

Client



Company:

The Flint Group

Website:

www.flint-group.com

Headquarters:

Fargo, North Dakota, USA

Industry:

Social Media Marketing

Size:

13 offices across North America including partner companies

Solution:

Alterian SM2

Results:

1. Easy-to-use social media monitoring available to all account teams
2. Limited investment in training required for all staff to reap the benefits
3. Improved consumer insight delivered daily, helps drive strategies for clients
4. Increased understanding of the social web helps win new business

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Josh Lysne
Senior Digital Strategist at the Flint Group

Social media monitoring drives new level of audience insight

Enviably agency track record

Less than one percent of marketing organizations last as long as Flint has – an impressive track record considering it was established over 60 years ago. A collection of full-service marketing, advertising, consulting, public relations and interactive companies, the Flint Group has 13 offices across North America, with clients such as the American Heart Association, 3M and Subway. Some client relationships have lasted over 50 years, something Flint puts down to its ethos of always developing new areas of expertise and helping clients find new opportunities.



More efficient monitoring needed

Digital now plays an integral role in everything the Flint Group does, across all areas of its services portfolio from research to strategy, interactive communications to traditional media and creative development. To keep delivering the best work possible for clients, the firm knew it was imperative to identify consumer perceptions on the social web.

"Keeping one step ahead of our clients by understanding audiences and markets are some of the factors which have led to our continued success as a group," explained Josh Lysne, Senior Digital Strategist at the Flint Group. "The fundamental shift in how consumers communicate with each other and with brands, caused by social media, has made monitoring these conversations critical to improve engagement."

Flint had been using free software tools to provide listening intelligence but as the social web started to explode, it soon outgrew existing methods. The group was using a lot of resource to integrate results from different applications and establish brand perceptions. Time was also being wasted wading through large amounts of spam and junk as Flint was finding the tools' filters to be ineffective.

"Free search and monitoring software can do a pretty good job but we needed something which would deliver deeper insights in a highly efficient manner, right across the company," Lysne commented.

Improved insight drives strategy

Following a review of various suppliers, Flint Group decided Alterian SM2 was best suited to its business. "SM2 had the right balance of functionality, usability

and price," said Lysne. "Other platforms were unnecessarily complex or their high cost wasn't justifiable."

Significant efficiency gains are now being realized by the group due to SM2's ease-of-use and valuable insights are being generated by those working closely with clients every day, as Lysne explained: "We felt some alternatives would take too long to train staff to use, or training a few specialists to use a complex tool would lead to bottlenecks. The true value comes from staff working directly with clients being able to glean insights to help shape ongoing communication strategies."

"After 1-2 hours of training, account teams are up and running, creating the searches they need – SM2 is very intuitive. And its licensing model means we can have multiple users without affecting cost," continued Lysne.

Flint uses SM2 in many different ways depending on the client but most applications so far have included brand audits and general listening. Others include corporate marketing and brand building, social media, PR, competitor insight, SEO and product development.

One example of the value Alterian SM2 brings easily is its Tag Clouds which help drive SEO strategies. Tag Clouds in SM2 allow you to see the words and phrases which consumers are searching for, around a particular brand, product or service. "Using search terms customers and prospects themselves are using is a lot more effective than hoping terms suggested by a brand or agency will work. This helps our clients feature more highly in SEO rankings," said Lysne.

Share of voice is another type of SM2 report proving invaluable to Flint, who use it whilst creating client plans, helping to understand if the audience in question is using blogs, whether they are heavy YouTube users, or frequent message boards, for example. "SM2 helps us avoid wasting budgets on the wrong message platform and making a blind guess on which social tactics might work best," commented Lysne.

Helping BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota change perceptions



One particular social media and PR campaign where SM2 is proving its worth is for health insurance provider BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota, with

whom Flint has been using the tool with for about a year.

By monitoring for general healthcare insurance conversations and key brands in the sector, Flint was able to confirm that quite a lot of traffic was concerned with negative perceptions of the industry and some referred to its client. "The health insurance industry, as a whole, receives an unjustified bad press, so we needed to understand what the feeling was in more detail before creating a strategy to rectify it," explained Lysne.

SM2 gives Flint real-time insight as to where these negative conversations are taking place, which helps it guide the client where to go and address the public's concerns and misconceptions. By discovering where the relevant bloggers, message boards, forums, or Tweets etc are, BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota can now act quickly and appropriately and engage with its online communities more effectively.

"Insurance companies often come across as the ones making all the money in the healthcare sector, whereas highly efficient companies like BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota pay out 93 cents in every dollar, back to the policy holder to pay for healthcare. Only 7 cents of every dollar goes to the company to administer the plans. Its facts like this that are being used to address people's concerns and wrongly held beliefs," said Lysne.

Another direct outcome of the monitoring was the creation of a blog by BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota, a very rare example in its industry. In addition to posting various comments, the blog has a forum section, allowing consumers to share their feelings or queries which BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota answers transparently.

The insight garnered by SM2 is also helping guide the content of the blog. Lysne explained: "BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota isn't 'flying blind' any more, or relying on traditional media to establish the public's sentiment. If new topics emerge, we can quickly add a new category or term to our SM2 searches to keep on top of current issues – it's very easy to adapt the criteria."

The output has also helped drive the messaging of TV, radio, print and outdoor campaigns for BlueCross BlueShield of North Dakota across the county. "Alterian SM2 gave us the insight we needed to help shape a campaign which addressed public perception head-on in a positive way, instead of creating a whole lot of marketing speak that might not resonate with audiences," concluded Lysne.

The perfect blend of benefits

Flint almost view social media monitoring as an insurance plan and believe all brands – whatever size or market – should be listening online. "People are talking about you somewhere, however small the volume and if someone says something negative you need to know now. Brands can't sit back and wait for something to happen as damage can happen very quickly," explained Lysne.

Overall, Alterian SM2 has brought a new level of audience insight to the Flint Group, helping it shape the direction in which they take their clients and how they engage with consumers, in both the traditional and social worlds. Lysne commented: "With marketing budgets being stretched even more, being able to prove ROI is increasingly vital. Part of this is being able to show the social media chatter increasing – or decreasing – depending on the case in hand."

"We were looking for an efficient, easy-to-use social media monitoring tool to help drive client strategies but also enhance our new business prospecting," said Lysne. "Alterian SM2 sat perfectly at the junction of all our demands, providing both an efficient internal model for staff but also the right metrics to show prospects, so they take social media seriously." Demonstrating an increased understanding of the social web, Flint's improved monitoring has been the foot-in-the-door for many new business wins and helped grow existing clients.

Alterian

Alterian (LSE: ALN) empowers marketers with an integrated marketing software platform combining database, online and operational marketing applications on a shared data infrastructure. The Alterian Integrated Marketing Platform makes it practical and cost effective for marketers to use actionable insight to execute an integrated marketing strategy across online and offline channels.

It is the unique integration of analytics, content and execution through our industry leading tools, such as the Alterian Messenger email platform, and the award winning Content Management solutions, which enables marketers to drive a seamless, multi-channel customer experience.

Alterian's analytically-led software is delivered to approximately 1,000 marketing departments, across 26 countries, and an international network of more than 100 business partners, including marketing services providers, agencies and systems integrators. Its partners, such as Accenture, Acxiom, Allant Group, Cap Gemini, Carlson Marketing, Experian, Epsilon, InfoUSA, LogicaCMG, Merkle, Ogilvy One and Euro RSCG Worldwide, deliver Alterian software alongside their own domain and services expertise to help market leaders such as Princess Cruises, General Motors, Zurich, Astra Zeneca, HSBC, Limited Too, AEGON, Avis, Worldwide Wrestling Entertainment, Dell, Amnesty International and Vodafone integrate marketing processes and drive competitive advantage. For more information about Alterian, products within the Alterian Integrated Marketing Platform or our Partner Network, please visit www.alterian.com.

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