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# Social Media Analytics Summit

April 17-18 | Hotel Kabuki | San Francisco, CA

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## Social Media Analytics Expert Interview Series: Part 1

Judy Pastor



Tom H. C. Anderson



Dana Jacob



Usher Lieberman



Marshall Sponder



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### Testimonials

The event was very informative. Great content, great location and great networking opportunities. I learned some new tricks and met many new and worthwhile contacts. Well worth the trip.

Ravi Prasad, State  
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January 18, 2012

As a lead-up to the Social Media Analytics Summit, Text Analytics News has partnered with Useful Social Media to publish a series of expert interviews with top Social Media Analytics professionals. In our first installment, Useful Social Media reached out to a few key supporters and experts in the area of digital research to better understand what cutting edge firms are doing the area of social media analytics.

On today's panel we have:

#### **Dana Jacob, Sr. Manager of Social Media Insights & Analytics, Yahoo!**

Dana built and launched the social media insights program across Yahoo! in January, 2011. She currently manages the program and is in the process of deploying the program globally. Previously, Dana managed Yahoo! Global Customer Satisfaction Tracking (CSAT) program. Dana has 18 years of experience in primary and secondary research, both on the client side and the agency side. She has received numerous corporate awards for excellence in market research and social media insights.

#### **Judy Pastor, Principal Operations Research Manager, American Airlines**

Judy holds a MS in Operations Research from Stanford University and before American Airlines conducted Operations Research for firms including Continental Airlines, Haverly Systems and UPS.

#### **Tom H. C. Anderson, Managing Partner, Anderson Analytics (OdinText)**

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Tom manages Anderson Analytics' new patent pending text analytics platform OdinText. Having worked with several social firms including LinkedIn and Facebook the firm is a leader in the intersection of marketing research and text analytics. His firm was the first among traditional full service market research companies to leverage natural language processing in large scale Customer Satisfaction programs for companies such as Starwood Hotels, and his work in this area has been recognized with several industry awards for innovation in research.

#### **Usher Lieberman, Director Corporate Communications, TheFind**

TheFind is the fastest growing top-tier shopping engine and the one people return to more than any other, according to comScore's measure of comparison shopping engines. TheFind's patented search and discovery technology makes it easy to shop, for anything you like, in every store, all at once. Before joining TheFind in 2009 Usher worked at several companies leveraging digital data including eBay, Jabber, Inc. and Ogilvy.

#### **Marshall Sponder, Founder, WebMetricsGuru**

Marshall Sponder is Senior Analyst, Author, and Founder of WebMetricsGuru. He is an independent Web Analytics and SEO/SEM specialist working in the field of market research, social media, networking and PR. He provides digital data convergence generating ROI and develops data metrics, KPI's and dashboards that drive businesses by setting and evaluating benchmarks.

#### **Useful Social Media: *What are the primary ways in which you leverage Social Media for your clients?***

**Pastor (American Airlines):** American Airlines and our loyalty program, AAdvantage, have both twitter accounts and Facebook pages to communicate with customers. Twitter is our first line of problem identification and is quickly becoming a major portal to our Customer Relations and Reservations departments for passengers on the "day of departure" (i.e. in the process of traveling).

Currently, we answer 700 tweets per day and that will increase as we ramp up our twitter agents to 24/7 by the end of first quarter, 2012. Inquiries and problems are also addressed on Facebook, though these tend to involve future travel plans. We also monitor the frequent flyer forums such as [www.flyertalk.com](http://www.flyertalk.com) and [www.milepoint.com](http://www.milepoint.com) and reply to questions that may come up about our policies and procedures. Our Facebook pages also highlight fare sales, and special travel destinations and deals.

**Anderson (OdinText):** Anderson Analytics has been leveraging Text Analytics to help our clients understand customer comments since 2005. Early on our focus was primarily on customer comments in survey open ends; this is still a key area for most of our clients. However since 2007 our clients have asked us to incorporate analysis of social media including discussions taking place on open forums such as [Flyertalk.com](http://Flyertalk.com). Twitter and other social networks are also a growing area of interest, however we try to help our clients to make educated decisions and prioritize all the unstructured data sources now available rather than trying to "boil the ocean." We've found that a deeper analysis and understanding of the relative importance of these sources makes for a better analytics ROI.

**Sponder (WebMetricsGuru):** I'm an analyst, so the lens I use to leverage social media is through an understanding of online conversations and how they can be best categorized. I don't consider myself a marketer, and let other others do that for me, so I am not focused on marketing messages or how to best respond, but I do look at platforms that handle those functions for marketers and public relations.

As far as the particulars of how I leverage social media for clients, I look at the following categories

- Is it brand messaging?
- Is it non specific, but pertaining to the overall industry?
- Is it messaging pertaining to a specific topic related to the client?
- Is the messaging online representative of offline sentiment (often, we've found, it's not).

**Lieberman (TheFind):** TheFind is a shopping search engine with perhaps the only index of every online store and available product; roughly 500k stores and 500 million items for sale. We are increasingly using social media, specifically the social signals broadcast by the open graph, to influence our search results. Already, the most Liked stores and brands in your network are ranked higher and the products people Like are more visible. We expect the influence of social signals to accelerate as more stores and brands recognize the obvious SEO benefits of driving social signals such as Like and +1 down to the product level.

**Useful Social Media: *What kinds of social media analytics have you found most useful?***

**Jacob (Yahoo!):** For our needs, text analytics is the foundation of social media analytics. Sentiment analysis is not sufficient as the bulk of social conversations convey a spectrum of emotions, and therefore can't really be categorized as positive or negative. In order to extract actionable insights, it is critical to sort, filter, analyze and code the conversations into quantifiable categories that are meaningful to specific business context.

Even for engagement metrics, text analytics is key to understanding the major drivers behind the engagement.

**Anderson (OdinText):** We've looked at and worked with many of the providers out there from social media monitoring to pure play text analytics vendors. What we have found is that there is no one tool out there for every situation. The needs differ tremendously by both data source as well as use case. Many of the social media monitoring tools out there have focused more on Twitter data and on the public relations use case, while the pure text analytics tools have taken an almost too broad of an approach. This is the reason we developed OdinText.com specifically for market research managers, however we make no claims about our own tools being the best tool for every use case and every type of data.

We've found a discussion about what client objectives are and what data is most suitable to answer these is the best approach. Sometimes this means recommending a provider like Salesforce's Radian6 or other vendor, sometimes it means designing a custom ad-hoc study that may incorporate survey data, and other times OdinText is used. Regardless, in many cases we do find that further and deeper analysis is beneficial; these are usually conducted using one of the common statistical analysis packages out there whether it's something as basic as Excel or something more advanced like IBM's PASW Modeler, SAS, Latent Gold etc. It really depends on the need and the data.

**Pastor (American Airlines):** We track click through rates and referrals from our Facebook pages to our booking engine, [www.AA.com](http://www.AA.com), and attribute revenue to each. Number of issues solved via Twitter is also tracked. We are still looking for ways to quantify the softer side of SM – the good and the bad stories that our customers tell. We are currently working on tracking Likes, re-tweets, and shares.

**Lieberman (TheFind):** More important than the tools is the personnel using them. De-facto, they have been entrusted with protecting the brand. Capable people, with a sense of urgency, and a healthy respect for the often ambiguous rules of the social road will usually get it right with even the most rudimentary of tools.

**Sponder (WebMetricsGuru):** From my point of view, and in my own experience, I found full service platforms such as Synthesio, Brandtology and Integrasco a better deal, overall for a certain class of high end enterprise client. That's probably due to the nature of emerging technologies and a lack of standards around social media analytics. The higher price tag that full service platform command is well worth it for purity of data, correct categorization (for a client) and integration of the data into a brand specific dashboard.

I have tended to find the Twitter Analytics platform, which are legion now, not as useful, and more of a commodity - but I see a middle ground in Self Serve platforms that have users who are much better trained in how to deploy the platforms. I also think usefulness of the platform (or not) is directly related to the maturity level of the clients in regards to how they would use social media data to bolster their businesses and the communications internally and externally. People focus on the tools, but who is focusing on the client's own awareness of what they actually need from these tools and how to extract that data?

It's from that perspective, that I started my own consulting practice - because tools are only as useful as the industry knowledge of the analyst and the cooperation of the stakeholders/clients - and that's what we need to work on. Often, it's not actually the platforms that are the issue, but the miss-understanding of what can and cannot be achieved using social analytics platforms - and that's what we all need to address.

**Useful Social Media: *What parts of the business (CRM, Research, CS, HR etc.) do you think can benefit most from social media analytics?***

**Jacob (Yahoo!):** Every part of the business can benefit from social media analytics, but the needs and focuses vary. For marketing, social media analytics provide measurement of campaign effectiveness,

brand image and association, and reactions to marketing messages. For product teams, social media could provide insights into users' mindset as to why they use one brand or type of product versus another, and could help uncover unmet needs in the market place. For the research function, social media is becoming an important data source to compliment traditional market research. The list goes on and on.

**Pastor (American Airlines):** The obvious place is in the area of Customer Relations with feedback to the operational where improvements are critical. In CRM, knowing which customers are influencers can help us determine who can help us with our marketing messages and who can do the most damage when a service failure occurs. Human Resources and management in general can learn about employee attitudes and concerns using internal Social Media. Happy employees can translate into happy customers and the reverse is even more strongly true.

**Lieberman (TheFind):** Marketing. Word of mouth is legend for catapulting shooting stars and cratering entire quarters. The immediate health of just about every company today may be determined by how quickly and effectively marketing can pivot to leverage opportunities and respond to failures in social media. If those are the stakes, no area can be more in need of social media analytics than marketing.

**Anderson (OdinText):** I think all the functions you mention can benefit from social media and text analytics. CRM, CS, and PR were earlier in realizing the benefits, and market research (which is our specialty) is now catching on. I expect Human Resources and other departments will also soon catch up.

All of these could benefit from more than the cursory analysis now typically being conducted. I expect Predictive Analytics will become more and more important regardless of data source or use case.

**Sponder (WebMetricsGuru):** To me, I think all the businesses you mention can benefit from "getting it right" but Market Research has the most to gain, immediately, from using social data along with useful categorizations. I think the biggest obstacle to getting "there" - to the promised land of social media analytics, is the lack of "governance" around keywords, taxonomies and categories that make market research function suspect.

On the other hand, the PR/Comms function of business has the least to gain, they have already "co-opted" social media, and often the uses of social media are governed by corporate communications, which tends to dilute the quality and integrity of the data that is obtained via social media. The aims of marketing communications and those of analytics are antagonistic to each other, with the former focusing on messaging and spin, and the latter focusing on a truthful understand of social data and what that data means.

**Useful Social Media: *What skillsets do you feel are most critical in a social media analytics department?***

**Pastor (American Airlines):** I think that an Operations Research background, with emphasis on problem solving and statistics, is ideal. Text and data mining skills are also key, along with a curiosity to find the latent issues that underlie the unstructured text and any other associated data. Since this is a new field and answers to problems are rarely obvious, tenacity is a great strength.

**Lieberman (TheFind):** Statistical research and analysis combined with communications and creative personnel. The former to spot trends and even predict the future; the latter to make sense of conversations, craft responses, and design new campaigns.

**Sponder (WebMetricsGuru):** I think having an industry knowledge is important to the social analytics department within an organization and here's why: Social Data, by its nature, is mostly unstructured (some have said that 90% of the social data is "unstructured") and it takes a lot of additional work to provide meaning to the data in context to what a client actually needs.

The platforms, themselves, cannot supply that crucial context, which makes data culled from social media useful and open to be leveraged by organizations to improve their business and measurement capabilities.

No doubt, the ability to handle "big data" and to have a "data scientist" background will become increasingly important because the amount of social data continues to multiply due to adoption and the use of pervasive mobile devices. The amount of unstructured but interesting data will grow so that only those who are adept in handling big data will be able to see the larger patterns within the social stream.

**Jacob (Yahoo!):**

I'd say there are four critical elements to an effective social media analytics department:

- The ability to recognize and identify patterns and trends from large volume of data
- A familiarity with how software applications are built, and a comfort in using them
- A thorough understanding of the business context and competitive landscape, combined with a sharp instinct
- A passion for adopting cutting edge technologies in insights research.

**Anderson (OdinText):** Other than business expertise, which really needs to come from the client side, I think that many of the skills from traditional market research and statistics have been lacking in many social media departments. I think the new researcher/social media analyst needs to have a combination of technology/software and data base knowledge alongside best practices commonly found in traditional consumer insights research.

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