

**The Social
Listening
Playbook:**



How Top Brands Read Their Audience's Mind

(And How You Can Too)

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Ever wondered how brands like Netflix, Domino's, and Wendy's always seem to know what their audience wants—before they even say it?

It's not luck. It's **social listening—the art of tracking conversations, trends, and sentiment across social media to understand what your audience truly cares about.**

In this guide, we'll break down how top brands have used social listening to:

- ✓ Predict trends before they go viral
- ✓ Spot customer pain points in real-time
- ✓ Find unexpected brand advocates
- ✓ Turn consumer shifts into on-point product development

And most importantly, we'll show you how to apply these strategies to your own brand so you can stay ahead of the curve.

CHAPTER 1

Predicting Trends Before They Go Viral

Netflix & The ‘Wednesday’ TikTok Trend

In 2022, Wednesday became one of Netflix’s biggest cultural moments. The streaming giant didn’t just launch a show; it used social listening to spot early audience buzz and amplify it in real time.

In an early scene from the show, Jenna Ortega’s Wednesday Addams performs an eerie, gothic marionette dance. Almost immediately, TikTok users started recreating the iconic choreography. Netflix tracked this organic momentum, recognizing the dance as a viral spark before it fully ignited.

HOW NETFLIX USED SOCIAL LISTENING TO SUPERCHARGE THE TREND

- ★ **Leaning into what audiences loved** – As the dance gained traction, Netflix prioritized it in their marketing. They funneled \$2.3 million (80% of their total ad spend) into pushing content inspired by the TikTok trend, ensuring the right audiences saw it at the right time.
- ★ **Creating content to fuel the fire** – Beyond paid ads, Netflix released organic follow-along dance tutorials and behind-the-scenes cast reactions, making it easier for fans to engage with the trend.
- ★ **Riding unexpected cultural waves** – The dance initially featured a song by The Cramps, but social listening revealed that TikTok users were also pairing it with Lady Gaga’s Bloody Mary. Netflix embraced the remix culture, boosting content that used the new song. Eventually, Lady Gaga herself joined the trend—elevating Wednesday to pop-culture dominance.

TAPPING INTO AUDIENCE IDENTITY: ‘THE OUTCAST EFFECT’

Netflix didn't just track trending content—it also analyzed the emotions and identities behind audience engagement. Through sentiment analysis and social listening, they discovered that Wednesday wasn't just a fun show for fans—it resonated deeply with self-identified "outcasts."

- ★ **Identifying the emotional connection** – TikTok comments, tweets, and engagement data showed that many fans saw Wednesday as a symbol of empowerment—someone who didn't fit in but thrived anyway.
- ★ **Creating community-driven engagement** – Netflix capitalized on this sentiment by running a dedicated [Twitter account for Wednesday](#), responding in-character to fans who identified with her. This made fans feel heard, validated, and encouraged them to share even more content.
- ★ **Inspiring User-Generated Content (UGC)** – Knowing that audiences saw Wednesday as a reflection of their own experience, Netflix encouraged fan-driven participation. They amplified cosplays, dance challenges, and even "Which Wednesday Character Are You?" personality quizzes to deepen the connection.



CHAPTER 1

THE RESULTS

- ✅ Wednesday became Netflix's most-watched English-language series of all time, surpassing Stranger Things Season 4.
- ✅ The show generated over 20 billion views across social media platforms.
- ✅ It sparked over 1.5 million recreations of the dance on TikTok alone.
- ✅ Netflix saw record-breaking engagement rates, proving that the right blend of organic and paid amplification can turn audience passion into cultural dominance.

THE TAKEAWAY

- ★ Use social listening to identify early audience trends, then lean in hard.
- ★ Don't just track engagement—analyze why people are connecting with your content.
- ★ Amplify viral moments with a mix of paid and organic content to fuel momentum.
- ★ Encourage fan participation—when people see themselves in your brand, they'll market it for you.



CHAPTER 2

Turning Customer Criticism Into a Brand Revival

Domino's & The 'Pizza Turnaround' Campaign

By 2009, Domino's was facing a crisis. Sales were slumping, and its reputation was in freefall. Then, disaster struck: a viral video surfaced showing two Domino's employees mishandling food in an unsanitary way. The backlash was immediate. But instead of just apologizing and moving on, Domino's took an unprecedented approach: they listened to the criticism and built their entire marketing campaign around it.

HOW SOCIAL LISTENING LED TO A BRAND REINVENTION



Acknowledging the brutal truth

Social media sentiment was overwhelmingly negative. Customers weren't just upset about the video—they were trashing the actual pizza. Comments flooded Twitter and Facebook, describing Domino's crust as "cardboard" and its tomato sauce as "ketchup-like." Even worse, a consumer survey ranked Domino's dead last in pizza quality, tied with Chuck E. Cheese. Instead of ignoring these opinions, Domino's decided to face them head-on.



Launching 'The Pizza Turnaround'

In December 2009, Domino's released a branded documentary that did something unheard of: it featured real, harsh customer complaints on screen. Dramatic music swelled as reviews like "mass-produced, boring, bland pizza" and "microwave pizza is far superior" filled the screen. It was brutally honest—and completely different from typical corporate damage control.

★ Putting leadership front and center

The video then cut to then-CEO Patrick Doyle. Instead of spinning the situation or making excuses, he delivered a raw, direct response: "There comes a time to make a change."

Instead of defending their old product, Domino's admitted its shortcomings and promised to do better.

★ A complete recipe overhaul

The campaign wasn't just about PR—it was backed by real product changes. Domino's detailed its process of rigorous dough testing, a reformulated sauce with more robust flavors, and higher-quality ingredients. They even filmed customers trying the new recipe for the first time—capturing their surprised reactions when they realized Domino's had actually listened.

ENGAGING IN REAL-TIME SOCIAL LISTENING

Throughout the campaign, Domino's actively monitored social media for customer feedback, responding openly and incorporating suggestions into their improvement strategy. The brand's shift toward transparency and accountability helped rebuild consumer trust.

"We listened to our consumers, and they want us to be better, and we want them to be happier..."



CHAPTER 2

THE RESULTS

- ✓ Domino's stock surged over 200% within a year of the campaign launch.
- ✓ The brand's revenue skyrocketed, and customer sentiment dramatically improved.
- ✓ By 2017, Domino's overtook Pizza Hut to become the largest pizza chain in the U.S.
- ✓ The campaign became one of the most celebrated crisis management case studies in modern marketing.

THE TAKEAWAY

- ★ **Own your mistakes—your audience will respect you more for it.**
- ★ **Use social listening not just to monitor feedback, but to use that feedback to drive real change.**
- ★ **Transparency + action = trust. It's not enough to acknowledge criticism—you have to prove you're listening.**
- ★ **Turn your biggest critics into your biggest advocates by making them feel heard.**

Instead of hiding from negativity, Domino's transformed criticism into a rallying cry for reinvention. The result? One of the most successful brand comebacks in modern marketing history.



CHAPTER 3

Finding Unexpected Brand Advocates

Crocs & The Gen Z Comeback

For years, Crocs were synonymous with comfort over style—worn by healthcare workers, gardeners, and older consumers who prioritized practicality. But in the late 2010s, something unexpected happened: Gen Z started wearing Crocs—ironically at first, but then, genuinely.

HOW SOCIAL LISTENING HELPED CROCS SPOT A CULTURAL SHIFT

★ Identifying brand mentions

Through social listening, Crocs noticed a spike in younger influencers and celebrities wearing their shoes. Many were posting about Crocs in a humorous, self-aware way, treating them as "ugly-cool" fashion statements rather than just functional footwear.

★ Noting industry shifts

At the same time, fashion trends were shifting. Streetwear was dominating youth culture, and comfort-first shoes were replacing high heels in everyday wear. Crocs were accidentally on-trend—but instead of waiting for the moment to pass, the brand leaned in hard.

CHAPTER 3

★ Signposting celebrity advocates

Recognizing the power of influential fans, Crocs **doubled down on partnerships** with trendsetting artists who had expressed a fondness for Crocs on social media, for instance:

* **Post Malone** – After he [tweeted about Crocs](#) (“u can tell a lot about a man by the jibbits on his crocs”), the brand turned the moment into a collab. They launched four limited-edition Post Malone Crocs, all of which sold out in minutes.

* **Ruby Rose** – Crocs saw her engaging with fans about which pair to buy, reached out, and turned it into a full-fledged collaboration.



CHAPTER 3

THE RESULTS

- ✅ Crocs' stock price increased more than 3,000% from 2017 to 2021.
- ✅ Gen Z adoption skyrocketed, with younger audiences seeing Crocs as a statement piece.
- ✅ The brand became a fixture in the fashion and streetwear scene, with collaborations selling out instantly.

THE TAKEAWAY

- ★ Your most powerful influencers might not be the ones you expect. Pay attention to who's organically engaging with your brand—and amplify their love with strategic partnerships.
- ★ Jump on emerging trends before they peak. Social listening allows brands to spot cultural shifts early and take action while the momentum is building.
- ★ Embrace playfulness and internet culture. Crocs didn't fight their “ugly” reputation—they owned it and turned it into a viral, billion-dollar rebrand.

By listening to the right fans at the right time, Crocs transformed from a niche comfort brand into a Gen Z fashion icon.

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CHAPTER 4

Turning Consumer Shifts Into On-Point Product Development

Example: Wendy's Nutrition App

Fast food and healthy eating don't always go hand in hand, but Wendy's discovered a surprising insight through social listening: a significant portion of its customers wanted to make more health-conscious choices—even at a drive-thru.

At first glance, this might seem contradictory. Wendy's was the #1 seller of bacon cheeseburgers in the U.S.. But at the same time, it was also the top seller of salads in the fast-food industry. This revealed a valuable trend: their customers weren't exclusively looking for indulgence or health—they wanted the ability to choose between both.

Through social listening, Wendy's identified a recurring question among their audience:

“How can I eat at Wendy's without breaking my diet?”

CHAPTER 3

To address this, Wendy's developed a mobile app that helped customers make informed choices. Launched in 2012, the app allowed users to:

- ★ Set a calorie target and receive meal recommendations that fit within customers' goals.
- ★ Customize their meals to tweak the calorie count (by removing ranch dressing, for instance).
- ★ Save their favorite meal combinations for easy ordering.
- ★ Use geo-location to find the nearest Wendy's.

THE RESULTS

- ✅ Hundreds of thousands of users downloaded it, proving that when brands listen to their audience, they can create high-value solutions that drive organic engagement.

THE TAKEAWAY

- ★ **Look for hidden opportunities in customer sentiment. Social listening revealed an unmet need among their audience. By acting on this insight, Wendy's positioned itself as a brand that empowers customers with choice—and won big in the process.**

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**Hundreds of
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users
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the app**

CONCLUSION

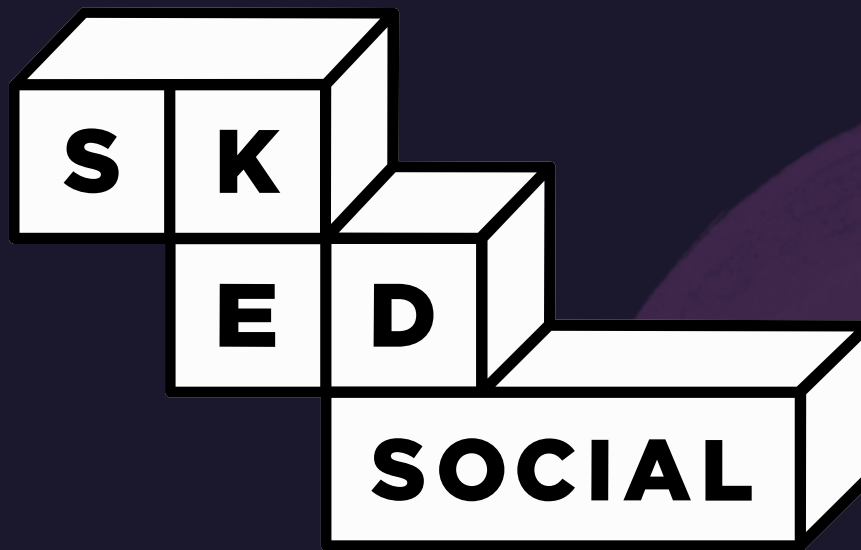
Know What Your Audience Wants—Before They Even Say It

Great marketing isn't about guessing—it's about listening. With Sked's Social Listening feature, you can track trends before they go viral, spot customer pain points in real time, and tap into organic brand love to create content that truly resonates.

SKED'S SOCIAL LISTENING ALLOWS YOU TO:

- ★ **Track sentiment of brand mentions**, to see how your audience is perceiving your brand and the content you post.
- ★ **Monitor competitor reach and engagement rates**, so you can refine your strategies and stay ahead of the competition.
- ★ **Gather insights about your audience**, including their preferences, behaviors, and demographics, to tailor your content more effectively.
- ★ **Discover key influencers who are talking about your brand**, helping you build partnerships to amplify your reach and credibility.
- ★ **Track keywords**, so you can ride the wave of key trends before it's too late.

Ready to **read your audience's mind** and create content they actually want to engage with? [Start your free trial today.](#) 🚀



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