

the conversation audit

an in-depth qualitative analysis of how your business, product, service or brand is being talked about on the Live Web.

designed to:

- provide a snapshot of a 'business story' as it is developing online
- provide a guide to future conversations.

A conversation audit takes a 'vertical slice' through the conversation economy at a particular moment to identify the "conversation attractors" and look at how people are talking, relating and constructing a 'business story'.

the Business Story

Every business has a story. It is the way it tells those outside the business (clients, stakeholders, customers) and those inside (staff) what it is about, what are its values and USP and what it does. It tells the business' who, what, where, why and when. Traditionally, that story has been told from the top down. Marketing, communications, pr and brand guardians have built that story and sought to pass it out to passive receivers. The Live Web has ushered in an age where not only is that inappropriate, but also impossible. The business story is now told by the business and its market. That market read-writes stories across the Web. It is an active partner in building narratives, media and business stories.

Customers and stakeholders are co-creators of that business story. As they discuss the business and its product or service on their Blogs or across social networks; as they share videos, photographs and audio they are reading/writing the sets of ideas around that product. They are building the bigger business story that others will read as they find the business.

how that story is built

- The business story is a 'discourse', a set of linked ideas and cultural practices
- That story is set in motion by the Conversation Attractor.
- That discourse is built using 'narrative' and 'rhetoric'
- Narrative and rhetoric are based in 'language'.

the Conversation Attractor

There are some people and spaces around which conversation gravitates. These are the conversation attractors. The conversation audit identifies these powerful Bloggers or social networkers, explores how they talk and offers ways of working with them.

A key outcome of the conversation audit is to provide a strategy for building content relationships. The conversation attractor, whether it is an individual, a group or a space offers a potential partner for a business to work with in co-creating its story.

tools and concepts

The conversation audit uses tools from linguistics and literary and cultural studies to provide a rigorous and systematic analysis of the conversations and conversation attractors:

- To look at the content of Live Web conversations, the conversation audit uses "semiotics" a method that looks at how meanings are created by looking at the 'signs' within a discourse.

A conversation audit might look at how particular words or pictures are repeatedly connected to a product or service and thus helping to build the story. It might also look at how those signs are 'intertextual', related to other media stories and cultural references.

- To look at the form of Live Web conversations, the conversation audit uses the tools of rhetorical and discourse analysis.

A conversation audit might look at how particular lexical and grammatical structures create 'subjects' and subject positions for instance a service or brand as a 'problem' in need of a 'problem solver'. It might also look at how the business story is being co-narrated as 'realist'.

A conversation audit will not cover every conversation online, as a more quantitative approach might. In contrast it focuses on the conversation attractors as potentially powerful co-creators of the business story.

www.conversationacademy.com

how a conversation audit looks

Of course every conversation audit will be different, not only because every conversation space and moment is different but because each is tailored to fit a business' needs.

With that said, here's how one might look:

1. Identifying the conversation attractors.
An analysis of the players and the spaces in terms of identifying the 'attractors', the spaces or people who are the gravitational centre of the discourse. This may be the person who set up a group or the person who makes the most comments or whose blog attracts the most comments. It may even be the person who, while not attracting or creating large amounts of traffic, sparks off powerful conversations. The conversation attractor may not be the author but the text. It may be a video or a social network space or a particular conversation that has generated new discourse.
2. Content analysis
An analysis of the 'signs' that the attractor uses and how meanings are constructed and issues re-presented. This may be the words, the images, the sounds or a combination. The analysis would look synchronically and diachronically i.e. at the choice and combination of signs. The aim would be to see how an 'issue' or 'idea' is constructed and connected to the broader business story.

3. Form analysis
An analysis of how the conversation attractor uses various lexical, grammatical, narrative and rhetorical constructions that serve not only to construct a particular discursive space but also to create a space for conversation i.e. how those forms encourage other interactions and connections.

4. Ways forward
The conversation audit concludes with proposals for how to join in the conversations - the sort of language and narrative forms to use - but also how to work with the existing conversation attractors.

the conversation audit process

An effective conversation audit arises from a close working relationship between the business and the Conversation Academy. It is not the sort of report that you commission, wait for and is then delivered. Rather a conversation audit emerges from Paul Caplan knowing your business story and using that as the basis for identifying and analysing the appropriate conversation attractors.

A typical process might involve:

1. Initial meeting with business to identify scope of conversation audit and nature of the business story
2. Identification of conversation attractors
3. Meeting to discuss and agree on conversation attractors for full analysis
4. Analysis
5. Report and presentation
6. Meeting to discuss ways forward.

the Conversation Academy

the Conversation Audit is a service from the Conversation Academy

WWW.CONVERSATIONACADEMY.COM

the Conversation Academy is run by Paul Caplan WWW.THEINTERNATIONALE.ORG a qualified english teacher, cultural studies lecturer, journalist and consultant. His company, the Internationale, has worked with national and local government, charities and corporates developing content strategies as well as training and auditing their Live Web communications.

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