

# **PART 1: LEARN TO LISTEN**

**SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS**

**[FACEBOOK.COM/DELLSOCIALMEDIA](https://www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia)**

powered by:



## OVERVIEW

For a company of any size to successfully participate in social media, it's absolutely essential to take time to listen to the conversation online. We like to use the "dinner party" analogy. You wouldn't walk into the middle of a dinner party and start shouting about topics that only you want to discuss. You would introduce yourself, listen to people and then join the conversations. The same holds true online and in social media.

Listening to customers, prospects and influencers – and using their feedback to shape business innovation – is the foundation of all successful social media programs. In this section, we will share tools, techniques and best practices to help you get started.

## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

By monitoring the online conversation happening in [blogs](#), [forums](#), [social networks](#) and other [social media](#) channels, small businesses can bring the voices of their customers directly into their businesses and cut down on the need for expensive research. In most cases, you'll find that people are already talking about you and your industry online. You can learn a lot by just listening. For instance:

- The volume and tonality of online conversation about your company, your competitors, your industry and issues you care about.
- The key influencers driving the conversation. While there are more than 170 million blogs and just as many forums, you'll likely find that about 20-30 influencers are driving the conversation in your space.
- Your customers' likes, dislikes, wants and needs.
- Your competitors' activities.

Insights gained from listening can guide a company's social media strategy (i.e., where to participate, who to target, what type of content to create), as well as marketing and business innovation.

## GETTING STARTED

There are several ways to start a listening program at your company. Here are some ideas:

- **Discover where people are talking about your brand and your industry online.** Use free tools such as [Google Blog Search](#) and Technorati to identify blogs and other types of social media that talk about you and topics that are important to you.
- **Set up a blog/RSS reader.** [RSS](#) stands for Real Simple Syndication, which is a format for delivering frequently updated online content such as blog entries, podcasts and news to an RSS reader, such as [Bloglines](#), [Netvibes](#) or [Google Reader](#). This allows you to view updates from Web sites you care about, all in one place, rather than visiting multiple sites each day. You can get started in two simple steps:
  - o Step 1 Create an account with one of the services mentioned above. It's easy and it's free.
  - o Step 2: Subscribe to RSS feeds for relevant blogs, news and other sites. Just look for the internationally-recognized, orange [RSS symbol](#).
  - o Step 3: Make it a habit to read new posts in your reader every morning.

## GETTING STARTED (continued)

- Share insights and take action. Develop a process for gathering, analyzing and sharing these insights, and importantly, find ways to act on them. For instance, is a customer praising you online? [Say thank you](#) by commenting on the customer's blog or forum post. Is a customer complaining about your company? Reach out and fix the situation.
- Explore advanced listening platforms. The free listening tools suggested above are good, but they each have their limitations. Depending on your company's specific need, you may also choose to explore more advanced, subscription-based listening platforms such as [Radian6](#). Tell them that Dell suggested you call for a special offer.

## BEST PRACTICES

Based on our experience at Dell and conversations with small- and medium-size business owners, we've identified several best practices for listening, such as:

- Assign a team or individual to lead a listening program for the company, but encourage all marketing professionals, as well as your owner or CEO, to engage in active listening in some way.
- Make sure that your corporate communications and IT policies allow employees to access social media Web sites at work. Dell recently [opened up social media Web sites](#) to all employees to allow them to listen and engage in conversations online.
- Don't focus solely on blogs. Your customers may also be talking about you in forums and places like [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).
- Don't only listen for conversations about you. Listen for conversations about your competitors, your industry and issues that are important to your customers. It's easy to set up folders for these categories in your RSS reader.
- Take action based on what you learn, and let your customers know that you're listening and implementing their ideas. One way to do this is to blog about ideas under review and ideas in action. We'll discuss corporate blogging in an upcoming guide.

## CASE

[GelPro](#), the manufacturer of anti-fatigue kitchen floor mats, monitors the online conversation about its brand daily. Recently, they found a negative review on Amazon. They identified the customer and resolved the situation. The customer had moved and was not aware that GelPro had attempted to resolve his issue long before his review appeared on Amazon. The result: GelPro turned a dissatisfied customer into a satisfied one. He withdrew his negative Amazon review.

## **ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS**

Visit [www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia](http://www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia) to read all eight guides written by Dell's Small Business and Communities & Conversations teams:

- Part 1: Learn to Listen
- Part 2: Join the Conversation
- Part 3: Start a Blog
- Part 4: Tap into Twitter
- Part 5: Crowdfund Your Next Big Idea
- Part 6: Harness the Power of Facebook
- Part 7: Share Photos and Videos Online
- Part 8: Measure Your Success Online

We hope you will join this Facebook community, share your own ideas, and continue the conversation with Dell and small businesses around the world.