

Q&A: Stephanie Dlugopolski of Johnsonville Sausage Talks Social Listening

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The pandemic has sparked new use cases for **social listening**, an underutilized tool in marketers' work belts. But some brands, like Johnsonville Sausage, were already well-acquainted with the concept. Stephanie Dlugopolski, the company's senior manager of PR and social media, said her team has utilized social listening for nearly a decade. It has allowed them to not only monitor conversations about the brand, but also see how consumers react to larger issues.

We spoke with Dlugopolski about Johnsonville's use of social listening: how the tool informs content strategy, the advancements and limitations of social listening technology, and how its return on investment (ROI) is measured.

How do you define social listening, and what is your approach to using it?

We define social listening as getting the consumer's point of view. That includes listening to conversations around our business and trying to understand consumers' reactions toward a new ad campaign or product. We also listen outside our business for responses to larger cultural or social issues.

How does social listening inform your marketing campaigns?

We tend to use listening more for insights on product development and early responses to new product launches. For example, we may look into whether people want more turkey sausage. Do they want more spices? Less sodium? We'll share those findings with our brand and innovation teams. Listening also helps us understand whether content is working or not.

Can you provide an example of how you've used social listening?

A couple of years ago, we started noticing that the ketogenic diet was gaining traction, and a lot of people would tag one of our products as an ingredient in their meal. They'd show off what they ate and talk about how many grams of protein and calories it had. At the time, we had no keto recipe content whatsoever. So, we showed our team the data. Then, we came up with about 25 different recipes over the next six to nine months. That gave us good content, which helped other people think about how our sausages fit into keto diets.

Have you been relying on social listening more during the pandemic?

No, social listening hasn't been relied on more. That's because we've seen it as a critical piece of our social marketing arsenal at all times. What's different, though, is that we've also been using it to listen for more external purposes. How are people talking about eating at home? What problems do they have now that they're cooking three meals a day—when maybe they were cooking only one pre-pandemic?

How has the social listening landscape evolved in the past few years, and what are the current limitations?

There are definitely a lot more social listening tools available. For us as a social marketing team, it has been a challenge to keep up with which strengths some platforms have over others. The other challenge is that a lot of these listening tools are still limited.

More conversations are happening beyond Twitter and Facebook. In the past few years, we've seen more conversations on Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn than we ever have before. But it's hard to get information from Stories that are posted on Facebook and Instagram, and it's very

hard to listen on LinkedIn. So, there's a lot more listening to be done. The challenge is working with the limited number of tools that help you get to those conversations.

How do you measure ROI for social listening?

The success of social listening depends on whether we can get the data and insights to more people at our company, outside social marketing. It's about sharing insights with our innovation team and letting them know that we should be looking at a certain product or flavor profile. That's how we measure the ROI: when we're not just keeping the information within our own team—we're sharing it with others who can do something good with it.