into the Facebook, Tumblr, or Google free-site basket, I highly recommend you put down this book long enough to get a hosting account and at least set up a self-hosted version of a WordPress blog. (WordPress uses an open-source content agreement and allows users to retain ownership of their own material.) Post everything related to your business on your own website first so that you own it and then link out elsewhere to share.



Your *domain name* is your Internet calling card for your business — the address where folks will go to find you. Think of it as the online version of your brick-and-mortar store or office. Pick a good name that is easy to remember! Once you have a domain, you need hosting (a place to put your web files). Web hosting is cheap these days! For \$5 to \$20 each month, you can get an account on Bluehost, Go Daddy, DreamHost, Rackspace, or any one of a dozen or so reputable web hosts. After you have hosting, a simple blog can get you started.

Your e-mail

E-mail is going to be a backbone of your online marketing and business. The great news is that nowadays you can apply metrics to your e-mail, too. Using an e-mail service provider, you can track who opens which e-mail, who reports you for spam instead of simply unsubscribing, what the reader clicks, how long they spend on each page, where they share your e-mail info, and so much more. E-mail has certainly come a long way since the days of "You've got mail."

Your images

You can apply metrics to any photos or image files you upload. In fact, Google rolled out an image search function this year that finds what you need by searching the picture (graphic) itself, not words.

Image search results have been a leading traffic generator for websites for the past several years. It pays to pay attention to the details when you're placing your content online and planning to track how it works for you.



Don't forget your titles, tags, captions, and other helpful file data. (And of course, make sure that you check the copyright details of images before use!)

Social networks

Many social networks, such as Facebook, Google+, YouTube, SlideShare, Twitter, and LinkedIn, offer varying levels of insights, metrics, and statistics for you to use right on their sites. This data allows you to get at least a rudimentary snapshot of how your content and engagement is doing for you online.



Some of these metrics are only superficial. However, you can go deeper with these data sets from simplistic and incomplete methods like Klout or HubSpot's Graders, to third-party services like ShortStack in tandem with Google Analytics, or something more robust that you put in place yourself.

Traditional collateral

Don't forget to track your traditional collateral. That's right — use online tools like hashtags and offline tools like good signage to direct traffic you receive offline and track the attention you can bring online from that offline traffic.

Tracking offline traffic and traditional marketing efforts, such as print ads, in-store sales, radio spots, and so on, requires a bit more effort than online metrics, but you can get at least a rudimentary picture of how your traditional marketing is doing by strategic cross promotion and general crossover of key elements and trackable phrases, QR codes, and links.

Getting a Closer Look at Analytics

“Measure Everything — you cannot improve what you cannot measure.”

—Peter Stern, CEO of bit.ly and Founder of Datek
<http://erany.com/blog>

Social media sites are so unassuming that they make it easy for anyone to use them. This means that folks may find personal success on social media but not have the strong business background necessary to take that success further. I'm here to tell you that while studying metrics can't magically give you business savvy, anyone can learn how to read the data they collect and use it to improve what they are doing online.

Metrics and analytics are fairly interchangeable words both indicating measurement. People have many reasons for wanting to track analytics. Four common reasons include

- ✔ **Sales generation:** Any good business owner will want to use metrics to track sales and to generate additional sales from their activity online. Metrics are an integral part of the *sales funnel*, which is a way to visualize the sales process for your company that tracks the process from the wide top of the funnel (lead generation) to the narrow bottom (actual sales). In fact, good metrics will turn your sales funnel upside down, making your entire sales process more efficient and getting your business better returns overall.
- ✔ **Qualifying leads:** Leads, while part of your overall sales process, are an entity all to themselves. By creating separate metrics campaigns to track qualified leads, you'll find you are able to generate more qualified leads in a shorter time frame. What's more, you'll discover when and where you may be wasting effort, enabling you to shift your focus to better lead-generating sites and sources.
- ✔ **Focus groups:** Focus groups and crowdsourcing are important to your business. *Crowdsourcing* just means asking a group of people to answer a question and help you define an idea or reach a solution, based on the "wisdom of the crowd" philosophy. If you have solid metrics in place, you can get real-time feedback on the ideas, changes, and thought processes behind your brand and its products. Sure, expensive and controlled focus groups still have their place, but online metrics help broaden your reach when you don't need a more formal solution.
- ✔ **Competitive intelligence:** That's right — competitive intelligence. Metrics can help you spy on your competition. Pretty cool, right? If you're using keyword and search-based metrics well, you can tell where your competition is headed and what they've been working on. Sometimes you can tell where they're going before they even know themselves. Now that's a stealth trick you want to have in your bag.
- ✔ **Customer service:** Metrics can also help you take good care of your existing customers. Metrics help you listen in real time to what people are saying about your brand and products, enabling you to respond in a timely fashion and do what you can to give them the best experience possible. If you're really sharp, you can pull some of that competitive intelligence magic in here as well. Listen to your competition's feedback and solve their customer's problems if you can, especially if they're slow due to not listening — that's certainly one way to get the attention of a potential customer.
- ✔ **Tracking influence:** Tracking influence can get tricky, as influence has to be defined to be useful. Influence may mean number of followers on a service or reshares of content in some campaigns. In other campaigns, someone with fewer followers may wield more influence if the network they've built results in more sales or actions on your campaigns. Before you build out metrics for influence, be sure you outline the definition of what kind of influence you need for your goal.



Every metrics campaign needs a baseline, a snapshot of where you are today, for comparison later. You may as well start putting this metrics stuff into practice right now. Put this book down and make a list of all the social media sites on which your brand has a presence. Not online? Write that down also. Then

add detail: List how many fans, followers, page views, outposts, and so on you have today. Take a look at how you measure up. Do a quick search on Google and Facebook to see whether fans or customers have created pages for you, too. Then, when you finish this book and are a metrics whiz, you can see how far you've come.

Discovering the Kinds of Social Metrics Services Out There

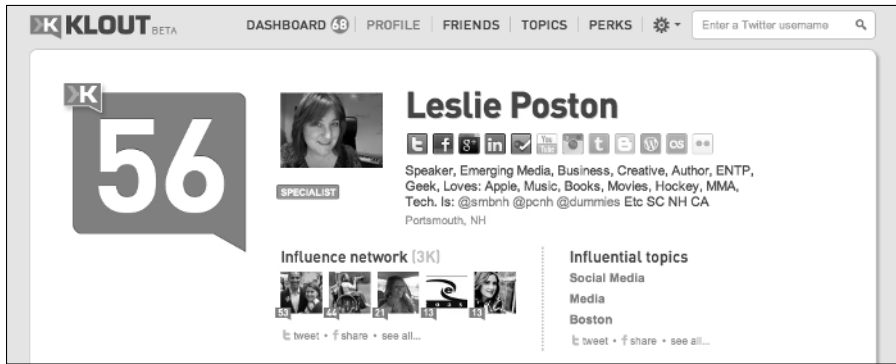
So many types of metrics services are out there that it would be impossible to list them all in this chapter. However, here's a quick run-through of the basic types to get you started:

- ✓ **Single-metrics services providers:** This third-party metric service measures only one thing. One example is Twitter Grader, made by HubSpot, a service that loosely measures exactly what it sounds like — your Twitter account's reach and activity (see Figure 1-1). Another is Klout, a service that measures volume across several networks (Twitter, Google+, Facebook, and more), and then rewards high scorers with small perks sponsored by brands (see Figure 1-2).



Figure 1-1: Twitter Grader helps you measure your Twitter account's reach and activity.

Figure 1-2:
Klout evaluates your volume across networks to arrive at a score for your social-media performance.



More detailed single-metric services like Smarterer measure your individual actual knowledge of a service, such as Twitter, LinkedIn, or even Microsoft Word, in the form of a weighted test and then gives you a badge that you can display that will update as you retake tests and improve your knowledge (see Figure 1-3). That's a concrete measurement of what you know about something delivered in a trackable badge and valuable for companies who want to display that their employees know their stuff and indicate that customers can trust them.

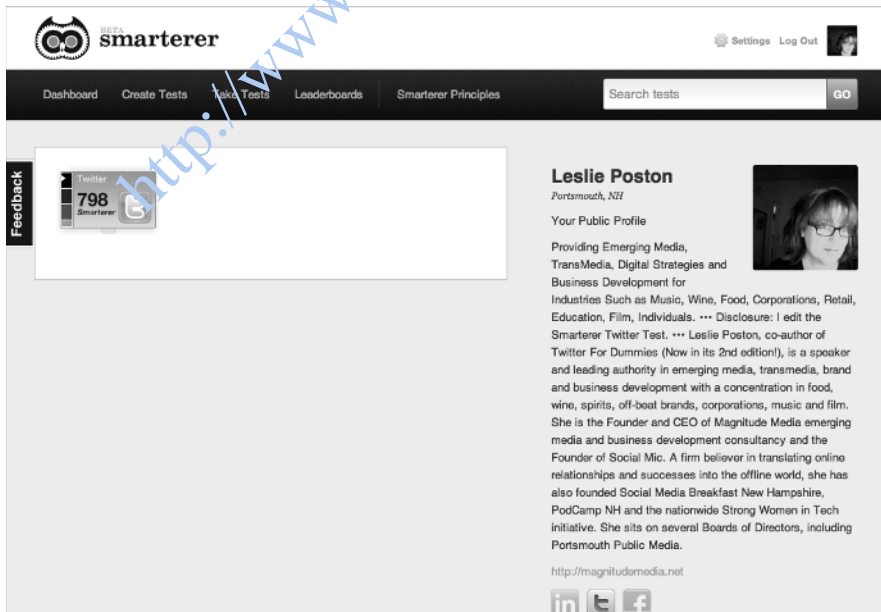


Figure 1-3:
A Twitter-related knowledge badge at Smarterer.com.



- ✓ **One-site metrics:** Some sites, such as Facebook or SlideShare, offer their own insights and analytics services that track your metrics and traction on their site. These metrics can be pretty detailed, but because they look at only one site, they can hardly be considered comprehensive.

I cover how to make one-site data part of your overall metrics tracking in Part III.

- ✓ **Advanced metrics:** With services like Google Analytics, you can track your metrics down to the most microscopic result. Not only can you track them online, you can do advanced tricks, such as exporting your metrics to spreadsheets or massaging your data to wring the most information out of it that you can. These advanced techniques are where metrics become truly powerful.

Determining Which Measurements Matter and Which Ones Are Junk

It's human nature to want things to be easy and to take little time. Busy people have important things to do! Be careful, however. Some of the junk metrics available online rely on folks who are looking for a quick fix.

Luckily, you aren't one of those people, or you wouldn't be reading this book right now. The following sections help you separate the measurement pitfalls from the measurement gold mines.

Beware of single-metrics services providers

That is, beware of services like Klout and Grader. Setting aside the scary privacy issues some of these services have (I'm looking at you, Klout — see the upcoming “Safeguard your privacy!” section) any metric that measures only volume or quantity can tell you only one part of the whole story. These metrics work best when considered alongside other metric indicators, such as reach, conversion, sentiment, click-throughs, views, location data, device data, demographics, and more.

Know which measurements are important

Measurements that matter are the ones that tell you clearly what people are doing to interact, engage, and use your stuff online. Are you getting forms filled out, tweets and retweets, comments, newsletter subscriptions, sales,

sales leads, and more? Or are you being ignored in the sea of online brands? Even if you're getting results, you should also be tracking what kind of online person, site, or brand is getting you the most sticky results. Retweets are nice, but not all retweets lead to action. Pay attention to more than how noisy or popular someone is.

Note: *Sticky* refers to content that resonates with the viewer and remains “stuck” in their mind. *Noisy* refers to that online user who just can't seem to tone down the number of updates that they make and who doesn't filter out mundane updates — so they have volume without quality.

Safeguard your privacy!



Many automated metrics services are worth trying, but some are dangerous phishing scams. Be careful if you're asked to give a password to use a service — double-check the service's reputation online before handing your password over.

OAuth services (services that ask you to log in to your account on another service, such as Twitter, and then click a button to connect — meaning you don't have to share that password to link the services) are somewhat better in that they don't require your password, but many want too much information about you, and they often demand access to your accounts beyond what they need. Klout is one example: Using it gives the service access to your private messages on sites like Twitter, and to the people in your extended network — even if those people aren't Klout users!

Look beyond follower count

When you're seeking influencers to help spread your message, look beyond follower count. Someone with 50 loyal followers that are fully engaged and invested in their network will often get more results for you than someone with 5,000 people in their network that ignore them and don't engage with their online interactions. Use good metrics to filter out the best influencers and campaign targets for you.