

DOES SOCIAL MEDIA REACH ELECTRONICS AND EMBEDDED ENGINEERS?

Social media is a rapidly growing part of the marketing mix for many companies, and those in the electronics components industry are no exception. Many people, however, find it hard to know what to expect from a campaign that uses a social media channel such as Twitter. This paper helps marketing teams set clear goals by benchmarking the performance of some leading companies in the electronics industry.

The statistics in this paper were collected at the start of June 2011

Social media is a dynamic and rapidly-changing channel. Whilst it allows you to reach far more people than you could through direct sales activities, the reach that can be achieved in the electronics components industry are still small when compared to other marketing channels.

Companies in the electronics sector usually struggle with limited budgets and resources, and therefore must ensure that their marketing activities deliver a positive return, yet many social media experts simply enthuse about “experimentation” and “learning”. This white paper identifies the metrics you should use to measure the results of a Twitter campaign and gives guidelines to realistic targets based upon the performance of electronic component companies that are already running social media campaigns.

HOW MANY FOLLOWERS?

The most basic metric is the number of people following your Twitter stream. The number of followers was found to be dependent upon the type of product supplied by a supplier:

- Microcontroller manufacturers - between 1000 and 10000
- FPGA manufacturers – around 2500
- RTOS vendors – less than 1000

Interestingly whilst some of the microcontroller vendors appeared to follow-back everyone, most had a follower-to-following ratio of five to 10, suggesting that engineers don't expect a follow-back.

Despite their broad appeal, distributors didn't have large numbers of followers; perhaps because much of their content was from the manufacturers whose products they sell. Large global distributors such as Digi-Key (@digkey) and Future (@FutureElec) had relatively small follower counts (4500 and 2000 respectively). Regional distributors typically attracted less than 1000 followers. Interestingly the distributors that are most active in social

media – Farnell (@element14) and RS Components (@DesignSparkRS) didn't seem to have vastly different follower numbers, attracting about 2700 and 3500 followers respectively.

Anyone can follow a Twitter stream, and many users build followers on a “follow you, follow me back” basis, so it's important to focus on *relevant* followers rather than total followers. Mindless following-back will not build an interested or relevant audience. Companies should only follow back relevant users, and a regular audit should be carried out to monitor the percentage of followers that are relevant.

WILL YOU BE LISTED?

When a follower places a Twitter feed on a list, it's a reasonable indication that they are interested and engaged and therefore the proportion of your followers that put your stream on a list is a reasonable indication of follower quality. In the electronics sector, typically 5-10% of followers add companies to a list. Distributors tend to have a lower percentage of followers placing them on a list, and the research also found a few companies that were well outside this range.

WILL YOU GET RETWEETED?

Social media platforms are based upon links to people or companies that already interest you and therefore social media campaigns tend to only reach existing customers. On Twitter retweeting is one way to achieve a wider audience, but during the time we conducted our research the number of retweets was too small to allow us to produce any valid statistics – particularly once we had discounted distributors retweeting suppliers' posts. It's clear that today companies in the electronic components sector should not expect a large number of retweets, and therefore Twitter is a tool to develop

relationships with existing customers rather than to acquire new customers.

HOW MANY CLICKS WILL SOCIAL MEDIA GENERATE?

It's essential to track your clicks and URL shortening services such as Bitly (bit.ly) and Hootsuite's Owly (ow.ly) are efficient ways to do this. However these services are public, allowing competitors to also view and analyse your click-through stats.

The microcontroller and FPGA manufacturers in our study achieved CTR of between 0.5% and 2%: not that dissimilar to the CTR that might be achieved from online display advertising, but it is impossible to know how many clicks can be attributed to customers and how many are due to people within the organisation. Distributors again lagged the manufacturers, with CTRs of 0.2 to 0.5%, and the distributors that are most active in social media actually did worse during the short period that we studied, although they were tweeting far more frequently, which resulted in a higher number of total clicks than their less active competitors.

The reason that distributors with a strong social media presence had relatively low CTRs might be that because their links are posted on many different social media platforms, the clicks from people working at the company are lower because they have seen the story on another platform and therefore are less likely to click on every Twitter link.

Unsurprisingly clicks happen in a very short timeframe: most (around 80%) of the clicks happen within the first 24 hours.

WHICH NATIONALITIES ENGAGE ON TWITTER?

Most American companies find that followers in the USA generate most clicks. Other than

this, however, it's difficult to draw clear conclusions. The study only considered English-language twitter feeds, and unsurprisingly countries that speak English as a first language were very strongly represented.

European followers generate a significant number of clicks, with Eastern Europe generating a disproportionately high proportion of the clicks – probably due to the limited information available in their local languages.

Global companies receive a small amount of traffic from the Far East. Furthermore, with Twitter blocked in China at the time of writing, it's clear that social media platforms cannot provide truly global reach.

CONCLUSION

Companies in the electronics sector have to be realistic about the results that can be achieved from social media today. Most companies will struggle to get more than a few thousand followers, and companies that focus on a specific geography will have fewer.

Click through rates are not that dissimilar from online display advertising, and with the minimal cost of tweeting – only a couple of minutes per tweet – this makes it a very cost-effective medium. In our industry, however, retweets are rare, making social media a tool to develop relationships with existing customers and not to acquire new customers.

Social media campaigns are not free, requiring an investment of time from the in-house team or budget to work with an experienced external partner. It's clear, however, that the impact of social media on electronics engineers is growing and the electronic components companies that develop a social media strategy now are likely to see real benefits in the future.

About Napier

Napier is a pan-European B2B technology PR and marketing agency that has a well established practice covering electronic components and embedded software. In addition to conventional PR and marketing services, we've helped several clients develop social media strategies and execute successful programmes. For more information visit www.Napier.co.uk.