

# Unravel the

# web chatter

People are talking about your brand online, but what are they saying and how do you find them, asks **Robert Gray**

**A**ccording to a report released by E-consultancy this month, the UK market for online reputation and buzz monitoring will grow by around 30 per cent in 2008, to an estimated value of £60m. That this bullish outlook comes at a time of broader economic uncertainty illustrates the growing importance that brands and organisations are attaching to blogs, forums and other social media.

Over the past couple of years a new wave of online reputation monitoring tools have been established in response to increasing media fragmentation, changing consumer behaviour and the increasing breadth of different consumer channels. E-consultancy's *Online Reputation and Buzz Monitoring Buyer's Guide 2008* concludes that it is no longer feasible just to monitor online reputation manually. Moreover, as technology improves, organisations are getting more value from their monitoring services.

E-consultancy head of research Linus Gregoriadis says: 'There is quite a broad range of products available - from free

## CASE STUDY Britvic

Soft drinks group Britvic owns brands including Robinsons, J2O and Tango. It also has an exclusive bottling agreement with PepsiCo to bottle and distribute Pepsi, 7UP, Gatorade and VWater in the UK. In recent months it has stepped up its targeting of social media.

For example, Britvic's popular commercial for spring water brand Drench – featuring Thunderbirds puppet Brains dancing wildly to go's club floor-filler *Rhythm is a Dancer* – was carefully nurtured online into becoming a viral success. The ad has had more than two million hits on YouTube and had a Facebook

site created in its honour.

'As a company with a diverse portfolio of leading consumer brands, we have recognised the importance of understanding how consumers interact with our brands through social media,' says Britvic media communications manager Emma Peacock. 'The challenge was how to do this in a cost-effective and meaningful way.'

'We have been working closely with Metrica, which has created a way of incorporating social media into our wider media analysis. By normalising it in this way we have been able to quickly and easily update our

monitoring and analysis brief to represent our consumers' entire media landscape and experience.'

Peacock adds that it is still 'early days' but what Britvic ultimately hopes to be able to do with the results is deliver valuable insight to the business that can then be used to drive strategy for engaging more proactively with social media.

'We were actually working with Dell back in 2006 when the exploding laptop saga demonstrated just how powerful an influence the blogosphere was becoming,' says Metrica associate director Clare O'Sullivan. 'As a result,



**Viral hit** Britvic's Drench advertisement gained fame on the web

since then, we have been working closely with clients to help them understand how

best to monitor and evaluate social media and devising solutions to enable it.'

technology to services that are quite sophisticated but reliant on consultants for maximum value. The choice of technology provider depends partly on whether the intention is simply to keep track of what is being said for defensive reasons, or whether the intention is to use the resource proactively to improve engagement with customers and to make improvements to products and services.'

The market is still relatively immature and fragmented – the E-consultancy guide alone assesses 16 different suppliers – which means there is a lot of healthy competition between vendors, but also a sometimes baffling amount of choice for PR agency and in-house team buyers. Additionally, the sheer volume of data out there in a variety of forms and languages makes it difficult for a single technology solution to offer a truly comprehensive level of coverage.

So, how to go about making sense of this confusion? Bottle PR managing director Claire Cairns says that to monitor simple client mentions online, RSS feeds and Google Alerts, which tell you when your brand is mentioned online, are a good place to start. However, to pick up on forums, monitoring agencies can help. She recommends trialling different suppliers until

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**Tony Nixon** director, NixonMcInnes

you find the one that picks up the most relevant and frequent mentions.

'When monitoring your online activity for a client, it is important to get the analytics right,' she adds. 'If the key aim is to drive traffic to a client's website or blog, then you need to show that you've done it. Online brands tend to have the technology in place already. For those that don't, find a supplier you trust. If your own web guys are doing a great job – and they should be – use them.'

Drew Benvie, director at PR agency Hotwire, says that by tracking issues as well as brand mentions, press office teams can begin to steer the digital media agenda.

'Buzz on social networks can quickly become mainstream media news, and left unmanaged, can quickly spiral out of control,' he explains. 'Your company name, spokespeople and product names all need to be tracked. You then need to identify the impact of online buzz in this space. Positive buzz can help drive customer acquisition, but negative buzz can mean customer churn.'

Tom Nixon, director at social media agency NixonMcInnes, cites Brandwatch, which the agency uses for its clients, Nielsen's BuzzMonitor and Radian6 as the more advanced buzz monitoring tools. He believes these tools are particularly useful

for measuring the impact of other marketing/comms activity and can track how people's perception of a brand changes over time and how it compares to competitors. Additionally they can help identify the communities or other social media sites on which to focus your resources. But they are not the be all and end all.

'None of these tools will really come into their own unless you have in-house people who know how to use them,' says Nixon. 'They are an essential part of the PRO toolkit, just like reading newspapers, and we are receiving an increasing number of requests to train both in-house and agency marketers in how best to track their clients' online presence.'

Chris Reed, director in charge of the digital and social media team at Fishburne Hedges, uses Radian6. 'The tools that are free are getting better and better,' he says. 'So the agencies selling the service will have to demonstrate the benefits to justify the cost. However, like Nixon, he feels it is only by having 'informed people' to evaluate the data that real insight can be gleaned.'

The sheer volume of material makes it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. Social web tracking company Brandwatch says it downloads close to five