



Is content more important than conversation?

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I bet you've heard plenty about the importance of conversation in social media.

We've all heard companies must engage their customers online. We've probably said it ourselves.

But is conversation the most important thing in social media?

What's the value of conversation?

Few will question the value of conversation. It extends customer service and makes PR more personal. But does conversation improve the bottom line?

Case studies suggest social companies do better than their non-social competitors.

If we've proven conversational companies are more profitable, is it because conversation made them more visible?

There are more reliable ways to reach the masses.

You could [advertise on Facebook for \\$0.25 per thousand views](#), and you wouldn't be subject to that notoriously unreliable viral phenomenon.

Did companies who got social first simply get media (and its associated benefits) because they were first? Can late-adopters get the same benefits? Will we always have to do something novel to get noticed? Do social prospects buy more because we talked to them?

Or was it because they already liked our brand more anyway, and that's why they talked to us?

Have you really tracked how many of your new customers heard about you because you got their attention first from a social media platform?

What are we talking about, anyway?

Business card cartoonist [Hugh McLeod](#) wrote a post about [social objects](#) years ago. Let me paraphrase: People need something to talk about. Let's give them something to talk about.

In day-to-day life, we talk about art, TV shows, movies, fashion accessories, and sports games—all creations or performances. Businesses use blog posts, whitepapers, and infographics to create conversation or get a lead form filled out.

That's content marketing. It's not the same as conversation. Conversations without any content are less likely to go anywhere. Your executive suite cares where conversations go—they want them to go toward the bottom line.

Conversation isn't enough

Talk is cheap. Conversation is ephemeral, too easy, and not as valuable. Quantity conversation doesn't make up for lack of quality content. And yes, content is harder to do than conversation.

You have to create value with content. This is why books are valued. This is why people love infographics—they look valuable and usually are valuable. It's not easy to do, because it's hard to create value out of nothing.

Quality content creates better conversations. If your search and social popularity aren't great, you may not have enough content, or your content may not be good enough.

If they aren't talking to you, you're invisible

Facebook reaches at least four times as many people than Twitter. You probably heard about [EdgeRank](#), the algorithm Facebook uses to filter what posts people see in their newsfeed.

Do you know only 3 percent of fans ever return to your business's facebook page after liking it? Are you aware your Facebook page fans, if they aren't liking and commenting on your posts, will stop seeing your posts?

Did you know [the average Facebook page reaches just 17 percent of its fans?](#)

The average page's posts are not being seen by 83 percent of their fans.

Mediocre engagement leads to horrible visibility.

We must get more likes and comments on our Facebook posts if we want more of our fans to see them. We already wanted more retweets and clicks so we could demonstrate an impressive number of visits to websites from social media.

Now we need to go figure out what content is most engaging and viral, why that content works, and then reproduce that success. We need to use tools such as [InfiniGraph](#) to discover what content is working best for us and our competitors.

Then we need to monitor which content creates the most leads and sales for the company, because controversy doesn't necessarily create sales. Oh shoot—this social media thing has to be connected to direct marketing and sales? Is it PR or is it marketing? I'm not sure there's a line anymore. Everyone needs to learn new skills.

Start caring about which content is most engaging and viral

Google's "[Search Plus Your World](#)" makes all search results more social. You're more likely to see search results for things your friends have shared or created. One of the biggest effects this will have in the next couple years is to move more of the search experts away from link building and more toward content creation.

These guys live on analytics. They get off on turning a 250 percent ROI campaign into a 700 percent ROI campaign. They'll bring their nerdy analytics focus to the task and make sure the content they share gets lots of tweets, likes, plus-ones, shares, and comments. In other words, if you don't get quantitative about your content, these geeks are going to beat the pants off you.

Brian Carter is the author of the bestselling books "[The Like Economy: How Businesses Make Money With Facebook](#)" and "[Facebook Marketing: Leveraging Facebook's Features For Your Marketing Campaigns](#)" (3rd edition). A version of this post first appeared on [Spin Sucks](#).