

What Are Your Customers and Competitors Buzzing About?

6 things to listen for on social media

It's so important to actively listen to what's being said about your business, wherever your customers may be talking. You should ask for customer feedback via online surveys, in your email newsletters, on Facebook and Twitter, and by using Facebook's Questions feature. **Free tools and services** such as NutshellMail, Google Alerts, and HootSuite let you aggregate and track your social media activity, so you can see and hear what customers and industry colleagues are buzzing about.

Of course, there's a tidal wave of information churning through social media. Some of it is relevant to you, but much of it is noise. So what exactly should you be listening for? Filter what you're "hearing" into these six buckets.

1. Things You Are Doing Right

Are your customers raving about you? That's great! Which of your menu items bring out the most favorable reviews? Is there an employee that customers say is doing a particularly great job? Ask your biggest fans if they'd be willing to share their raves in print or video testimonials. Make your happy customers' stories part of your story—one you share in your email newsletter, on your website, and via social media.

2. Ways You Can Improve

On the flip side, there are going to be times where you've fallen short in satisfying your customers. Thankfully, social consumers aren't shy about posting complaints in public places. Always remember, feedback is a gift. If you do something wrong, make it

really, really right. Stay ahead of customer grievances posted on social media websites. Catch them early, respond quickly, and fix the problem before a quiet trickle turns into a loud waterfall.

3. Ideas for New Products, Menu Items, or Promotions

Sort through your favorable customer reviews to spot trends and opportunities. Is there an aspect of your restaurant's offerings that could be expanded, based on customer needs and feedback? Is a niche audience emerging that you could be marketing to? Are customers applauding a favorite dish that you could feature in a special promotion? Look for opportunities to solve a problem or fill an unmet need. These may be within your own operation or that of your competition.



4. What Your Audience Is Talking About in General

Social media provides a valuable glimpse into your customers' personal world—their interests, problems, successes, and desires. Listen to what your audience members are talking about to each other, including your Twitter followers, Facebook fans, and members of other online social communities. Listen for mentions of your peers and competitors, and note what they're doing right and wrong. You may discover good ideas for developing and marketing your own business.

5. What Others in Your Industry Are Talking About

No one can afford to operate in a void. In today's hyper-competitive marketplace, it's important to be aware of what your industry colleagues are talking about. What are the new trends? How are changes in the economy affecting your business or organization? How are your competitors engaging their customers? What can you learn from their successes and mistakes? Pay attention

to industry news, trends, and other hot topics emerging on social media—and join the conversation.

6. News and Events That Connect to Your Business

Listen for how local, national, and world events may affect your business and customers, directly or indirectly. Where it makes sense, weave those topics into conversations you start and follow on social media. Maybe it's a news or human interest story in your local community, a weather event in your region, national or world news that somehow relates to your business, or even sports and entertainment happenings.

Customers are more likely to engage with businesses that demonstrate a connection to the community and the world around them. That's part of showing the human side of your business. So don't be shy about jumping in to the mix. Listen *and* speak up! Participating in social conversations extends your network, engages consumers, demonstrates your expertise, and builds trust in your brand.

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