

Social Media Case Study

Although Verizon is a relatively small company consisting of around 177,300 employees, it has a large social media presence. Although its main competitor AT&T has almost one and a half times more employees, Verizon has more followers on Twitter and Facebook. However, in today's media environment, the size of a company has no bearing on the impact it has on the internet community. Consequently, executives at Verizon want to know how well—or how poorly—Verizon is engaging its community, its competitors, and its industry. By listening, measuring, and engaging, Verizon can develop and execute a comprehensive social media program that will set it apart from its competitors.

Listening

As the social web evolves, so businesses advance with the fast-moving, ever-changing information network. Since Verizon participates in social media campaigns and has a strong web presence, it must monitor how information changes around its brand, competitors, and industry. As Verizon evaluates the words and phrases surrounding its brand, competitors, and industry, it determines how, where, and when to engage its community.

Brand-centered Listening

Verizon has developed its brand on several social media and web platforms. These platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Google/Bing. Although some of the feedback Verizon receives on these platforms is positive, the majority is negative.

Facebook

Verizon uses its Facebook page to promote its own services and products as well as its hashtag #WhyNotWednesday. Many of its posts deal with sporting events or, more recently, fashion week. Verizon's Facebook receives much of its customer traffic. No matter what Verizon posts, customers leave angry comments. Verizon has a separate customer service tab on its Facebook page so that users can receive the help they need. They also have a customer service Facebook account as well. On both the main page and the customer service page, although some customers ask questions about their contracts or note some difficulty they are having, the majority of people who leave comments do not articulate what Verizon has done to upset them at all. When customers articulate themselves, Verizon always responds and directs users to services that will assist them. Even when customers are angry and do not articulate themselves, Verizon attempts to help them.

Instagram

Verizon's Instagram account receives less of its customer traffic than its Facebook account does. However, like its Facebook account, its Instagram account also receives much of its negative traffic. Verizon uses Instagram to promote different social events rather than its services: their posts

include photos and videos of food, fashion week, football players, and musicians. Although Verizon did not post about its own service, customers were quick to comment no matter the post. Most of their comments were negative. Although Verizon attempted to respond to customers' comments on Facebook, it did not try to handle their negative feedback on Instagram.

Twitter

Verizon's Twitter account received steady positive traffic. Verizon uses Twitter to post many of the same links, photos, and video clips as it does on Facebook and Instagram. Customers seem to respond more positively on Twitter than on any other social media account. Although some customers tweeted negative responses to Verizon, customers did not leave as many negative comments on Twitter posts as they did on other social media platforms, perhaps because they could use only 140 characters.

Google/Bing

Verizon has several extensions of its brand. Consequently, when customers use the search term "Verizon," they find links to several different facets of the company. These facets include the homepage, social media platforms, local offices, and sub-brands. Search engines direct customers to the official site, local businesses, and news articles first. The news articles these search engines featured were positive reviews of Verizon's products and services. Although some of the news articles about Verizon included lawsuits, most of the news surrounding the company was positive.

The search engines prompted three secondary searches: Verizon FiOS, Verizon Email, and Verizon Customer service. First, conversations concerning Verizon's FiOS service were overwhelmingly positive. Most articles dealt with the steady growth the program has had, and how it satisfied customers. Next, the search term "Verizon Email" generally linked customers to a login portal. Conversations surrounding this search term were neutral—the few comments and articles did not contain either rave reviews or angry customer complaints. Finally, the phrase "Verizon Customer Service" yielded the most negative traffic. Several articles concerning this search term discussed lawsuits over bills or company-wide issues that Verizon had not settled quickly.

Competitive Listening

As the web evolves, Verizon can compare how it adapts with how its competitor AT&T adapts. By understanding the words and phrases surrounding AT&T's brand, Verizon can understand its own strengths and weaknesses better.

Facebook

AT&T's Facebook page receives a large amount of traffic. Unlike Verizon, AT&T does not have a separate tab for customer service. However, just as many Verizon customers post negative comments through Facebook posts, so many AT&T customers use Facebook to complain. Since the users did not have access to a separate customer service page, many asked questions about technological issues they were having. However, the majority of customers left angry, illogical

comments about AT&T's service. Like Verizon, AT&T responded to each of these customers graciously.

Instagram

Although AT&T's Instagram account receives less traffic than its Facebook account, it receives about the same amount of negative feedback. Like Verizon, AT&T tends not to post images or videos of its products or services. However, followers still leave negative comments on these neutral posts. Like Verizon, although AT&T attempted to respond to customers' comments on Facebook, it did not respond to their negative feedback on Instagram.

Twitter

Like Verizon's Twitter account, AT&T's account received steady positive traffic. AT&T also uses many of the same media on Twitter as it does on Facebook and Instagram. Customers were quick to favorite and retweet posts, generating a positive atmosphere. Once again, customers left a few negative comments but did not seem as likely to leave negative posts on Twitter as they were on other social media apps.

Google/Bing

Like Verizon, AT&T has several extensions of its brand. Consequently, when customers use the search term "AT&T" (or similar terms such as "ATT"), the search engine displays content that applies to different facets of the company. For example, many of the links lead customers to social media platforms, homepages, and local stores. The news articles that these search engines featured included many negative results. Several news articles dealt with lawsuits, accusations, and service issues between AT&T and its competitors and customers.

The search engines did not prompt secondary searches for AT&T as they did for Verizon. However, the comparable search terms AT&T U-Verse, AT&T Email, and AT&T Customer Service yielded good information. Customers who search AT&T U-verse encounter several advertisements. The conversation surrounding this important search term was negative. Most of the news articles about the U-Verse dealt with contract negotiations or service failures. Next, the search term "AT&T Email" generally linked customers to a login portal. Just as the conversations surrounding Verizon Email were neutral, so the conversation around AT&T was neutral, lacking both overwhelmingly positive reviews and angry customer complaints. Finally, the phrase "AT&T Customer Service" yielded the most negative traffic, as the corresponding Verizon term had. Several articles concerning this search term discussed lawsuits, wireless issues, and company-wide investigations.

Industry-wide Listening

As Verizon compares itself to its competitor, it can also compare itself to other industry leaders. In particular, Verizon can listen to T-Mobile and Sprint social media interactions to determine how the conversations surrounding other brands differ from the feedback they generate.

Facebook

Across the industry, customers seem to use Facebook as a place to leave negative comments. Although some customers do use Facebook as a customer service platform, most just use it to complain about connectivity issues or product shortcomings. Other companies in the industry—such as T-Mobile—received many negative comments about their coverage specifically. Moreover, Sprint's Facebook account had the most traffic about its competitors because Sprint mentions specific competitors in its media campaigns.

Instagram

Like Verizon and AT&T, other industry leaders receive less traffic on their Instagram accounts. However, this traffic is overwhelmingly negative. Although T-Mobile and Sprint posted more pictures and videos that promoted their service contracts and devices specifically, the majority of customers responded negatively no matter what the company posted.

Twitter

Across the industry, Twitter seems to create a positive environment for companies. Because customers have only 140 characters to tweet, they tend not to leave as many negative comments. Both T-Mobile and Sprint customers often favorite and retweet posts, but they do not engage in negative conversations on Twitter as often as they do on other social media platforms.

Google/Bing

Although search engines provided different search terms for users when they searched "Verizon," they did not do so for T-Mobile or Sprint. However, similar search terms provided details concerning industry conversations. For both Sprint and T-Mobile, the conversation was quite negative. T-Mobile in particular is playing a central role in a data breach. Moreover, both companies are involved in large lawsuits against their customers and their competitors.

Measuring

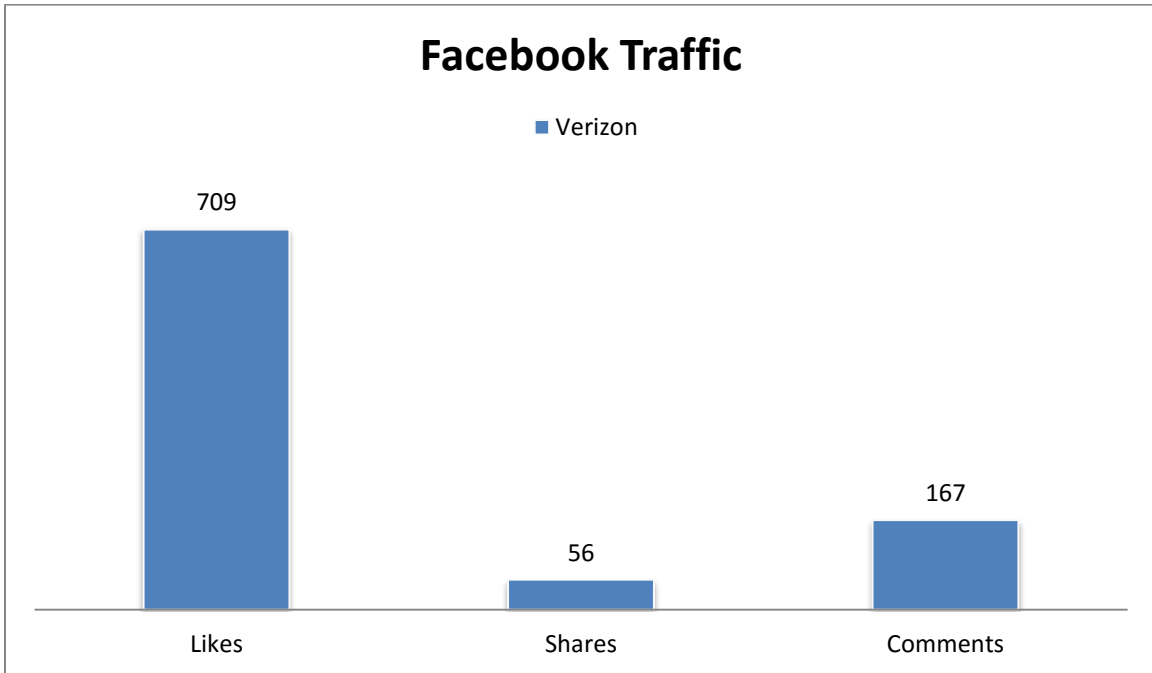
After listening to follower and user conversations, Verizon can measure and evaluate this feedback. By evaluating traffic on its Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts as well as on popular search engines, Verizon can understand how to adjust its image on the social web better. Moreover, by evaluating competitors and other industry leaders using the same metrics, it can take steps to improve its brand. Specifically, Verizon monitored reverberation, repetition, and engagement on its social media platforms. The company wanted to know the volume of inbound content, how often users repeated content, and how often these comments turned into conversations.

Brand-centered Measuring

To measure engagement around the brand, Verizon evaluated whether there was a disconnect between how the company presents itself and how the community perceives the company. Once Verizon understands where its brand stands, it can move its brand forward.

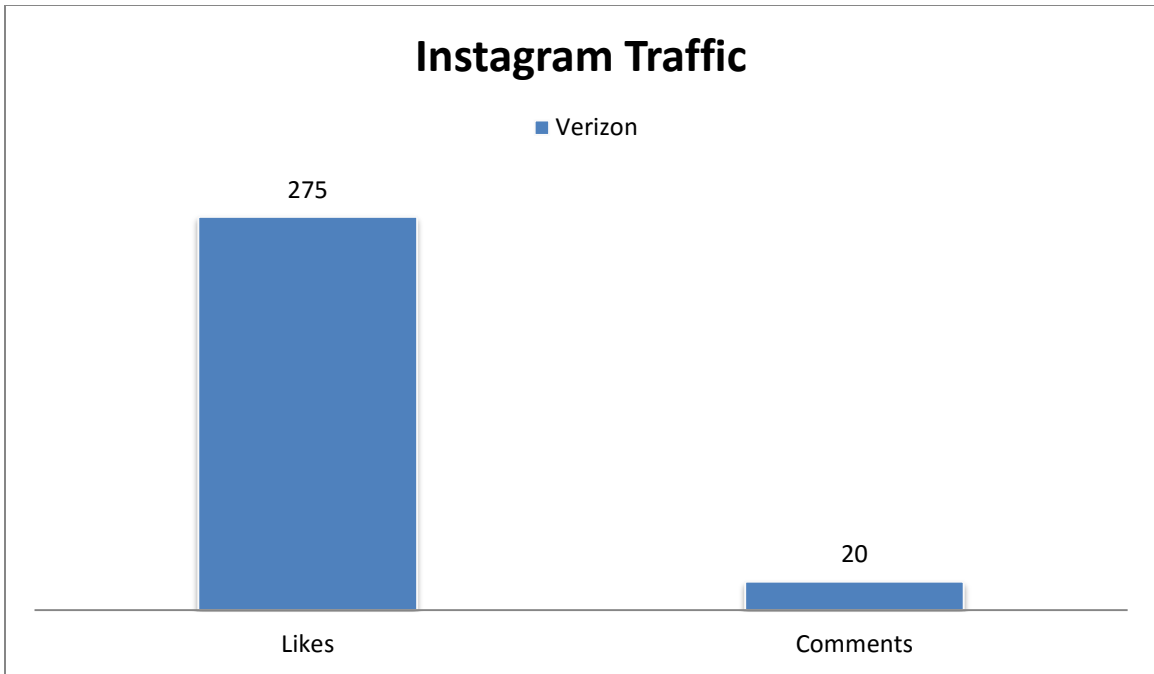
Facebook

Verizon has a large Facebook constituency with 7,071,221 likes. Over the past two months, Verizon has averaged 709 likes, 56 shares, and 167 comments per post. The posts with the highest amounts of traffic were part of Verizon’s “#WhyNotWednesday” campaign. Almost all of the comments on the Facebook page were customer service questions or rants from angry customers. The chart below illustrates Verizon’s Facebook traffic.



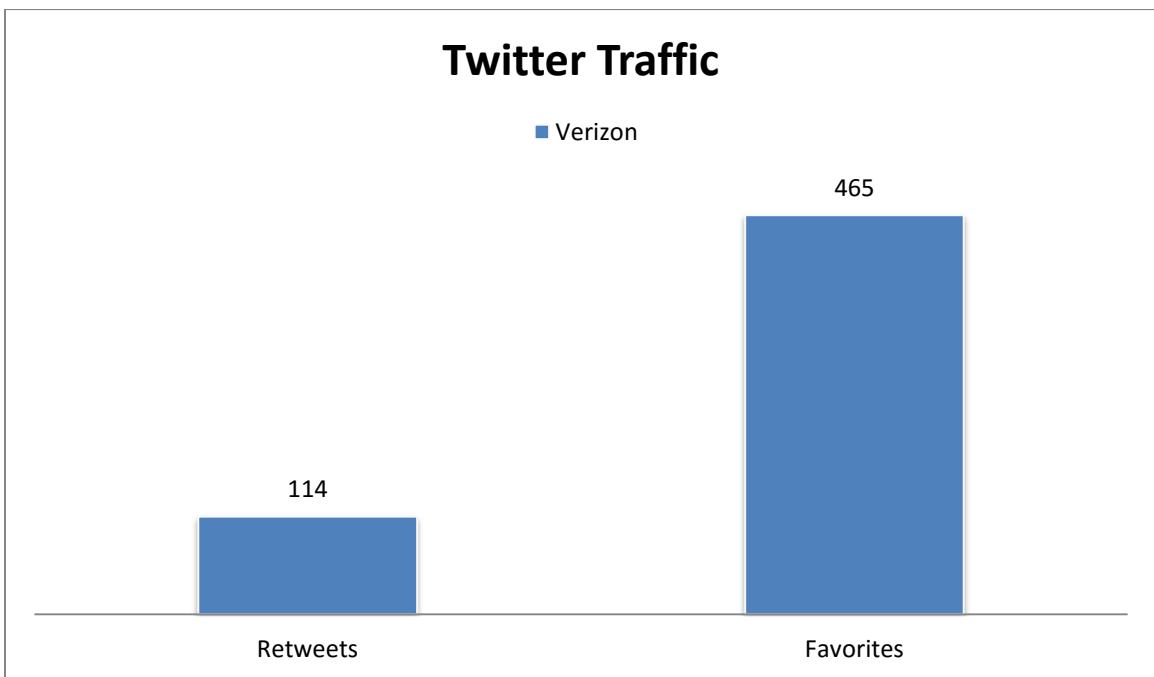
Instagram

On Instagram, Verizon has 25 thousand followers and averages 275 likes and 20 comments per post. Since they averaged significantly more likes than they did comments, the traffic they encountered on Instagram seemed generally more positive. However, on any post, the majority of the comments were negative, and Verizon did not respond. The chart below illustrates Verizon’s Instagram traffic.



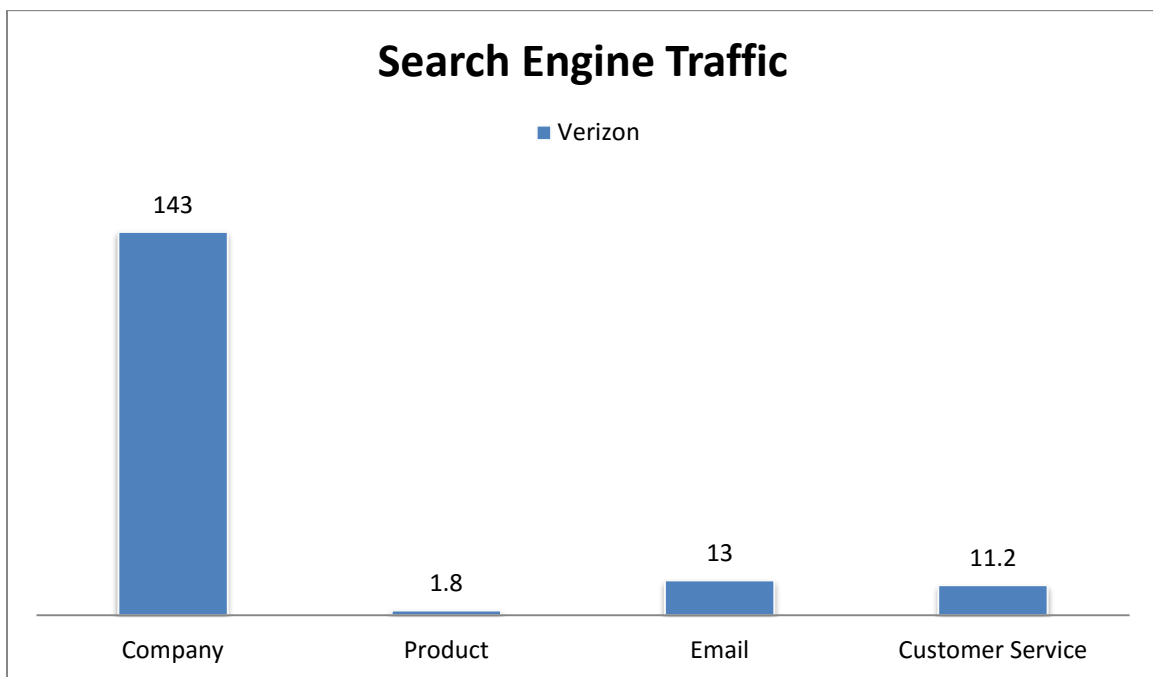
Twitter

Verizon's Twitter account has 1.63 million followers. These followers tended to favorite posts more than retweet them. On average, Verizon receives 114 retweets and 465 favorites per post. The most popular posts on Facebook and Instagram were also the most popular posts on Twitter. In particular, the posts with Verizon's hashtag #WhyNotWednesday received the most positive traffic. The chart below illustrates Verizon's Twitter traffic.



Google/Bing

Verizon has a small but positive media footprint on search engines. The top four search terms—“Verizon,” “Verizon FiOS,” “Verizon Email,” and “Verizon Customer Service”—do not yield as many search results as competitors’ search terms do. The most popular search term is “Verizon Customer Service,” with 11,200,000 results. Unfortunately, the term that generates the most results also generates the most negative feedback, since customers visit these pages most often when they have a problem. “Verizon” is the next popular term with 14,300,000 results. “Verizon Email” yields 13,000,000 results. Finally, the least popular search term of the four is “Verizon FiOS,” which returns only 1,800,000 results. Unfortunately, the term Verizon connects with its most lucrative enterprise and most positive feedback yields the fewest results. The chart below illustrates Verizon’s search engine traffic, scaled to millions.



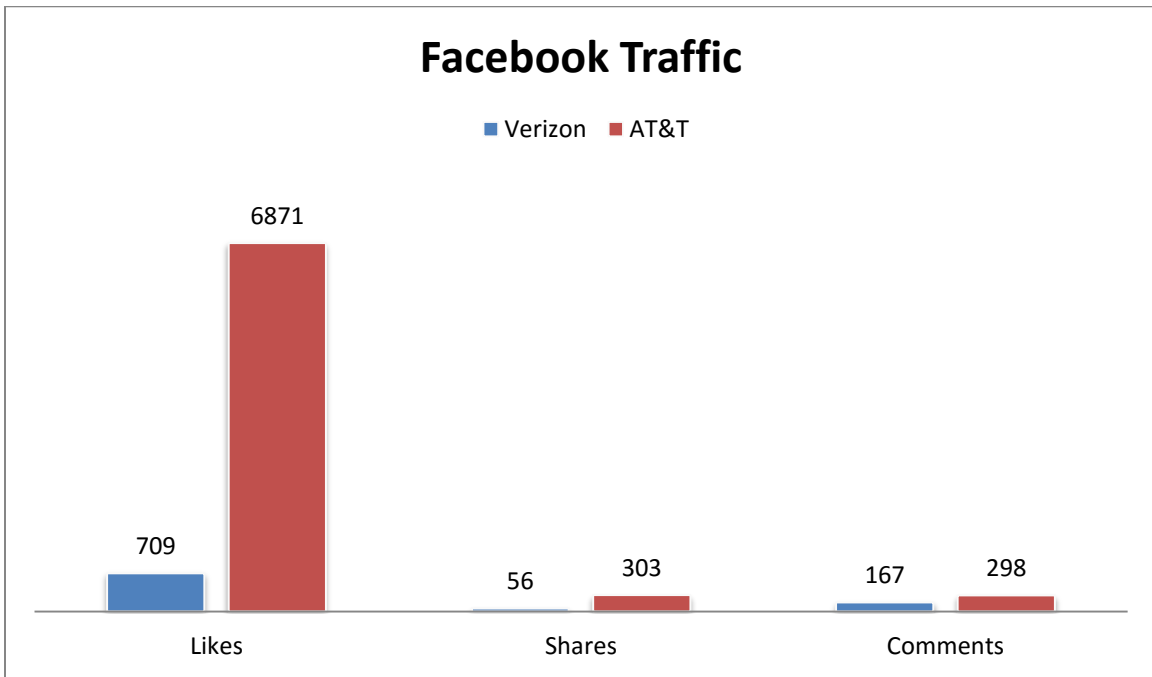
Competitor Measuring

As Verizon seeks to improve its brand, it can also measure how its competitor engages the online community. Verizon may also discover an area where its competitor’s brand identity does not match customer opinion and capitalize on this gap.

Facebook

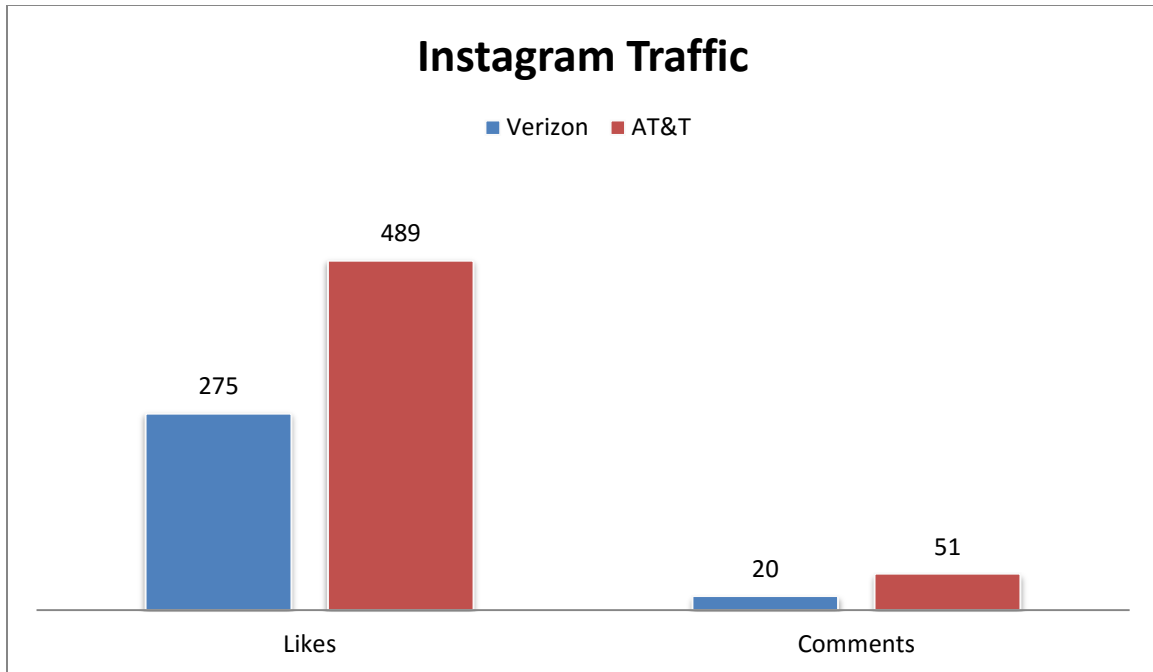
AT&T’s Facebook account has 5,750,007 likes, and AT&T has averaged 6,871 likes, 303 shares, and 298 comments per post. The posts with the highest amounts of traffic were photos or videos of professional athletes. While these posts generated a great deal of positive feedback by causing more users to like or share them, they also attracted more angry customers. Almost all of the comments

on these Facebook posts were customer service questions or user complaints. The chart below compares Verizon and AT&T's Facebook traffic.



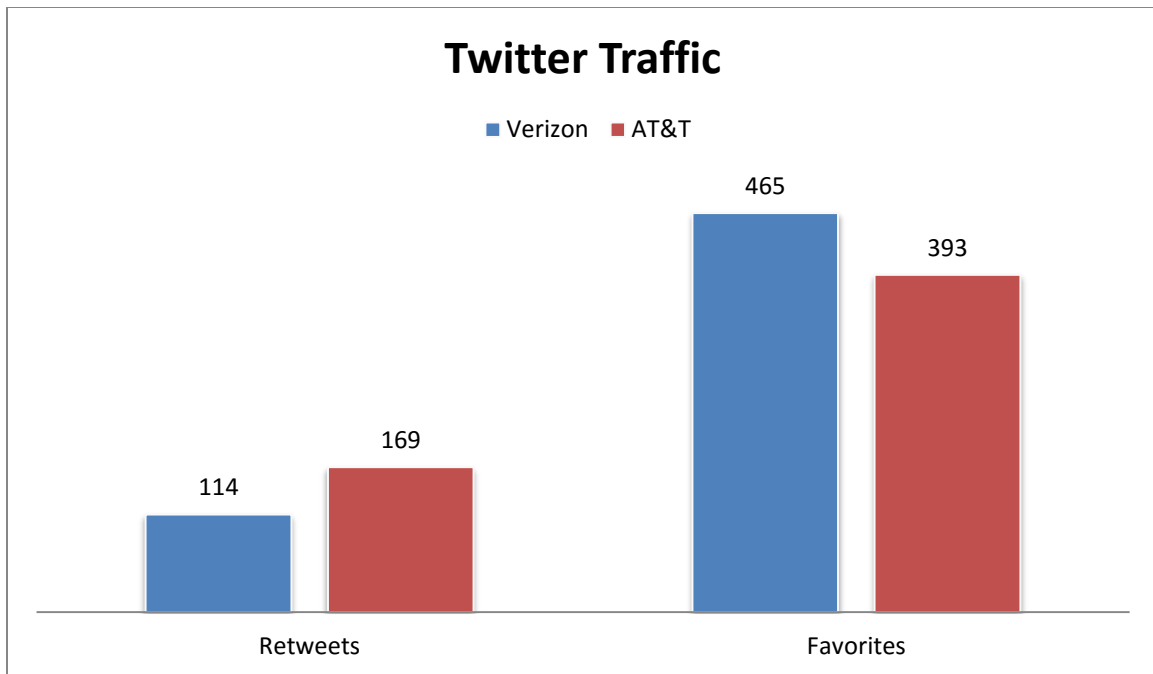
Instagram

On Instagram, AT&T has 33.9 thousand followers. Like Verizon, AT&T receives more likes than comments, with 489 likes and 51 comments on average. Although these numbers were slightly higher than Verizon's, they represent the same trend. Even though many followers liked AT&T's posts, the comments AT&T's Instagram account handled was mostly negative. Instagram seems like a more positive atmosphere; however, followers still managed to leave negative feedback. The chart below compares Verizon and AT&T's Instagram traffic.



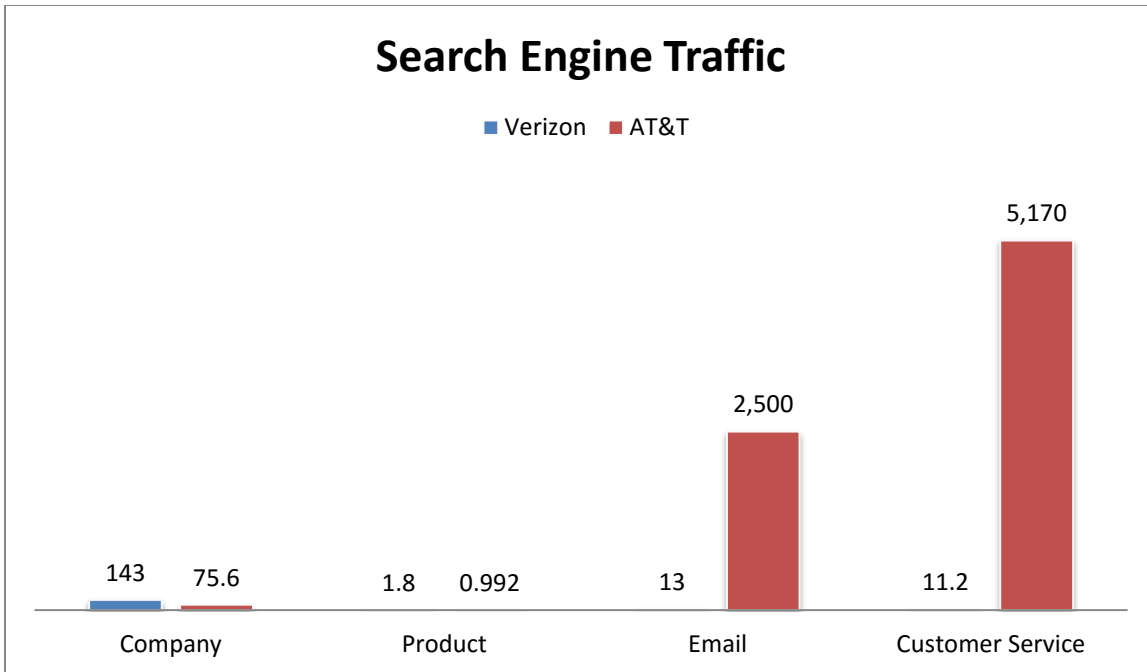
Twitter

AT&T's Twitter 685 thousand followers adhered to the same trend as Verizon's—they tended to retweet and favorite more than they commented. On average, AT&T would receive 169 retweets and 393 favorites on a single posts. Consequently, AT&T averages more retweets but fewer favorites than Verizon. Although the most popular posts on Twitter were also the most popular posts on other social media platforms, AT&T did not have a popular hashtag to which customers responded. Instead, AT&T received the most traffic when it posted pictures of professional athletes. The chart below compares Verizon and AT&T's Twitter traffic.



Google/Bing

AT&T has a sizable though somewhat negative footprint on search engines. The four top search terms yielded thousands and at times millions more results. The most popular of the search terms was "AT&T Customer Service" with 5,170,000,000 results. Once again, the search term with the most negative feedback yielded the most results. The second most popular search term was "AT&T Email," with 2,500,000,000 results. Next, the company name alone yielded 75,600,000 results. These items also included three advertisements at the top of the search engine results page in contrast to Verizon's single advertisement. Finally, like Verizon, AT&T's most important search term was its least popular. Its service term, "AT&T U-Verse" returned a dramatically lower number of results—only 992,000, almost 75,000,000 fewer than the next most popular. The chart below compares Verizon and AT&T's search engine traffic, scaled to millions.

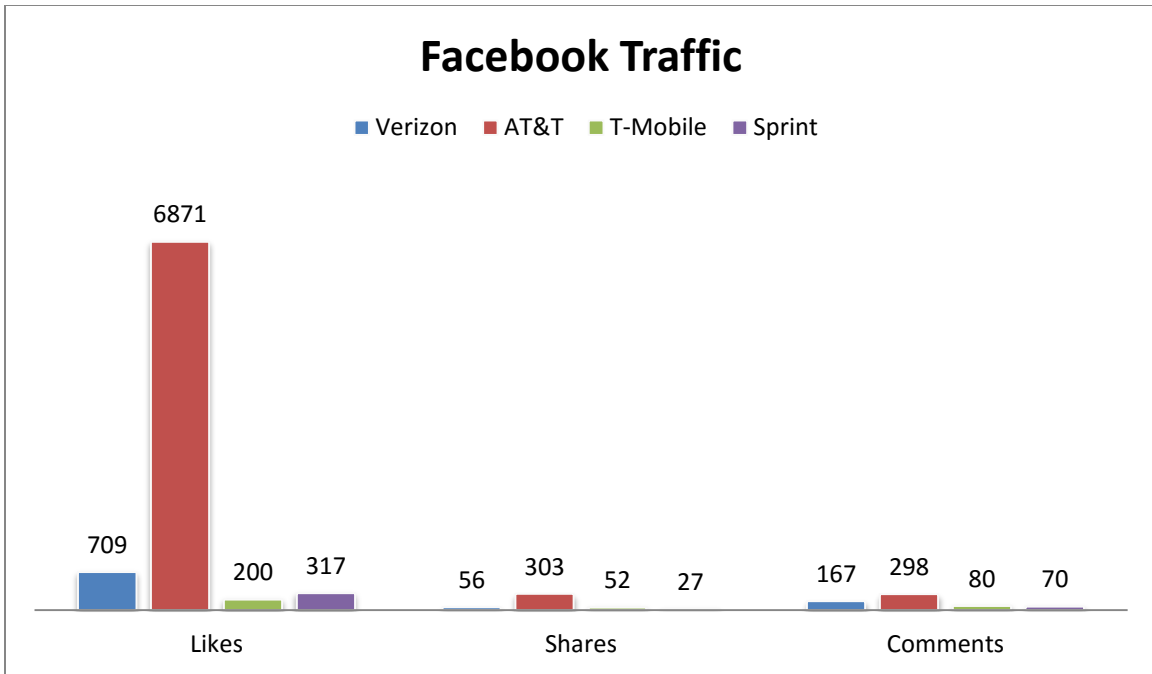


Industry-wide Measuring

In addition to measuring engagement around its own brand and its competitor’s brand, Verizon can compare its engagement to industry-wide trends. If Verizon understands these trends, it can separate itself from the industry in a positive manner.

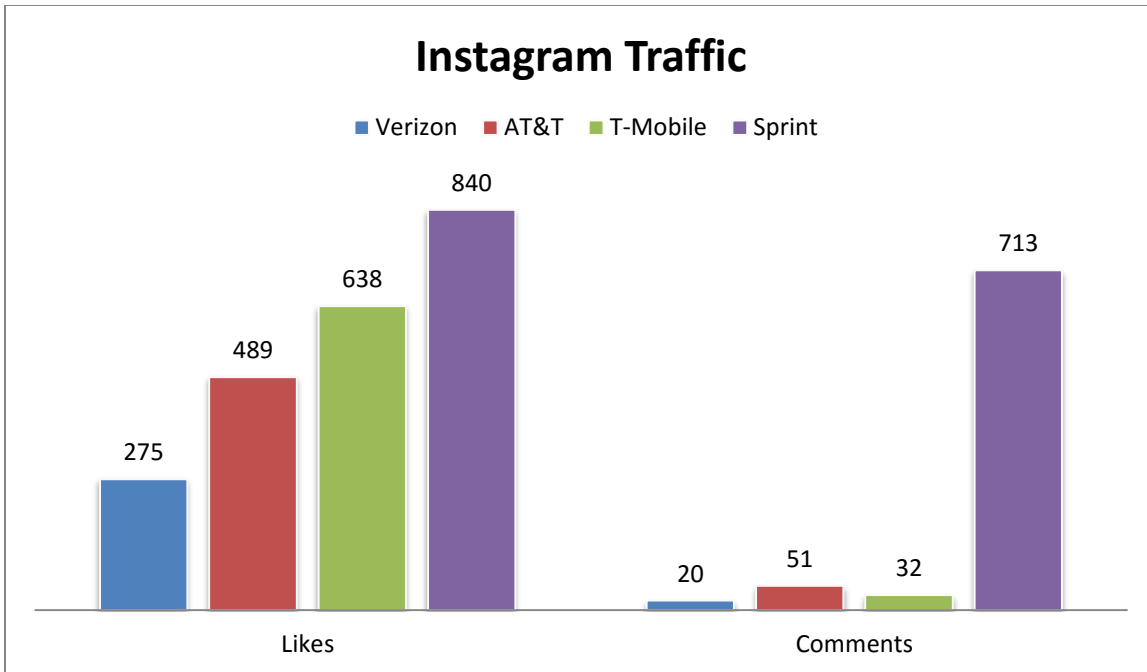
Facebook

Verizon’s Facebook traffic statistics compare to those of T-Mobile and Sprint while AT&T leads the industry in traffic by a wide margin. T-Mobile has 5,154,657 followers while Sprint has 2,011,064 followers. Verizon has significantly more likes on its Facebook page than other industry leaders. Although Verizon has around 400 more likes per Facebook post, it does not have much more traffic than other industry leaders. T-Mobile averages 200 likes, 52 shares, and 80 comments per post while Sprint averages 317 likes, 27 shares, and 70 comments per post. The majority of the comments on T-Mobile’s page were negative and belonged to customers accusing T-Mobile of having poor coverage. Interestingly, the most popular topic of the comments on Sprint’s posts was actually Sprint’s competition. Because Sprint mentions specific competitors in its advertisements and media campaigns, customers often mention these companies by name in their comments. The chart below compares Facebook traffic across the industry.



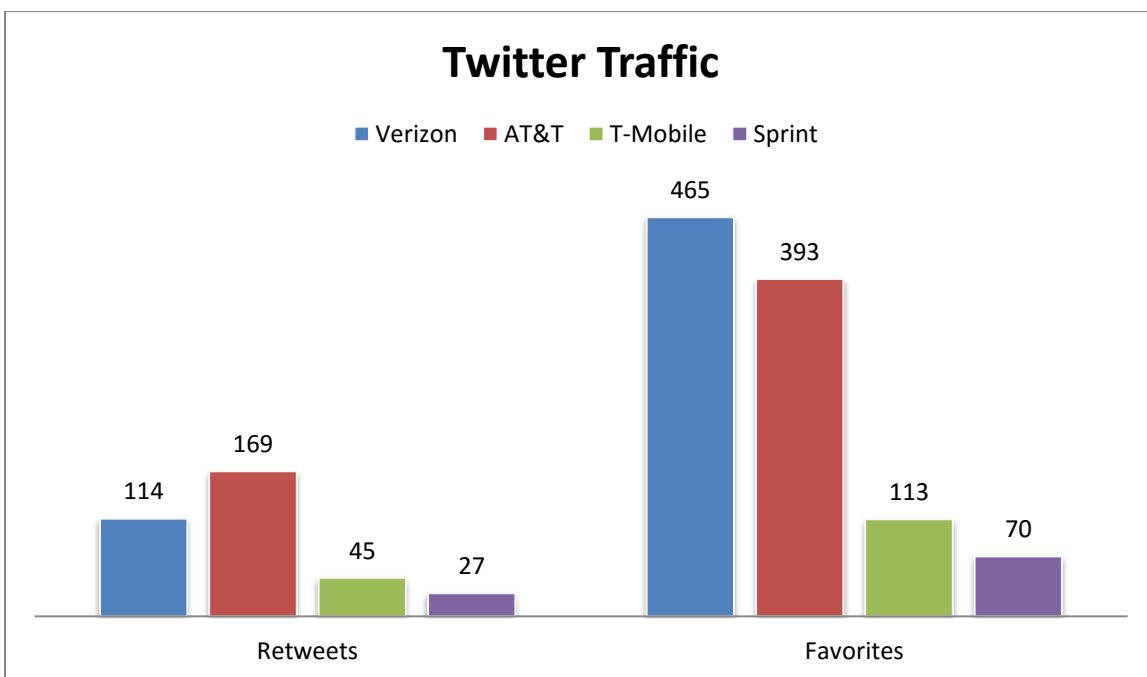
Instagram

Overall, Instagram accounts seem to handle both positive and negative feedback. Although AT&T had the most likes and comments overall, all companies had many more likes than shares. For example, T-Mobile account, which has 66.6 thousand followers, averaged 638 likes per post and only 32 comments. However, Sprint had a fairly even like-to-comment ratio with 840 likes and 713 comments on average from its 10.4 thousand followers. Sprint increased its own number of comments because it began to respond to its followers on Instagram as it had on Facebook. The chart below compares Instagram traffic across the industry.



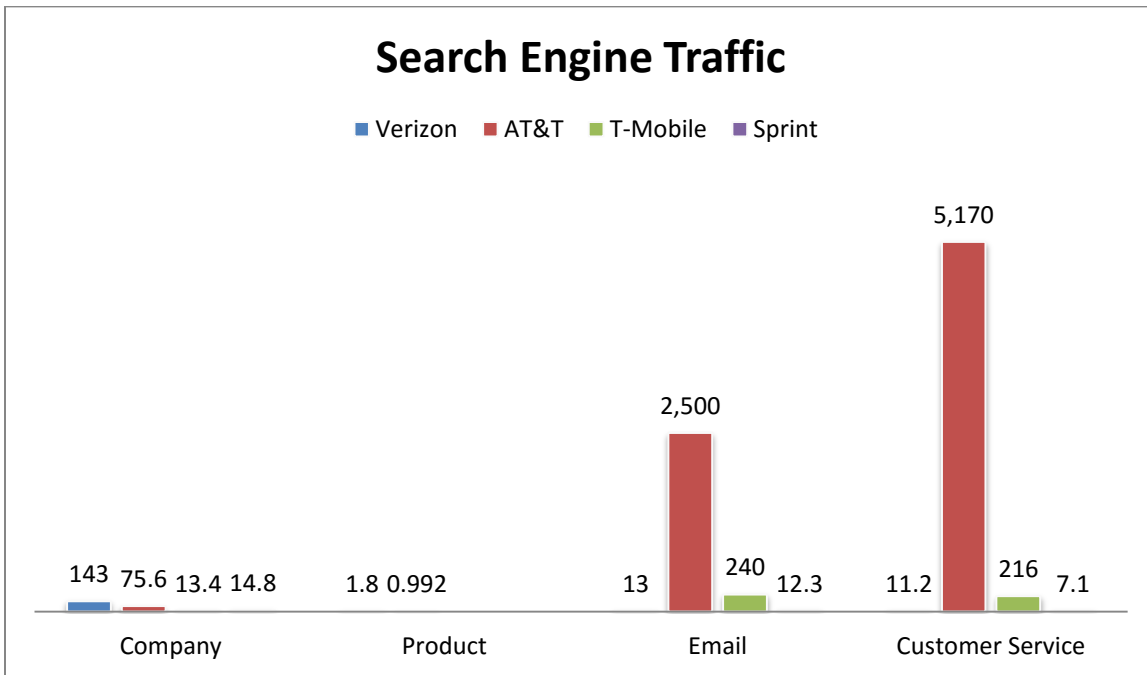
Twitter

Across the industry, companies receive the most positive feedback on Twitter. Customers tended to favorite more than they retweeted, and they did not leave as many negative comments on Twitter as they did on other apps. T-Mobile averaged 45 retweets and 113 favorites per post, and Sprint averaged 27 retweets and 70 favorites per post, averages that were proportionate to the number of followers that each company has. The chart below compares Twitter traffic across the industry.



Google/Bing

Search engine traffic is somewhat inconsistent across the industry. Overall, AT&T yielded significantly more results than any of its competitors did. Verizon and its competitor AT&T both had high traffic around their customer service pages and low traffic around their service pages. However, neither T-Mobile nor Sprint had comparable services to Verizon and AT&T’s FiOS and U-Verse. For the three remaining terms of these industry leaders—their company names, their customer service pages, and their email services—a slight commonality emerged. Both Sprint and T-Mobile have the highest traffic surrounding their company names and lower traffic around their email pages. In contrast to Verizon and AT&T, both T-Mobile and Sprint had the lowest amount of traffic around their customer service pages. The chart below compares search engine traffic across the industry.



Engaging

As the social web grows, companies must engage the internet community. As Verizon engages its audience members, it can hold its customers’ attention through regular business-to-community interaction. Verizon should engage its customers in order to create brand loyalty. They should use negative feedback as an opportunity for a positive interaction.

Why to engage

Social media and the web have created an environment where people can easily share their opinions. Unfortunately, since people can give their opinions so readily, companies often struggle to combat any negative feedback they encounter. Since many of Verizon’s social media followers leave

negative comments, Verizon needs to engage its customers so that these angry users do not deter others from buying Verizon's products and services.

What to say

To engage its followers, Verizon must show them that the company cares about each individual customer's experience. Like its competitor AT&T and other industry leaders, Verizon responds to all the feedback it receives on Facebook. Often, Verizon follows a simple format when it responds to comments: they mention the user directly, apologize, articulate that they want to help the user, and direct them to a private messaging app to solve the problem. Verizon should continue to model this behavior. Using phrases like "We're sorry," "How can we help you," and "We're listening, and we hear you," Verizon can openly address and calm users. Consequently, the company can take a potentially negative situation and turn it into an opportunity to show that Verizon is loyal to its customers.

Where to engage

Since Verizon has already engaged users on Facebook, it should also engage them on Twitter and Instagram. Verizon has the most traffic on its Facebook page; consequently, it should engage customers most frequently where they are. Moreover, because they have modeled positive interaction in one social media outlet, they should continue to do so across other outlets. Since its Twitter account is its second largest social media outlet, Verizon should allocate time and resources so that it can respond to negative feedback on Twitter as it has on Facebook. After it has engaged its audience on Twitter, it can engage its audience on Instagram in the same way.

Who to engage

Verizon should continue to engage customers who need product support. Most of their negative feedback comes from frustrated users. However, they can use customer complaints as opportunities to create brand loyalty if they help these users. Consequently, they will transform many brand detractors into brand supporters and improve the brand's image.

How to engage

Verizon should follow a three-part strategy to engage their audiences. First, they can engage their brand by improving customer support on social media. Next, they can engage their competitors by creating aggressive advertisements to distinguish them from other companies. Finally, they can engage their industry by avoiding negative public relations.

Brand-centered engaging

Because Verizon has responded so well to customers on Facebook, it should continue to engage them on Twitter and eventually Instagram. Moreover, Verizon should consider creating more awareness for its Verizon Support page on Twitter and should create one for Instagram. Overall, Verizon's brand seems to handle the negative feedback it receives well and has used the #WhyNotWednesday hashtag to create positive feedback. Of course, negative people are still going

to comment where they can. However, to maintain its positive brand identity, Verizon must attempt to help users whenever possible.

Competitor engaging

In addition to responding to customers on social media, Verizon can improve its brand identity by separating itself from its competition. In particular, Verizon should engage its competitors by creating advertisements that are more direct. Like Sprint, Verizon should use media to describe specifically how its products and services serve its customers in ways that its competitors cannot. Since Verizon has more of a social media and web following than Sprint does, it will have a competitive edge over this industry leader. Moreover, since its competitor AT&T does not have a similar advertising strategy, Verizon should adopt one before its competitor does to establish its brand.

Industry-wide engaging

Finally, Verizon can maintain its brand by avoiding public relations scandals. Unlike the other three industry leaders, Verizon has an overall positive reputation on the internet. Verizon should continue to establish its identity as a customer-centered company by continuing to avoid lawsuits and large customer service issues and by responding to them directly when they occur.

Conclusion

Overall, Verizon experiences traffic typical of its industry. However, Verizon can separate itself from its competitors by engaging its community. Many of the conversations surrounding Verizon's social media are negative—users use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as platforms to complete their customer service requests or to rant about their expensive data plan. Verizon can use even these negative interactions to its advantage. Consequently, Verizon should respond to complaints and questions on Twitter and eventually Instagram as it does on Facebook. Moreover, it should use all social media apps to launch more targeted advertisements that show how Verizon excels compared to its competitors. Finally, it should maintain its identity as a customer-centered company by avoiding the negative press lawsuits and data breaches cause. Although social media and the web have created a fast-paced environment, Verizon can adapt and thus thrive amidst constant change.