

ORACLE CLOUD

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Managing Your Facebook Community: Findings on Conversation Volume by Day of Week, Hour, and Minute

Introduction

According to Web analytics provider Alexa, Facebook's daily reach in August through October 2010 extended to more than 35 percent of the total internet population. What's more, those users spent an average of 55 minutes per day on the site—but which 55 minutes out of the day and which day of the week accounted for the majority of this activity?

If marketers are to optimize their Facebook community management practices to maximize the fan experience and generate a better return on engagement (ROE), they need to know what to publish and when to engage with fans.

The paper “Anatomy of a Facebook Post” focuses on publishing activity from a brand perspective, revealing which post times and types (video, text, image) yielded the highest fan interaction rates as measured by shares, Likes, and comments. The key takeaway from that paper is that marketers should publish posts with images weekdays before noon (Eastern time) to maximize their effectiveness. The data also showed that image posts are generally more effective than video or text posts.

In contrast, this white paper attempts to answer those same questions by examining the posts and comments (*not* shares and Likes) of brands and fans of brand pages. The findings presented here reinforce those from the previous white paper and reveal some additional insights—all of which combine to help marketers better engage with brand fans via Facebook.

Methodology

The insights presented in this white paper were gleaned from data from Vitruve Publisher¹ analyzing Facebook posts from August 10, 2007, through October 10, 2010. These posts were pulled from more than 1,500 brand streams, representing 1.64 million posts and 7.56 million comments, and the data analyzed was based on fan posts to brand pages by minute of the hour, hour of the day, and day of the week. The 24-hour data is based on times in the Eastern time zone, and approximately 95 percent of the streams represented are from the United States. The data does not represent all of a user’s Facebook posts but, rather, actions taken by brands and fans in response to a brand’s posts.

Several findings reinforce the idea that today’s proverbial watercooler is no longer offline at the office but rather online at Facebook:

- Conversation volume on brand pages is significant and continuous throughout the day (from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.), with 3 p.m. representing the peak.
- All weekdays share a similar high volume of conversations, with Wednesday representing the peak.
- Weekend activity differs dramatically, with Sunday seeing the lowest post activity from fans as well as brands.

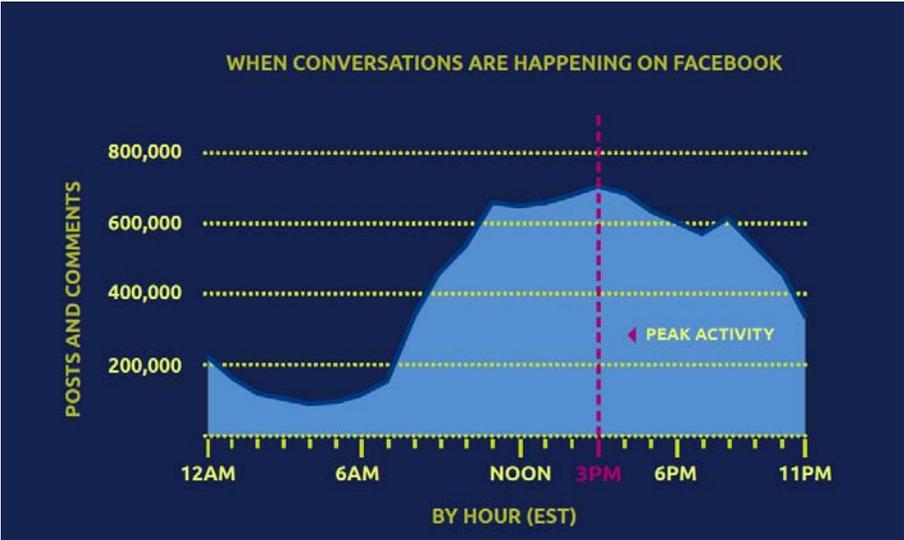


Figure 1. Fan interactions with brand pages peak around midafternoon Eastern time.

¹ Vitruve was acquired by Oracle in July 2012. Vitruve Publisher is now called Oracle Social Marketing Cloud Service.

As you can see in Figure 1, in the posts analyzed, Facebook activity spiked at three points during the day: 11 a.m., 3 p.m., and 8 p.m.—with 3 p.m. seeing the most activity. Yet the data from the previous white paper (“Anatomy of a Facebook Post”) revealed morning to be the best time to publish image posts to achieve optimal effectiveness. This suggests that when a brand publishes content in the morning (Eastern time), fan engagement builds throughout the day, peaking when West Coast (and other time zone) activity peaks in the morning. These behavioral patterns were found to be consistent throughout the traditional workweek (Monday through Friday).

This means that a marketer might publish an image post before noon (EST) and watch it begin to generate engagement from East Coast consumers shortly before they head out to lunch and from West Coast consumers as they start their day. By publishing during this time frame, you’re essentially “seeding” the message early into Facebook’s ecosystem. At 3 p.m., activity is highest—possibly because it’s lunchtime on the West Coast and midday break on the East Coast (as well as the time kids are getting home from school).

To develop social connections with fans, you need to engage in two-way conversations with them, responding to their posts as well as their comments on your brand’s posts. By understanding when fans are most likely to engage with brand pages on Facebook, you can push a poll or a survey during the time period in which it stands to gain the largest, most engaged audience.

When Are Fans on Facebook?

Marketers are still learning what to say, when to publish messages, and how to best manage their communities to optimize two-way communications with brand fans. A good place to start is by gaining an understanding of when fans are posting on Facebook. The previous “Anatomy of a Facebook Post” white paper revealed that the most effective days for generating user interaction with Facebook posts are Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

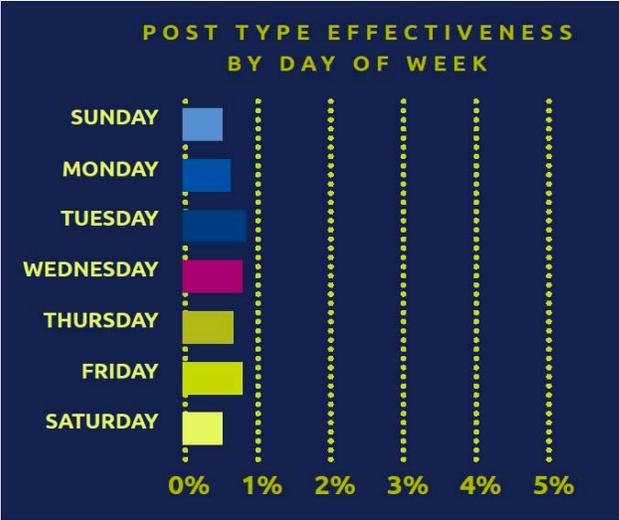


Figure 2. Dividing gross interaction (that is, comments, Likes, and shares) by the number of fans for a particular stream yielded the measurement of post effectiveness.

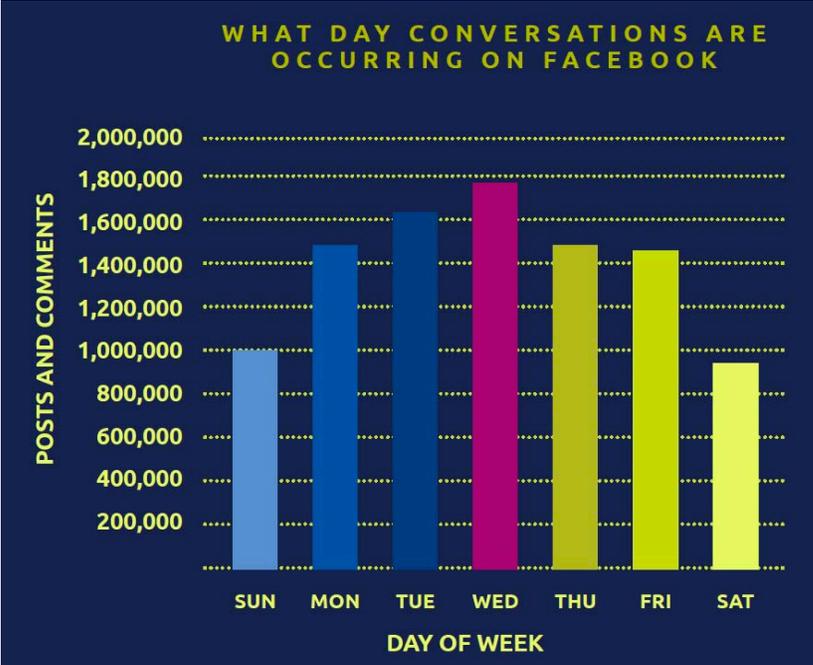


Figure 3. Brand page conversation volume peaks midweek and dips to its lowest point on Sundays.

For this white paper, a new data set was used to measure brand page conversation volume (that is, total posts and comments) by day of week, revealing Wednesday to be the highest and Sunday to be the lowest. Overall, Wednesday received 77 percent more interactions than Sunday. It also received 7 percent more interactions than Tuesday and 11 percent more than Thursday.

To further evaluate conversation volume, the difference between post and comment volumes was analyzed (see Figure 4). (Posts and comments can originate from brands as well as fans of brands.) This analysis revealed Monday to be the highest posting day and Wednesday the fifth-lowest posting day. However, Wednesday is also the day when the most commenting takes place, edging out Tuesday by 7 percent.

Thus, it appears that fans and brands are likely to begin their weeks with a higher posting frequency; however, this does not necessarily correspond to when fans or brands are commenting on posts.

The key takeaway is that fan engagement does not start and stop when a message is published. Instead, it continues throughout the week as brands and fans connect via comments made during the entire conversation cycle. Publish your message, and then engage in a two-way conversation with fans as they respond to your posts and/or post their own messages on your brand’s news feed.

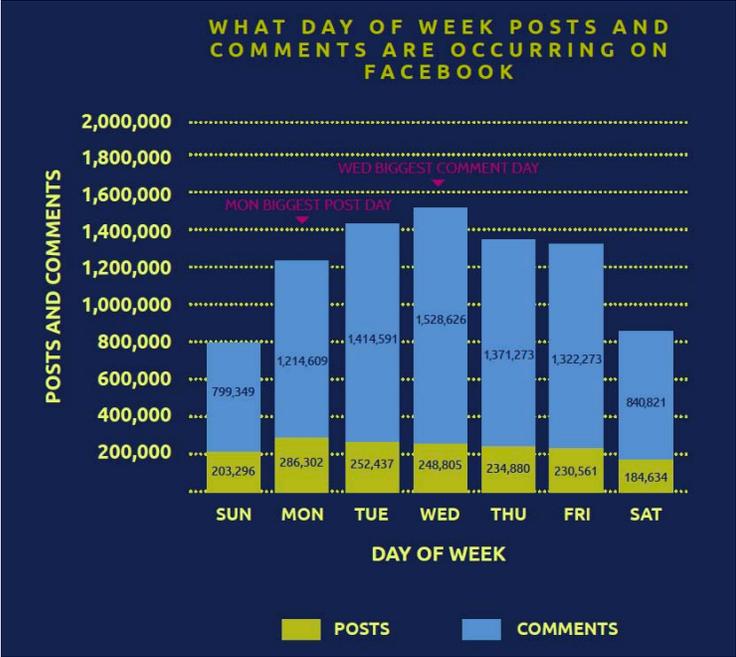


Figure 4. In the data set examined for this white paper, Monday saw the highest volume of Facebook posts and Wednesday saw the highest volume of Facebook comments.

An Integrated View of Conversation Volume by Day and Hour

For analyzing Facebook conversation volume, there are two interesting data sets to consider: day-of-week/hour-of-day conversation volume (see Figure 5) and aggregate weekday/weekend performance, with best and worst days highlighted (see Figure 6).

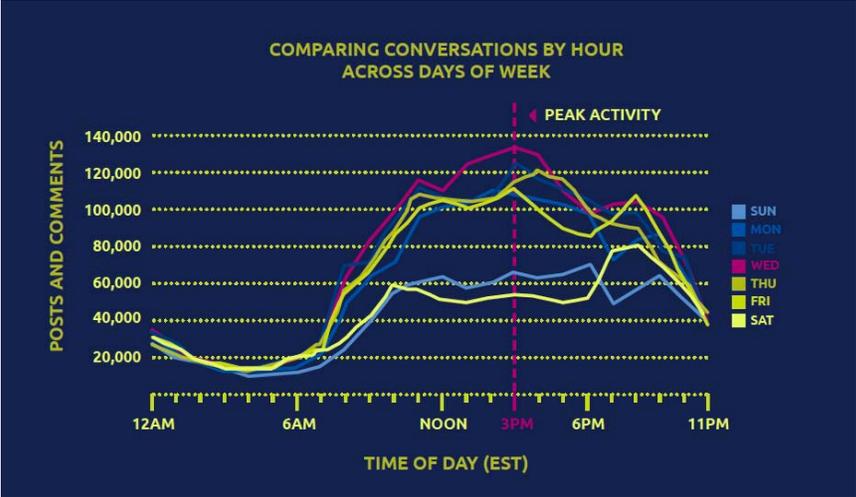


Figure 5. Facebook conversation volume was higher at 3 p.m. Wednesday than at any other time of the week in the posts analyzed for this white paper.

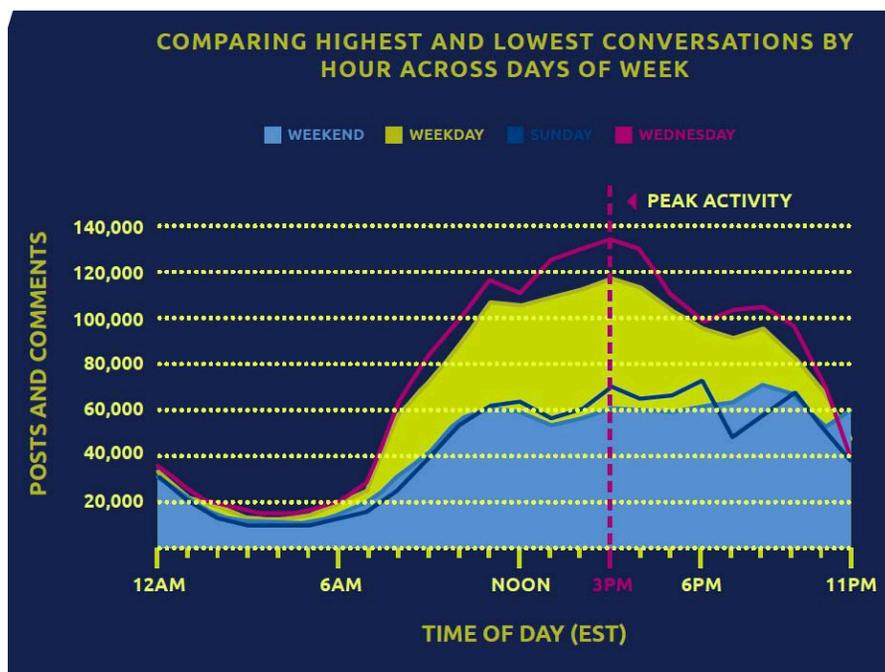


Figure 6. The data set revealed Wednesday to be the peak day for Facebook brand conversations and Sunday to be the slowest day for such conversations.

The “Anatomy of a Facebook Posting” white paper showed posting to be 65 percent more effective in the morning than during other times of the day (as measured by shares, Likes, and comments). And, indeed, the data analyzed for this “Managing Your Facebook Community” white paper indicated that by publishing early in the day, brands gain a better chance of participating in two-way conversations with fans throughout the weekday time frame of 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The data revealed that the lowest posting activity took place on Sundays between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.—when most of the US population is sleeping. However, even excluding the hours between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., less interaction is occurring on Saturday and Sunday (with the exception of a rise in interactions on Saturday between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. that eventually mirrors the downward curve of Monday through Friday after 10 p.m.).

The key takeaway from this analysis is that marketers should optimize their community management to follow their morning posts during the workweek. Despite the 24/7 nature of Facebook, you can optimize your messaging by engaging with fans through the news feed Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. (with key times being 11 a.m., 3 p.m., and 8 p.m.).

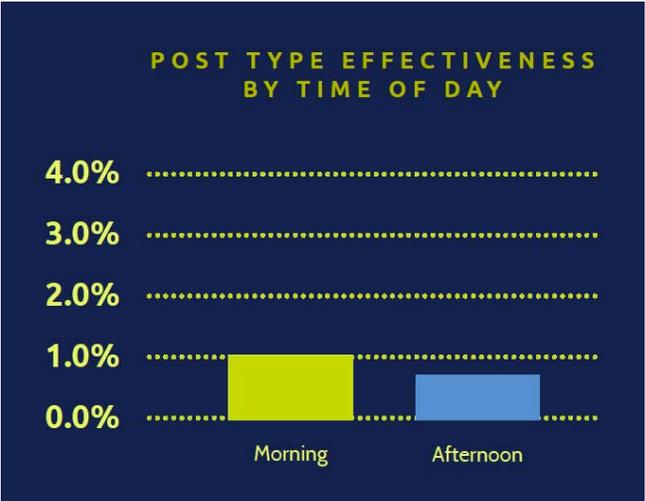


Figure 7. The data revealed that posts during the morning period (defined as 12 a.m. through 12 p.m.) are more effective than those during the afternoon period (12:01 p.m. through 11:59 p.m.).

Fan Interactions by the Minute

As brands publish content in the Facebook ecosystem, morning posts are presented throughout the day. Community managers can fuel interactions by commenting on fan comments as conversation volume rises.

As you can see in Figure 8, a more detailed view of fan activity suggests that the strongest part of an hour in terms of fan engagement comes between 15 and 30 minutes after the hour—that is also the portion of the hour that sees the most posts. The second-highest post interaction comes at the beginning of the second half-hour (between 30 and 45 minutes after the hour). In sum, the top of the hour sees 25 percent more activity than the bottom of the hour and 12 percent more activity than the middle of the hour.

A few interesting theories can be derived from this data set:

- Because these conversations are occurring during the workday, people are typically starting and finishing activities (such as meetings, phone calls, and projects) at the top of the hour and in 30-minute increments.
- The top of the hour sees the greatest volume of posts, driving increased fan interaction with the news feed.
- During the last segment of an hour (between 45 and 59 minutes after the hour), people are more likely to be engaged in tasks or activities other than interacting on Facebook.

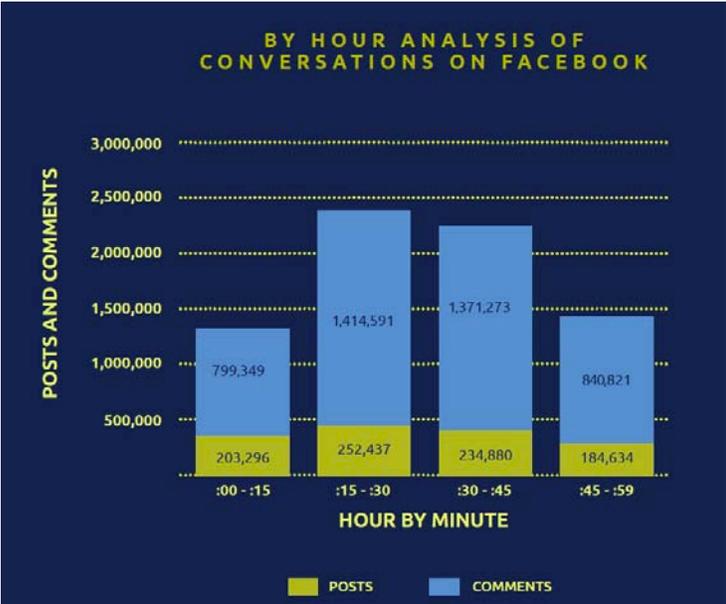


Figure 8. Post and comment volume varies widely, even within one-hour increments.

By viewing the data in a slightly different way—showing posts and comments by minute during the span of an hour (see Figure 9)—you can see that post volume spikes at the top of the hour but remains fairly consistent through the rest of the hour. In contrast, fan engagement with these messages drops dramatically within the first 3 minutes of a post and again between 31 and 33 minutes into the hour. Fans’ ability to interact with messages, Facebook’s real-time updating of messages into the news feed, and various other factors (including the use of unique publishing IDs to prevent message grouping) may all contribute to this cluster of activity at the top and the middle of the hour.

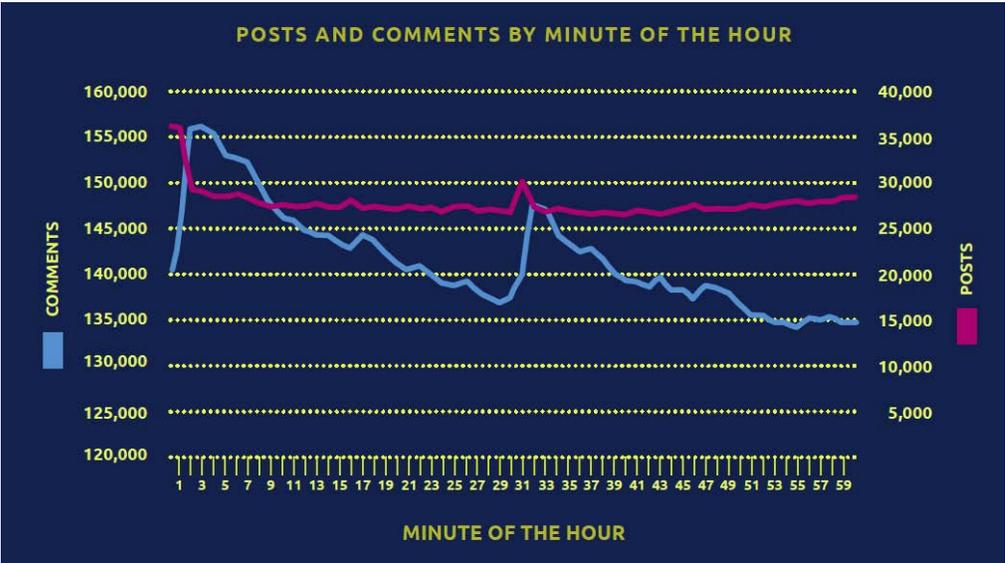


Figure 8. Fan activity is clustered at the top and middle of the hour.

Conclusion

With Facebook's reach and usage continuing to grow, Facebook brand pages have become an increasingly important tool for engaging with customers. However, without a clear understanding of consumers' Facebook usage (that is, when they're most likely to post or comment and what is most likely to engage them), organizations have little chance of maximizing the return on their social marketing efforts. This white paper has attempted to provide that understanding by showing patterns of usage revealed through an analysis of a wide sampling of Facebook posts (pulled from more than 1,500 brand streams, representing 1.64 million posts and 7.56 million comments, during a three-year period). Armed with this information, marketers should be well on their way to determining the best times and ways to engage with brand fans.



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