



WHITE PAPER

Engaging Customers Locally

How social is changing the local buying journey

HootsuiteTM

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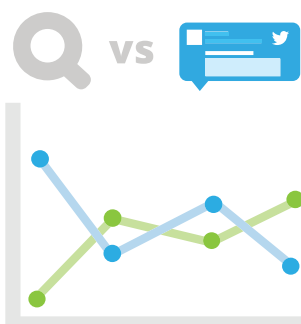
How social is changing the local buying journey

We've helped companies such as Century 21® Real Estate, OCBC Bank, Local World, Delaware North, Lids Sports Group, Toni&Guy, the Canadian Football League, and Usana Health Sciences roll out social media to agents, advisors, and local sales teams. Here's what we've learned about how modern buyers use social media to find, decide, and buy in their neighborhoods.

What You'll Learn:



How buyers use social hyperlocally



What the shift from search to social means for reaching local buyers



5 ways to combine global strength with local selling

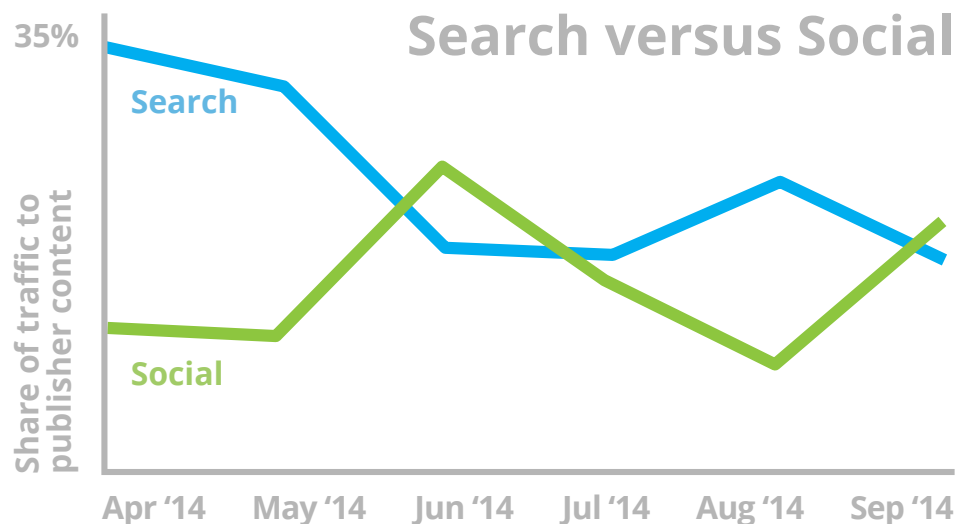


Image Credit: BuzzFeed Insights and Shareaholic

The local buying journey has changed

Social is the new front door for businesses. New studies show that social has begun to eclipse search for driving traffic. But while social is a key channel for consumers to discover and evaluate brands, digital budgets still lag behind.

- **Google is no longer the mayor.**
“The shift from search to social isn’t just in progress: it’s already here,” says BuzzFeed Insights’ report on the rise of social over search.¹ According to global data from Shareaholic, social is now the leading source of referral traffic to content on the web. Last year, the top eight social networks drove 31.24% of overall traffic to sites in December 2014, up from 22.71% the same time last year.²
- **Consumers decide. Then find your business.**
Buyers are waiting longer to contact sales professionals, conducting online research first. When they finally contact you, many of their preferences have been shaped and decisions made. According to Google, 94% of mobile search has local intent. However, most of these searches, says Google, involve the last mile of conversion such as queries for store hours, directions, and addresses.³ Search may be how people find your business, but social is often where they first discover and evaluate your brand. This of course varies by industry (for example, B2B buyers still rely heavily on search engines) but more and more companies are realizing that social cuts across the buying funnel, fueling discovery, evaluation, and loyalty.
- **Social selling increases revenue.**
LinkedIn conducted a global study, comparing sales professionals who used social selling tactics versus laggards. They found that social selling leaders generated 45% more opportunities per quarter than laggards. They were also 51% more likely to hit their quotas.⁴
- **Social is particularly important in high-value purchases.** For complex purchases such as choosing a realtor or comparing investment advisors, social plays an even greater role in the research process. LinkedIn and Cogent Research conducted a study of individuals with investment assets over \$100,000. They found that this group relied “heavily on social media when researching and deciding about financial products.” Younger investors who were focused on accumulating wealth placed the highest value on relevant content. They expected banks to have a social presence as social media was a part of all aspects of their professional and personal lives. Even soon-to-retire investors appreciated timely updates and “expect brokerages to have a social presence.”⁵

Search

Social

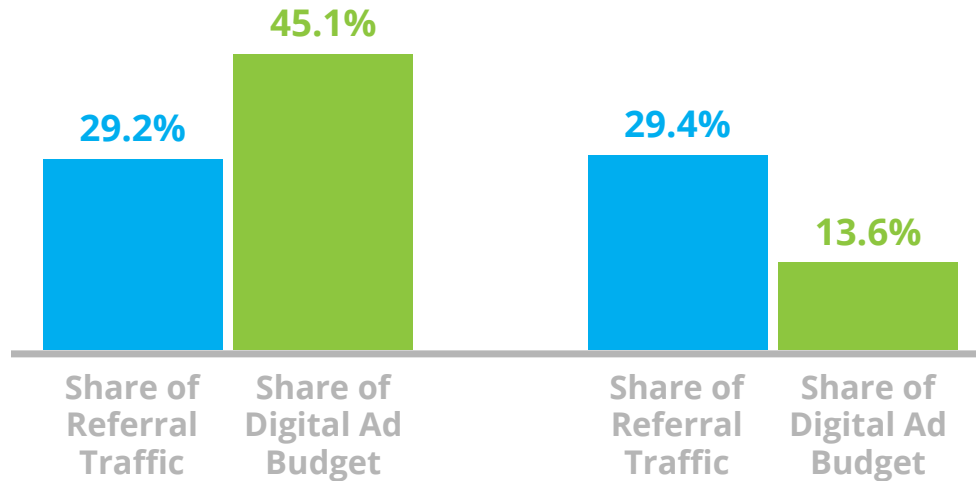


Image Credit: BuzzFeed Insights, eMarketer, and Shareaholic

- **Websites are declining for local businesses.**
In emerging markets like APAC (the Asia-Pacific region), consumers and brick-and-mortar businesses will often skip websites and instead communicate directly through social accounts. “Many local businesses in Asia won’t even have a website,” says Yvonne Tey, Hootsuite’s Marketing Director in APAC. Instead, their customers “interact directly with their Instagram account or Facebook Page for real-time updates and business information.”
- **Fortune 500s can learn from SMBs.**
Small businesses are leading the way for local engagement, investing 21.4% of their total marketing budget on social. According to BIA/Kelsey’s Local Commerce Monitor study, small businesses use “social media more than any other media category.” For global companies developing strategies to connect with their local customers, SMBs offer a trail of best practices that large organizations can adapt and include in their playbooks.⁷
- **But digital budgets still lag behind.**
Most executives understand the value of social. But digital budgets still focus on standard tactics like local SEO and paid search advertising. According to data by eMarketer and Sharaholic, marketers invest 45.1% of their digital budgets in paid search advertising. While social generates 29.4% of referral traffic, it only receives 13.6% of digital ad spend.⁶
- **The land grab is on.**
According to a global study by McKinsey & Company, organizations that focus on social media stand to unlock 1.3 trillion dollars in business value. But only 3% of businesses are maximizing this opportunity. Organizations have the opportunity to develop new ways of reaching local buyers with social content.⁸

What's driving this shift?

The rise of the new digital buyer

"Social is on a serious growth path, and Millennials are the driving force behind it," says BuzzFeed Insights' report on social.⁹ According to eMarketer, 89% of Millennials visit social media sites regularly.¹⁰ Unlike previous generations, Millennials are much more likely to make purchases based on social content shared by their peers.¹¹

- **The surge of the digital native.** Millennials are digital natives—they grew up with digital technology and are accelerating the use of social media to discover and evaluate products and services. They now surpass the Baby Boomer generation in size, representing one-third of the total U.S. population in 2013.¹² According to a report by the White House, "three-quarters of Millennials have an account on a social networking site, compared with only half of Generation Xers and less than a third of the Baby Boomers."¹³
- **Seniors catch up.** Seniors are now catching up to social and digital technology. The Pew Research Center found that "for the first time, more than half of all online adults 65 and older (56%) use Facebook. This represents 31% of all seniors."¹⁴ Baby Boomers aged 45 to 60, who are the seniors of tomorrow, are already comfortable with digital. They're shopping online, adapting to mobile banking apps, and reconnecting with old friends on Facebook and Twitter.
- **Digital natives expect social connections.** Creating national YouTube campaigns or responding from official brand channels isn't enough. Digital natives want to talk to your brand as well as your local agents or sales teams. Edelman surveyed 33,000 consumers in 27 countries and found that 52% of the international public consider employees either extremely credible or very credible. The research further revealed that "employees are considered the most trusted source across most clusters of trust attributes" and that the general public wants to hear directly from employees as "ambassadors for the company."¹⁵
- **Buying is fluid and always-on.** "We don't 'go' shopping anymore," says Jason Golberg of Razorfish, one of the world's top digital agencies. "We are always shopping." Digital natives have toppled the old sales funnel. In the past, brands would use marketing to drive awareness, which, in turn, would result in foot traffic. But now, says Golberg, "you can't win for being well-known."¹⁶ Instead, the digital trail that your brand and customers co-create is where the true decisions happen.
- **The companies of today go straight to social.** According to a global study by Gartner, one in four companies will lose their market share if they ignore the impact of digital disruption. And 25% of the top companies today will be unseeded by companies founded after the year 2000.¹⁷ Why? Disruptive companies such as Airbnb, Uber, Wealthfront, Zipcar, Car2Go, and Tesla go straight to social and exploit high-growth digital levers. You've heard of these companies from earned media, events, and social traction—not from traditional local channels such as TV, radio, paid search, SEO, direct mail, or physical showrooms.

What to actually do

1. Shift from campaigns to enabling local conversations.

Many organizations still follow a campaign mindset. They come up with a national or global campaign idea. Execute. And then look for ways to amplify on social channels. It's much more effective to use your social relationship platform as a way to bring thousands of individual agents or advisors on social. Your social relationship platform can help disseminate brand content, reveal what content performs best across different local markets, and provide a central platform that allows the brand to enable and monitor interactions at the local level.

2. Create a company certification program.

To get sales teams on social and build social media into your professional services, we've found that a company certification program increases adoption. For example, Hootsuite and Wiley (a global publisher and knowledge-enabled services company) created a co-branded employee education program. This gave Wiley's employees the skills and confidence to engage their customers on social media. This case study outlines how we created custom education for Wiley, training 250 employees in marketing, customer service, and editorial.

3. Develop a daily practice for sales.

Century 21® Real Estate, as an example, developed their C21 University in partnership with Hootsuite University. The goal was to educate realtors on best practices in social selling.¹⁸ As part of this initiative, their global social media team came up with the idea of "21 Minutes of Social." This training program offers specific steps: spend this many minutes listening to your local market, use these tools to find interesting content, connect with three prospects on LinkedIn. It's clever and builds social media into the daily sales processes of their realtors.¹⁹

4. Give sales teams something to say.

Make it easy for agents and local offices to practice what you teach. Use Hootsuite's Content Library to give your workforce access to approved social content that they can share. For example, your sales professionals can share images and branded content from your head office. This makes it easy for global companies to empower thousands of employees on social media. It also allows you to easily track what content is being used by local teams and uncover what works across your markets.

5. Combine human and online advice.

A study by Gallup found that in complex purchases such as hiring a financial investor, two in three investors prefer a mix of human and online advice. "The majority of younger investors still prefer an experience that relies mostly (42%) or exclusively (15%) on financial advisers. And if forced to choose, more younger investors, 43%, opt for a strong relationship with a financial adviser than opt for access to state-of-the-art electronic investing tools (30%)."²⁰ Marketing can create awareness through YouTube videos, local SEO, branded content, and official social channels to initially hook prospects. Then empower your sales teams to speak directly with prospects on social channels, giving them human guidance and advice. This humanizes your brand and multiplies your reach in local markets.

Customer Story: How a large UK newspaper stayed hyperlocal

Audiences now expect to receive their news and entertainment on-demand and on-the-go, using mobile devices throughout the day to stay connected. And with access to more content from more sources than ever before, readers are increasingly relying on social media to filter out the noise and discover the stories that matter to them.

Scott Hornsby, Local World's Head of Social Media, wanted the organization to be capable of consistently engaging with the right people and reacting quickly to breaking stories. However, with 107 regional newspapers, 400 social media profiles, and 74 websites, Local World required a scalable social media strategy to coordinate and empower newsrooms across the UK.

Local World's strategy had three components: practices, people, and platform. First, Scott Hornsby's team introduced best practices across all news centers. They designed content plans that were flexible enough to be implemented by all publications in the Local World organization, and presented social media guidelines in an approachable and understandable way.

Hootsuite Enterprise mapped easily to Local World's distributed organizational structure and allowed newsrooms to safely collaborate with external contributors on 400 social media channels. Teams could schedule entire social campaigns in advance, giving them more time to listen and engage on social media at a local level. Hootsuite Enterprise geo-location capabilities revealed what people were talking about in the villages and regions they served, allowing them to improve their content offerings.

Key to success was integrated data. With everyone working in Hootsuite Enterprise, the social media team had a global and local view of what was working. Daily central reports highlighted the number of posts by every title, overall engagement—also in comparison to previous days and weeks—and internal engagement metrics, such as page likes, number of posts, reach, and potential audience. Thanks to training, regional centers now actively generate their own reports.

Local World tripled the portion of web traffic from social media—with nearly 40% of their daily website referrals coming from social media.

In just 10 months, Local World also doubled their Facebook likes and Twitter followers. "It's numbers like this that our executives like to hear," says Hornsby, "but it's insights that go deeper into business objectives that really matter."



Next steps—how to drive company-wide adoption

Creating a social media strategy is one thing. But how do you make your sales teams and locations adopt social at a hyperlocal level? In our next guide, you'll gain the best practices to make sure that your investment in social doesn't stall on the frontline.

- Help sales professionals find local leads from social conversations
- Why adoption is not about tools or metrics
- Best practices for training thousands of employees or sales professionals

[Read the next guide](#)

Endnotes

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About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting enterprise.hootsuite.com

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