



# Listen and Engage At the Point of Need

## The Fruitful Way to Connect With Prospects Online

Listening is the foundation of strong social media strategy. But listening is of little consequence if you can never use that intelligence to connect with prospects, community, and fans and build your business, right?

On the social web, there is an unspoken line in the marketing sand called the “Point of Need”.

On one side of this line there’s the blatant pitches, advertisements, and “cold calls”, either in response to posts or out of the blue. To the recipient, these encroachments are usually unwelcome and tuned out, ignored, deflected, or even resented. These folks have not expressed interest (let alone need), they haven’t invited anyone to be part of a discussion, and the messages are often irrelevant to them in the moment that they hear them. Why? The messages are interruptive, and out of context.

On the other side of the line, there’s the idea of a sales pitch, connection, or outreach, but the perception is completely different. Over here, they are more than welcome; in fact, they are invited and often appreciated.

In both cases, people may ultimately need your product. They may be on the market for what you offer. They may even be talking about you specifically, but not asking for something from you in particular. The question is: is this the right moment in time for you to connect? What sets these scenarios apart?

### Swing and a Miss...

Misguided pitches on the web are everywhere. Barging in on a conversation between people - even if it’s about your brand or product - to deliver a pitch, regardless of the tenor of the conversation. Pitching your product at every mention of a competitor, even if no one has asked for information or alternatives. Tossing a link to your latest promotion at the slightest passing mention of your industry.

Step in on these conversations carelessly, and you can be perceived as pushy, opportunistic, irrelevant, or “sales-y”. You may annoy or inconvenience someone, or even lose a bit of respect or brand equity in the eyes of the person who received your unwanted solicitation.





Not every conversation or mention of your brand or industry is an invitation to engage. In this scenario, you're disregarding circumstance, context, and convenience. While someone online might ultimately have an interest in what your selling, it may not be the priority for them right now. In other words, your pitch doesn't line up with the point in time when they need you, and when they may be open to a chat.

## Home Run...

On the other side of the line, you don't pitch on your terms. You connect, listen, and participate in the online community, and often for the purpose of contributing and sharing without expectations. You're courteous and polite, but friendly, approachable, and helpful. You make it clear that your investment in your community is for the long term, not just when you've got a transaction on the line.

This time around, when the same customer expresses a need for something you offer, declares an intention to purchase something, or poses a question online about which you have expertise or interest, you have the opportunity and also the invitation to connect.

When you do so, you offer information without sales pressure, but with the intention of helping. You're providing an answer to a question, or information, or expertise. You're not interrupting, you're contributing and responding. And because of your active participation in the community both before and after the sales opportunity, your outreach is accepted on a broader basis of trust, familiarity, and affinity.

In this scenario, your community members will often be pleasantly surprised that you're paying attention, and responding when they need you (instead of the other way around). They'll be far more receptive to your outreach, appreciative of your assistance, and likely to stay connected and follow through.

Many companies are starting to effectively listen online. And while the initial business goals may start with monitoring conversations about your brand, measuring your share of voice, and identifying the communities of influence, the point of need changes everything.

We've settled for decades of single-digit response rates to our marketing campaigns, and chalked that up as "success". But why? Most of our mass outreach efforts fail because, on a person to person basis, we've had the timing wrong. We're not there when our communities need us, we're only there when we've chosen to speak.

Listening for the point of need changes all of that. The social web invites us to market differently, and sell with a purpose. Listen, contribute, participate, and respond, and you always get the timing right.

