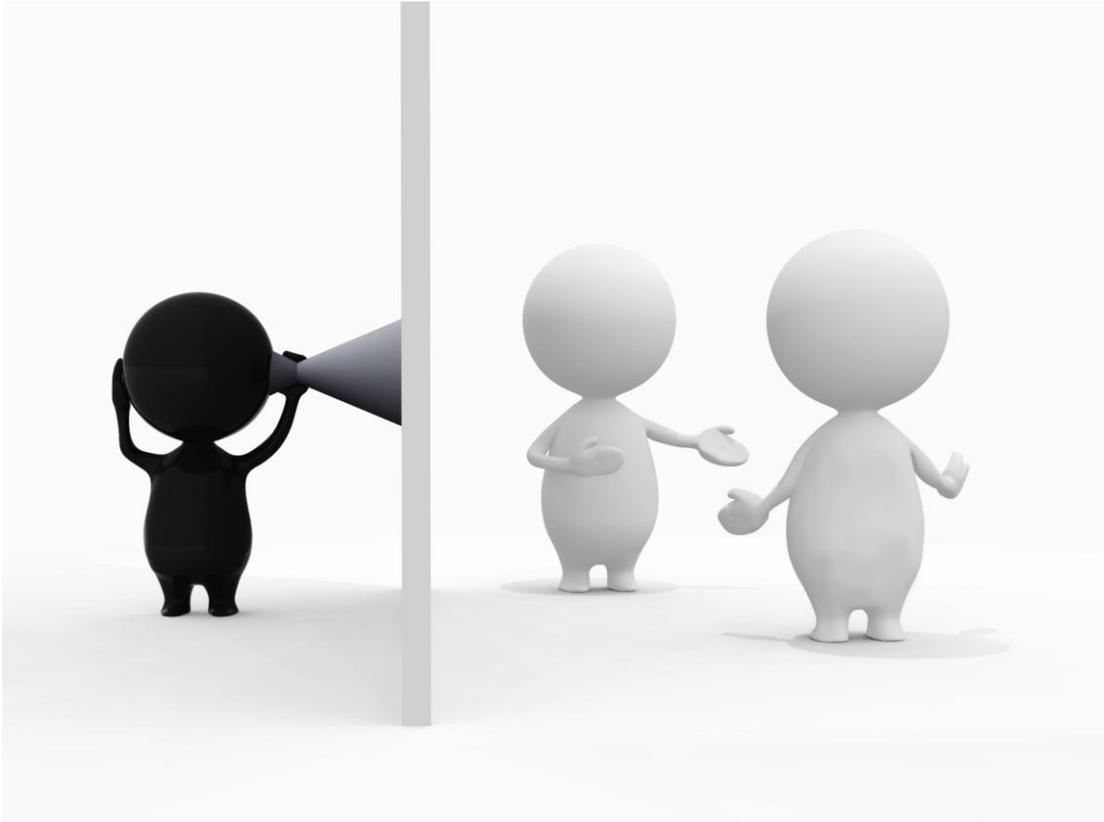

Turning conversations into insights: A comparison of Social Media Monitoring Tools



A white paper from FreshMinds Research

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1. Executive Summary

Once upon a time, social media monitoring was a niche activity, often undertaken by PR agencies keen to make sure that a rant by a disgruntled customer on an obscure blog didn't end up on the front pages of the national press. As the level of conversation has increased so has its significance and usefulness to brands¹ and to a wider range of departments. For example, Customer Service teams can listen out for customer issues online and then and resolve them. Competitor Intelligence departments can find out what customers are saying about competitors' products. PR managers can get early warning of pending PR disasters before they hit main-stream media and most of all, by listening first, companies can be better prepared to join online conversations and become 'social'. Instead of revealing what were typically the extremes of opinion of a small but vocal minority, social media monitoring now brings observational research to a mass audience.

Many online conversations can be accessed easily and for free, using Google or other search engines. Simply using your brand name as a search term, or using phrases that are associated with your brand (e.g. for Starbucks you could search for "Starbucks" or "whole bean coffee") you can find conversations that are related to your brand. Taking that process a step further you can set up Google Alerts so that you get an email when someone mentions your keywords.

However, if you search in this way you'll probably end up with hundreds of thousands of returned results and a limited number of ways to categorise and then analyse the data further. You will also get a mixture of professional and user generated content. It is possible to use some free buzz tracking tools to harvest social media sources. For example Omgili and Board Tracker are great ways to search forums. But until Google enters the social media monitoring market, the best way for enterprises to track social media is by using a paid-for tool.

A vast number of software and services companies have created software tools to search and categorise this wealth of social media data. These are known as social media monitoring tools, and it is important to note that the industry itself is still in a nascent, ever-changing state.

These tools deal with the issues of gathering, categorising and analysing online conversations. They use web crawling technology similar to search engines in the way that they read online conversations. However, unlike search engines, the tools clean, de-duplicate and categorise the conversations and then store them in a database. As our report will show, some tools do this better than others.

Social media monitoring tools also allow you to enter Boolean search strings into a database so that you can customise the way you view the results. The tools count the conversations that contain your search terms and provide you with the ability to display this information in charts. Most tools also allow you to sort by location and media type (e.g. Twitter or blogs) and at the cutting edge, some social media monitoring tools provide workflow management process that can help you disseminate conversations within your organisation, others are starting to

¹ According to Nielsen, consumer recommendations have now become the most powerful form of advertising (78% of people trust customer reviews)

combine buzz tracking with CRM in a bid to create single-customer-view social CRM. And for those who don't only want to listen, but also want to engage, there are some tools that allow you to respond to conversations across the web from a single dashboard. While there are tools out there promising to reveal everything from online sentiment to the effect of 'influencers', the challenge for researchers is how to pick the right tool (or tools) for the job. It's not realistic to think that one tool can meet the entire business's objectives – some are designed for reactive PR use, while others are better for insight and research. Equally, despite the capabilities of the tools, you still need a human to refine the search and make intelligent use of the data gathered.

From our test of seven of the leading tools we have highlighted a number of key considerations to bear in mind when choosing the right tool. There is no universal standard across the tools so each one will offer a different solution to each one of these features:

1. **Coverage** – types of media or geographic markets. There was 11 times difference between the tools that reported the least and most conversations in our test project.
2. **Sentiment analysis** - We don't believe that the tools on the market have nailed sentiment analysis yet. The tools can be extremely valuable, but it is important to understand their limitations as it is to understand their capabilities. In our test the accuracy of their analysis at an aggregate level varied from 59% - 87% and was even lower at an individual post level.
3. **Location of conversations** - Different social media monitoring tools classify the location of conversations in different ways to determine the location of conversations. In a recent project, we had to go to great lengths, through human blog mining, to establish if Portuguese tweets were originating from Brazil or Portugal.
4. **Volume of conversations** - Should retweets, spam, signatures or adverts be counted in your study or not? Different tools treat them in different ways and so the actual number of conversations is not always as it seems. Most importantly, as any good researcher knows, a bigger sample is not necessarily better and duplication is a serious issue that needs to be addressed in any social media monitoring.
5. **Data-latency** - The speed at which conversations are collected by a tool is limited by the frequency of their web-crawlers and the length of time it takes the tool to process the data. This could make alert functions less useful.

As so many products have flooded onto the market and everyone from the marketing department to corporate risk has got excited about the insights you can get from conversations online, we are in danger of social media monitoring tools being used as an extremely blunt instrument. Given the right tools (and more importantly, the right expertise) online conversations can be a continuous source of lifestyle information for brands and provide a daily touchpoint with their customers. The possibilities from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective are huge; you can use social media monitoring to help understand everything from category choices to the lifestyles of different segments and look at data on either an individual or an aggregate basis.

The important thing is to understand that while multiple departments within the business may have a need to monitor social media conversations, their proficiency at, and time available for, extracting insights from any given tool will vary enormously. It is an art, as well as a science, to turn the information that is already present online into insight for your brand or organisation.

The remainder of this report focuses on the results of our tests. We have taken a sample of the tools available and simulated how an actual client project might run in order to outline how different tools meet the various needs that a company holds. First off, we'll deal with some of the key questions you will need to ask a tool provider in order to ensure you are getting the data, analysis and answers you are looking for.

2. Key considerations when choosing a tool

2.1 Coverage

Coverage, and hence breadth of insight, differs between the tools. Some tools don't cover all the different media (twitter, blogs, forums) or markets (i.e. geographies).

Filter	Alterian	Biz360	Brandwatch	Nielsen	Radian6	Scoutlabs	Sysomos
Media (Blog, Forum, Twitter)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geography (UK, US, France)	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Language (English, French)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Data available	2 and a half years	30 days	2 months	2 years	30 days	6 months	1 year
Sentiment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Proximity search	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓

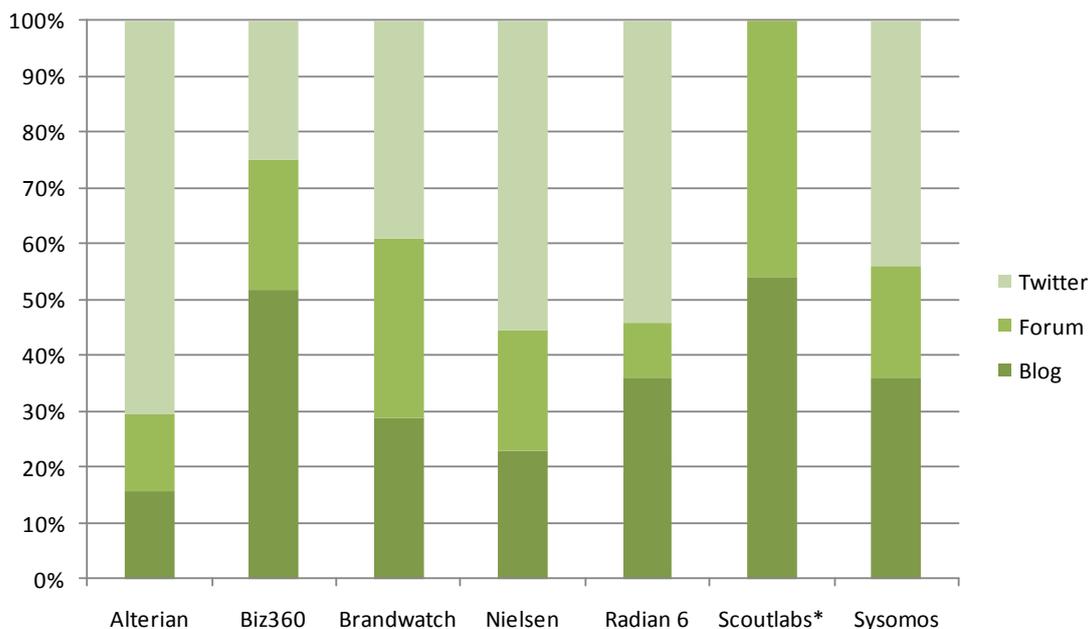
Source: FreshMinds

As the tools all have different coverage, whether it's for different media or markets, we set up the same filters for each tool to create a comparable 'universe' of conversations for Starbucks. Our test was carried out using only the English language and for the same time period on each tool. At this top-level, it's clear the tools are each doing something quite different.

Column1	Alterian	Biz360	Brandwatch	Nielsen	Radian 6	Scoutlabs*	Sysomos
Blog	693	269	344	630	2127	926	1219
Forum	609	121	382	599	581	787	678
Twitter	3129	129	467	1532	3201		1501
	4431	519	1193	2761	5909	1713	3398

of posts reported by tool. Source: FreshMinds

*Scoutlabs doesn't allow you to extract Twitter conversations with sentiment. The tool does allow you to browse the latest twitter conversations.



% of posts reported by media type. Source: FreshMinds

2.2 What is sentiment?

Sentiment is a thought, view, or attitude that is often based more on emotion than reason. In the context of social media monitoring, it is the concept of deciding whether a specific online conversation is positive or negative. This is really useful in helping you determine the themes and topics that are driving both good and bad conversations about your brand. Sentiment can also allow you to track the overall impact of marketing campaigns or news about your brand. We suspect the main reason people have latched onto sentiment is because it gives the impression that the plethora of web conversations can be summarised in a single number. Businesses track numbers and sentiment is often the KPI of choice for social media.

This is dangerous. Sentiment is more nuanced than a single number and using an automated tool to assess how people feel puts too much faith in the today's software. The diagram on the right shows a typical result – the average sentiment tends heavily towards a neutral classification. We don't believe that the tools on the market have nailed sentiment analysis yet. The tools can be extremely valuable, but it is important to understand their limitations as it is to understand their capabilities.



The algorithms used for sentiment analysis vary in their sophistication and effectiveness:

1. The first variable is the whether the tool runs sentiment analysis on all conversations in your results or a sample.
2. The next most significant variable is the proximity of the words used to identify positive or negative sentiment. Some tools simply require a key sentiment indicator (e.g. "I love") to be in the same conversation as your search string. Others are sensitive to the proximity of a search keyword and the sentiment indicator which helps to interpret conversations which contain both positive and negative indicators as your search string, others are sensitive to the proximity and interpreting both positive and negative

indicators in the same conversation. The 'proximity' rule is why most tools are more accurate at coding sentiment in micro-blogs (like Twitter) as each post is only 140 characters. This area is a constantly improving feature of the tools.

At an aggregate level (i.e. for this 'topic' x% of conversations were positive, y% neutral and z% negative) the tools were typically around 60-80% accurate (when compared to our manual coding). Not bad, but this is at an aggregate level. If you only want to understand sentiment trends then the aggregate level may be good enough. However, if you are intending to engage with negative conversations then the accuracy of coding each individual conversation is imperative. Sadly for the tools, the picture isn't quite as pretty when you look at each conversation in turn and look at the individual accuracy.

In our tests we manually coded conversations that the tools judged to be either positive or negative in tone. (We decided that 'neutral conversations' were less interesting or useful to organisations). We were shocked that, without 'training the tools', they could be so wrong. We found countless examples of the tools mis-categorising conversations - like a blog about "11,000 glass water bottles being recalled" coded as positive. Whilst positive sentiment was more consistently categorised than negative, not one tool achieved the 60 - 80% accuracy we saw at the aggregate level. In fact, on average the tools coded the positive or negative sentiment correctly for **only 30% of the posts**. The most consistently accurate was Sysomos but this still only achieved around 50% consistency to our manual coding.

In our opinion, to get real value from any social media monitoring tool ongoing human refinement and interpretation is essential. Buzz tracking opens up opportunities for insight, but it is worthless without sufficient people resource and internal processes to act on salient information.

Warning! We're biased. We are a research consultancy (we've twice been named UK Research Agency of the Year by the Market Research Society) and we're not selling a tool. Rather we help companies select the right tool, or combinations of tool, and help them get value out of it on an ongoing basis. But we think you'll find most of the software vendors will concur that their happiest clients are the ones who have properly resourced the listening effort and invested sufficient time in interpretation, dissemination and action.

2.3 Location, location, location

One basic factor that needs to be considered when looking at social media monitoring is the location of the conversations about your brand. Brands are generally interested in where the conversations are originating – a brand looking to understand sentiment about its product in the Argentinean market, for example, is probably less interested in conversations happening in the Philippines or Spain, even if they are all in the Spanish language. The social media monitoring tools use three main ways to determine the origin of the conversations, some more accurately than others:

- **Using the URL:** It's actually harder than you might think to use the URL of a site where conversations happen to determine the location of the conversation itself. It's not as simple as looking at .co.uk for the UK and .fr for France. Site URLs are not always helpful in defining location.

-
- **The IP address:** The major social media platforms tend to be hosted in the US, whilst their users may be commenting from around the world. For example, Twitter gives the impression that all of its users are in the US.
 - **Language being used:** Some providers use the actual words in the conversations to identify the country. This is pretty advanced and can work. But nuances in, for example, International English are difficult to unpick.

Each of the tools addresses the issue of location in a different way. Looking through the conversations manually it's easy to find examples that aren't categorised correctly. As a result it makes the job of comparing the different tools much harder.

2.4 Duplication

Are the tools with the largest number of conversations the best? We don't think so as we're not comparing like with like. If you were using Radian6 you would get the impression that eleven times as many conversations were going on about Starbucks and related terms than if you were using Biz360. There are many reasons for this and bigger is not in this case necessarily better. Think about the following: re-tweets, spam, signatures and adverts. Should these be counted in your study or not? Different tools treat them in different ways and so, as we saw with the issue of location, the actual number of conversations is not always as it seems.

Firstly, there's the source of the conversation – who did it start with? Is there more than one conversation around the same topic or is someone copying it? Is this the same tweet that's been re-tweeted or is it a new conversation? These distinctions are important. If a Tweet contains certain keywords it is often re-tweeted automatically many times by 'bots' which search Twitter for these terms and automatically reposts them.

We need a social media monitoring tool that deals with these and other situations. We found that the tools that identify the most conversations are often not the most useful or accurate. They may include a range of conversations that are irrelevant, spam or double-counted. Whereas any organisation looking to understand what people are saying about your brand online wants a more accurate portrayal of what is being said. Perhaps most importantly, as a user of the tools, you need to understand how your tool is currently dealing with duplication and what their plans are for the future. The technology is changing all the time, and any updates and changes to the algorithms they use can materially affect the numbers you are measuring.

2.5 Data latency

The speed at which the conversations can enter a tool is limited to the frequency of the web-crawlers and the length of time the data takes to process. While most tools prioritise key websites to ensure the fastest possible upload of conversations, we found that some tools can take several days before the conversation that's being held online is available in the tool. This delay is known as data latency.

Of the seven tools we tested, we found that Brandwatch was the fastest at searching for and processing new online data, while Nielsen Buzzmetrics proved the slowest at collecting up-to-

date information. It's important to note that Brandwatch doesn't cover as many geographies and conversation types as Nielsen does.

Obviously this has an impact for clients wanting to look at up-to-date conversations but it also has an impact on historical data. It's possible to look at a trend of conversations in the last few days and see one volume of conversations. The next day more conversations may arrive from the previous day, increasing the results.

Social media has driven a yearning for real-time information; a desperation to know exactly what's going on right now. As a result you might believe that a faster tool is the better tool. However, as with the other comparative measures between the tools, it depends on your business need. Our experience of the different social media monitoring tools suggested that high latency was often the result of more sophisticated data processing and de-duplication. Thus if your goal is to track what's going on with minimal effort, or to see only the really important conversations, you may be better off with an apparently 'slow' tool because it will cut out more of the online waffle.

3. Key findings

In the course of our project, there were three key stages:



Each stage highlighted key strengths and weaknesses of the tools at different points in accessing and analysing the information available. Below, we discuss the key findings from each stage, and outline how each tool performs.

3.1 Phase 1: Initial set-up test and conversation counts

Key findings: Without training, setup of the tools can lead to inconsistent results. So, if you want a tool that many people in your firm can pick up and run with Scoutlabs is best. But if you're going to have a single dedicated, trained member of staff, Nielsen Buzz Metrics would be a better.

The tools can be viewed against two key dimensions of depth of analysis and how user friendly the dashboard is. Brandwatch and Scoutlabs are grouped together as they have user friendly dashboards which you can navigate quite easily. Their filters aren't as sophisticated as other tools but you can still 'slice and dice' the data in many ways. Radian6 and Nielsen enable you to dive deep into the data; their interfaces are less user-friendly. Both providers advise you to receive training to use their tool.



Ease of set up



User friendliness



Responsiveness



3.2 Phase 2: Sentiment extraction and comparison

Key findings: All of the tools have some degree of inaccuracy. As they are shorter, tweets are more accurately coded than longer conversations such as blogs and forum posts.

This was a very time consuming process that extracted the conversations from the tools along with system generated sentiment. The extract process was often in small increments as some tools only allow you to extract a few hundred conversations at a time, sometimes in complex formats that are difficult to manipulate.

We selected a random sample of conversations from each tool and looked at forums, blogs and tweets separately. Our research team manually determined the actual sentiment of this sample.

Tool	Accuracy	Rank
Sysomos	87%	1
Nielsen	86%	2
Biz360	85%	3
Scoutlabs	84%	4
Alterian	81%	5
Radian6	77%	6
Brandwatch	59%	7

We then combined each of the results together to look at the error for forums, blogs and tweets. Finally we combined the errors together based on the proportions of forums, blogs and tweets for each tool to achieve an overall aggregate accuracy score.

Aggregated accuracy with manual coding. Source: FreshMinds

Ability to extract raw data



Sentiment accuracy



3.3 Phase 3: Issue analysis

Key findings: Without correctly configured searches, you may miss the key issues for your brand. We find that a combination of social media monitoring tools with other sources is critical.

In comparing the tools to each other we were able to get a sense of quality and diversity of each tool. In the interests of having a fixed point of comparison we checked to what degree each tool identified our key topic.

The table below shows the topics brought out by the different tools during our research time-frame. 'Guns' was the topic we were most interested in because we believed it was a critical issue that the brand would have wanted notification of during the period of our research.

Topic	Alterian	Biz360	Brandwatch	Nielsen	Radian6	Scoutlabs	Sysomos
Baristas							Yes
Burger King						Yes	
Cannabis		Yes					
Caribou					Yes		
Celebrity			Yes				Yes
Costa						Yes	
Credit Cards						Yes	
Fair Trade						Yes	
Falling in love			Yes				
Flat White		Yes				Yes	
Freebies						Yes	
Gold Card						Yes	
Goo					Yes		
Guns	Yes						
Keep going			Yes				
Promimity			Yes				
Rewards					Yes		
Service							Yes
Sundays					Yes		
Survey						Yes	
Wifi						Yes	

Source: FreshMinds

Finding our key topic (Rank of topics found)



3.4 Overview of the tools

3.4.1 How we compared the tools

Using a standardised set of parameters (e.g. topic, time period), we tested the following tools from a potential list of hundreds. The tools were chosen based on our previous experience as an agency in using them, and the fact that they are market leaders in this new field.



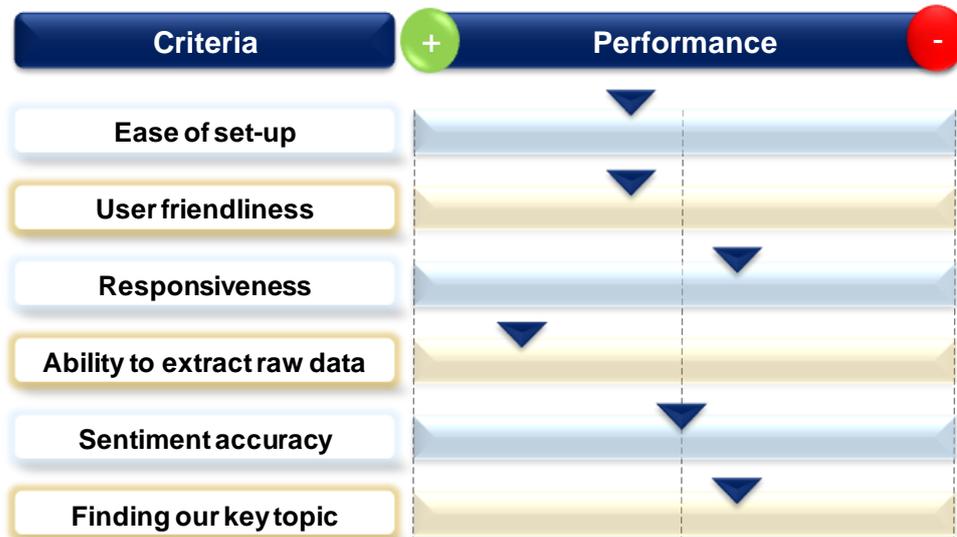
We have shown the ranking for each tool against some key measures:

Criteria	Qualification
Ease of set-up	How easy it was to use the query builder or wizard? Do the queries fail? Do they save easily?
User friendliness	How easy is the interface to use? Is it simple to navigate?
Responsiveness	How easy and how quickly the tool responds to changes? (this takes into account waiting for re-processing of data etc.)
Ability to extract raw data	How easy and quick the tool is to extract data?
Sentiment accuracy	A comparison of automated to manual sentiment
Finding our key topic	For our key topic, how prevalent was the issue and how easy was the tool to use as an analyst looking for more information?

What follows is a short description of each tool against these measures and performance scores represent a relative rank (where 1 is best and 10 is worst). When the figure below the diagram for each tool is emboldened, this indicates this tool is 'best-in-field' for this criterion.



Outstanding feature: The tone and emotional analysis.



(Ease of set-up 4, User friendliness 4, Responsiveness 6, Ability to extract raw data 2, Sentiment Accuracy 5, Finding our key topic 6.)

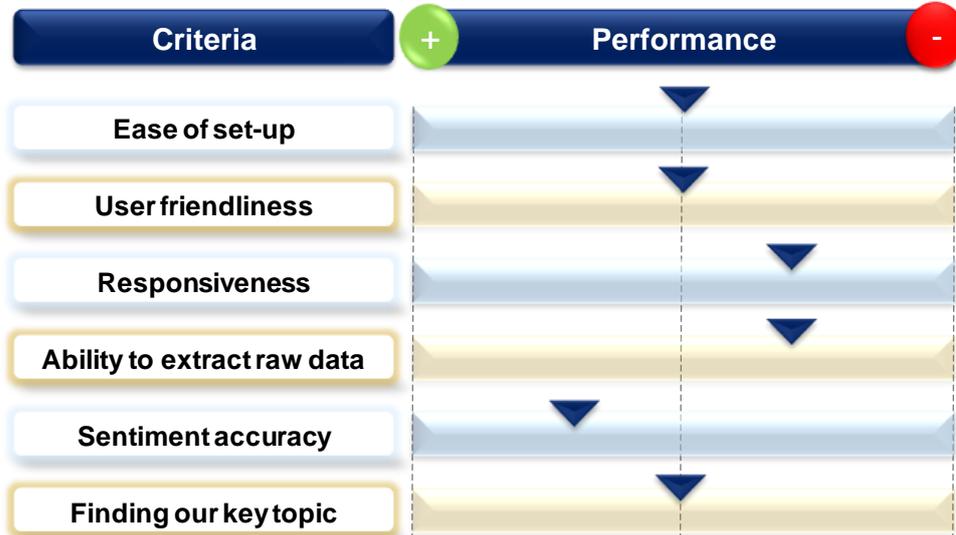
Alterian separates sentiment into Content Tone and Content Emotions. Content Tone is the usual positive (very/somewhat), negative (very/somewhat) and neutral. The Content Emotions are classified as: anger, sadness, social, family, friend, anxiety, bio, body, sexual, ingest, achieve, home, money, religious, death and leisure. We like this but would like to know more about the algorithms used.

We found the key word section very useful, but when links are followed the data is in a list format with no different style for media types (blogs/ microblogs/ news). Our key topic word did appear in the Theme diagram, but the data that came up was mainly focused on Twitter and did not highlight the key articles we knew to be elsewhere.

We found that the tool's layout made it difficult to scan for themes by eye, but once the tool provided results that hadn't appeared in other searches we were impressed. Although these extra results themselves were not of major importance, we felt they did start to tap into the more niche areas of the brand.



Outstanding feature: A nice feature is the Topic velocity, showing whether your topics are being more or less talked about.



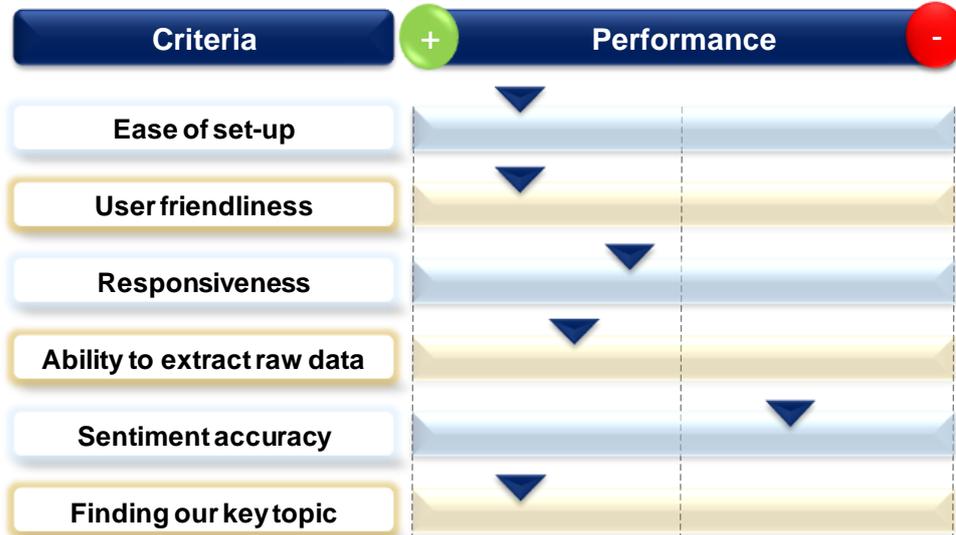
(Ease of set-up 5, User friendliness 5, Responsiveness 7, Ability to extract raw data 7, Sentiment Accuracy 3, Finding our key topic 5.)

We found Biz360 tool had clear presentation of information and logical progression through the data, from highest point of graph for mentions to a list of sources. Following the key topic in 'topic discovery' was less simple and the top four listed were all individual Tweets and not very significant overall.

We felt Biz360 would not be suitable for re-drilling of data as the data on offer is not organised in a way in which the most significant mentions are most obvious. The dashboard was, however, easily customisable



Outstanding feature: Brandwatch Answers – these are answers to questions like: Which sites talk about the brand the most? Which are the fastest growing negative topics?



(Ease of set-up 2, User friendliness 2, Responsiveness 4, Ability to extract raw data 3, Sentiment Accuracy 7, Finding our key topic 2.)

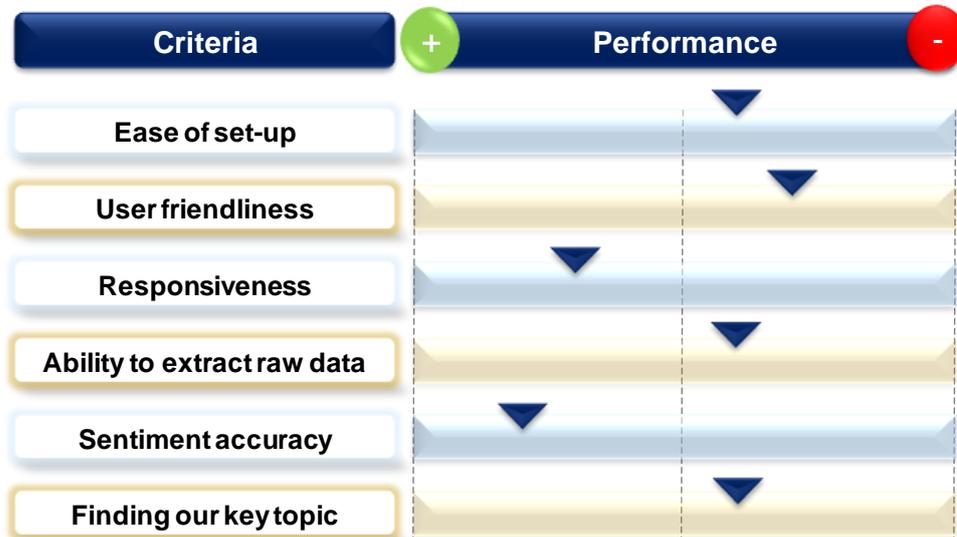
We found Brandwatch easy to browse. When a key word from the cloud struck the eye, there were extensive details on the topic with back-link and ranking information that made the importance of the source easy to assess. Within our key topic, the term ‘open carry’ yielded a wide range of relevant sources instantly, which could be further drilled down to assess importance.

Where there were graphs it was not possible to click a point of interest to find out what had caused the peak or trough. However, popular mentions were picked up adequately from the other tabs.

Because of the ease of browsing, this tool would be very good for companies running new campaigns, looking for things that engage customers, and scrolling through posts on similar themes to get a broad idea of sentiment.



Outstanding feature: Really powerful for a trained user.



(Ease of set-up 6, User friendliness 7, Responsiveness 3, Ability to extract raw data 6, Sentiment Accuracy 2, Finding our key topic 6)

Nielsen is very comprehensive and it allows you to really drill into the data. It is however less straightforward to pick out important themes than some other tools. Although we could find our key topic it was not instantaneous. The buzz graph and word cloud both shook constantly which made browsing difficult.

We found it hard to identify the most important stories because there was no information readily available regarding followers, back-links etc.

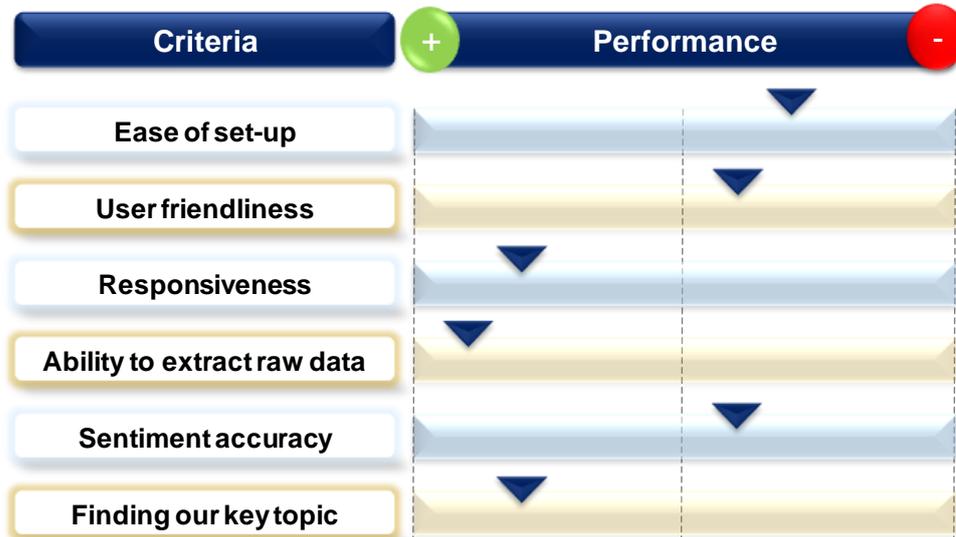
The tool is clearly very powerful and has excellent reporting capabilities. We believe this would be one of the main options for an Enterprise client wishing to have both internal and external users.

Without the support of the client service team we did feel that the Nielsen tool would be easy to misuse.

3.4.6 Radian 6



Outstanding feature: Using the conversation cloud you can run a river of news, conversation cloud or topic trends for each word, and repeat to dive further and further into the data.



(Ease of set-up 7, User friendliness 6, Responsiveness 2, Ability to extract raw data 1, Sentiment Accuracy 6, Finding our key topic 2)

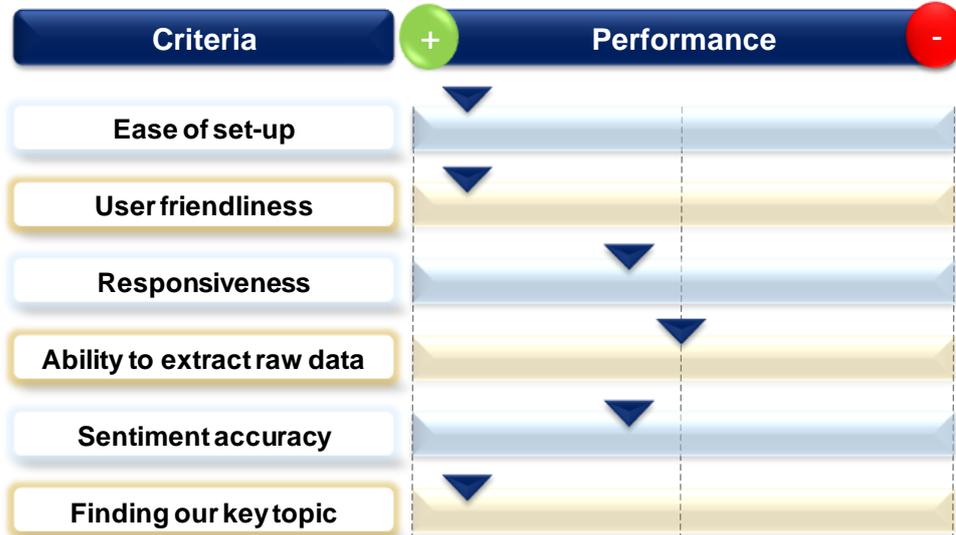
Similar to Nielsen, Radian6 is very powerful and really allows investigation into the data. It was relatively easy to use, outperformed only by Brandwatch, Sysomos and Scout Labs. Relating to our key topic, no related words or posts appeared in the word cloud or on the dashboard.

Our key topic was noted as 'neutral' despite there being a link at the bottom inviting readers to click to protest against the matter. It was not possible to explore further stories on the topic from a related article, so a significant volume of activity on the matter would have been missed.

Where there were graphs it was possible to explore the high and low points by clicking which was really useful. There is no magazine style interface where you can pick up the main issues at a glance. However when you are aware of an issue, you can drill down into the data and get an informative and detailed result that the others won't necessarily give.



Outstanding feature: The Quotes feature which pulls out emotive text and categorises it into: loves, hates, wishes, comparisons, recommendations, issues and caveats.



(Ease of set-up 1, User friendliness 1, Responsiveness 4, Ability to extract raw data 5, Sentiment Accuracy 4, Finding our key topic 1)

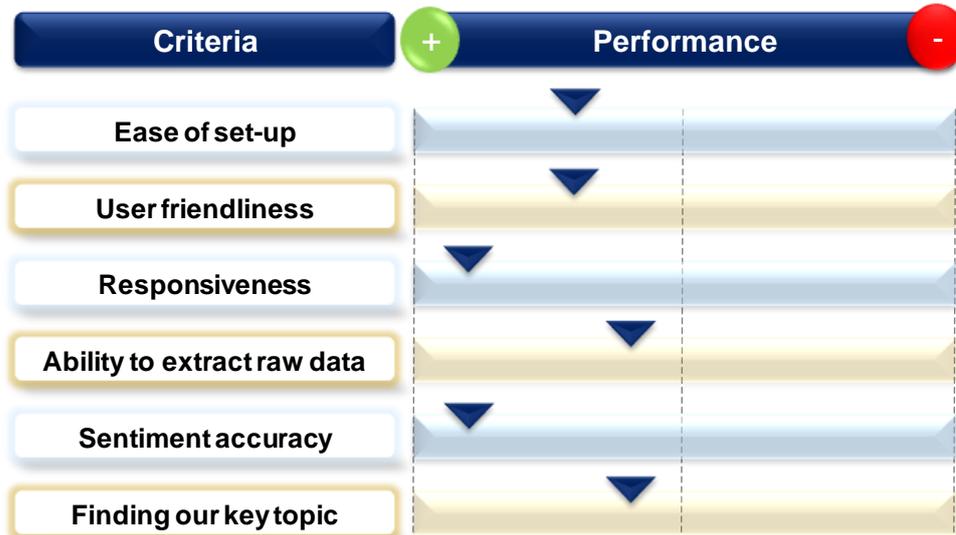
We found the dashboard interface very clear and easy to use – it picked out key issues in each section (quotes, blogs, news, sentiment); our key topic came up in the news section and was well covered in the quotes. We found that the links led to articles in the associated press and blogs with lots of hits. Other links were easy to spot and also gave quick access to sites that matter.

When up to date information is needed on a particular subject, Scoutlabs is easy to use to find that information. It also provides good long term coverage of major changes, so that big trends in the past can be analysed from graph spikes.

3.4.8 Sysomos



Outstanding feature: Global filters to change the language or location. In most of these tools you need to set these filters in the search setup. This means that the search has to be rerun whenever you change the language/location, which is time consuming.



*(Ease of set-up 3, User friendliness 3, **Responsiveness 1**, Ability to extract raw data 4, Sentiment Accuracy 1, Finding our key topic 4)*

Sysomos was very user-friendly to browse and pick up salient factors. The links then had to be explored across other media to reveal the extent of the interest. The link to 'traditional media' was useful because it held items with very wide readership on the topic, providing context for the social networking media entries.

If a company was looking to monitor the broad spectrum of what was being said about them, Sysomos makes it easy to see the range, with buzz graphs and recent posts easily accessible. The range of sentiments is particularly easy to view, with positive and negative opinions displayed adjacently.

4. Appendix: Methodology

4.1 The tools we chose

We chose these seven tools as we've used them in our day-to-day work with clients. This is by no means an exhaustive selection however and we hope to include more tools in future research.

4.2 How we compared the tools

As mentioned previously (in Section 3.4.1) we looked at following areas for each tool.

- **Ease of set-up** – how easy it was to use the query builder or wizard – do the queries fail? Do they save easily?
- **User friendliness** – how easy is the interface to use? – is it simple to navigate?
- **Responsiveness** – how easy and how quickly the tool responds to changes – this takes into account waiting for re-processing of data etc.
- **Ability to extract raw data** – how easy and quick the tool is to extract data
- **Sentiment accuracy** – a comparison of automated to manual sentiment
- **Finding our key topic** – how prevalent was the issue and how easy was the tool to use as an analyst looking for more information

We approached this research without the assistance of an account team from each tool provider. We have specifically done this not to be influenced and to see how easy the tools are to use 'off-the-shelf'.

There are three phases to our research chosen to quantify the outputs and qualify the ease of use and identification of a key issue.

We used an example client brief for the Starbucks brand and tracked the conversations over a period of one month (from 28th Jan 2010 to 26th February 2010). We decided to use Starbucks as a test brand because it's a global brand that is frequently discussed online. Also, the word 'Starbucks' doesn't have any other meaning or use other than being a brand/company name.

As well as tracking the word 'Starbucks', we also tracked the phrase 'Flat White', a new addition to the Starbucks coffee range which launched in December 2009 . We also tracked their new ready brew coffee, 'Via', which was released in the autumn of last year in the US and in March 2010 in the UK. We wanted to see what impact this new development was having on online conversations about the brand. Finally, because Starbucks is associated with its 'Reward Card' and the phrase 'Fair Trade' we tracked these subjects too. To keep things fair we created a similar search string for each tool.

It is important to note that some tools are capable of more sophisticated search strings than others. So we were testing to the lowest-common-denominator in this sense.

We also used a real client issue for Starbucks to identify whether the tools picked this up automatically.



Phase 1

Firstly a simple analysis of the 'off-the-shelf' outputs of the seven tools. The objective is not to prove who is right or wrong but to identify the differences between the tools. Although the tools may cover other media, we looked specifically at Forums, Blogs and Twitter.

Phase 2

The next step is to take the output from each tool and look at system generated sentiment. We extracted the conversations where we could and manually coded a sample by hand. The intention here is to see whether each tool is getting the sentiment right or not.

Phase 3

A key PR issue for Starbucks (in the US) during this period was the subject of the 'right to bear arms' in some stores due to State Law. The 'guns' topic was clearly shown in some tools but not others.

5. About FreshMinds

We are unique in uniting in one company a full service research and insights agency and social media specialist.

FreshMinds Research is one the UK's leading research consultancies. A unique combination of market research and business research skills has helped the firm become the MRS UK Market Research Agency of the Year twice in a row. Our intelligent strategic counsel helps companies grow, achieve and succeed, supporting clients as diverse as HSBC, Microsoft and Warburtons.

FreshNetworks is a social media agency that helps organisations connect with customers using social media. Services include social media strategy, social media software, and online community management.

By combining the research expertise of FreshMinds Research and the social media software and knowledge of FreshNetworks, clients benefit from a unique way of gaining insight about their business or brand through social media

5.1 Research Accreditations

FreshMinds conducts research in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and some individuals hold memberships of the MRS/ ESOMAR or AQR as appropriate. Research Managers may also hold PRINCE II qualifications. FreshMinds won accreditation from 'Investors in People' as a testament to our commitment to managing and developing people.

Testament to the quality of our services and delivery is the fact that FreshMinds won *Best Agency* at the Market Research Society Awards in both 2006 and 2007 and has been shortlisted for an award every year since then.

5.2 Testimonials

Here is just a small selection of what our clients have said about their experience of working with us; we hope to have you in this list some day!

"I've found working with FreshMinds to be a really unique experience. They're different from any other agency I've used. With an innovative approach to developing methodologies, they always offer a fresh perspective and are generally great people to work with." **PC World**

"FreshMinds produced excellent results, providing insightful analysis throughout their research. I have been impressed with FreshMinds research, and it has proved very helpful in assisting us to make important business decisions." **MSN UK, Microsoft**

"Innovative, responsive, illuminating and strategic" **Director of Marketing, BT**

"FreshMinds has a fresh, can-do approach .They showed great interest in, and understanding of, our business needs and proactively researched the brief we gave them, before coming back to us with a strong research solution. Their analysis has given us a much better understanding of the 'Gift With Purchase' market and the results have helped to create a new focused strategy." **Director of Marketing, Clinique**

5.3 Contact

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