

# Moving from hearing to listening

By [Jaco Pienaar](#)

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Social networking has changed the way consumers engage with brands. The likes of Facebook and Twitter mean people can more easily question things like quality, service levels, and product reliability. This forces brands to respond or risk facing reputational damage.

But is there a difference between hearing what consumers are saying and actively listening?

Author Stephen Covey once said that most people do not listen with the intent to understand, but rather with the intent to reply. Unfortunately, social networking has exacerbated this. As easy as it is for a consumer to post a negative comment without thinking it through, so too is it for a company to respond without considering the potential impact of its 'official comment'.



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## Social networking mistakes

The internet is littered with examples of social networking mistakes (we touched on a few in our [previous column](#)). Some are due to technical glitches, while others are a result of brands reacting blindly to criticism or complaints. Irrespective, companies would do well to start listening to what people are saying about them.

And who is better at listening than a monitoring and analysis agency? After all, these agencies have to keep their fingers on the pulse of what is said about their clients in the media. Given the nature of the connected world, this media has to extend beyond the traditional pillars of print, broadcast, and online, and embrace social networking as well.

While media houses are also using these tools to disseminate content, the key component of social networking is getting a view of consumer sentiment. While there are still many people who do not use social networking, it still provides an indication of the brand value of a company. It is also a cost-effective way for companies to do polls and get immediate feedback from their target market (assuming of course that the target market is connected consumers).

## Listen first

The value that the monitoring and analysis agency brings to play is the fact that it can perform sentiment analysis based on what it finds. But it needs to be remembered that this analysis means nothing if the potential influence of those people the brand engages with are not factored in.

This monitoring has to be done in real-time with the client informed about issues as and when they arise. Those agencies who are able to differentiate themselves do so with the level of analysis and support they provide their clients.

It is pointless to push social network engagement if that exposure is not reviewed as it happens. By partnering with an agency that is able to do analysis based on the interactions not only happening in the social space, but also in the rest of the media landscape, companies are better able to respond and gauge the success (and failures) of their actions.

So next time you are considering whether or not to follow the conversations online or to respond to criticism, remember that it is better to listen first thanks to the assistance of a trusted monitoring and analysis partner.

## ABOUT JACO PIENAAR

Jaco is an MA Information Science graduate who specialises in research, analytical framework development, and content analysis. His thesis was on Intellectual Capital measurement and he applies this to his framework developments as well as knowledge strategies. Professionally, Jaco has worked in the journalism field, academic environment, multi-national research environment, and media analysis environment. He is currently the Chief Knowledge Officer at Professional Evaluation and Research.

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