



GUIDESERIES

The Kenshoo Guide to Evaluating Social Advertising Technology Platforms

- WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS GUIDE:
- Overview of paid social advertising
 - Why you need (or don't need) a third party solution
 - The 5 key components of a paid advertising technology platform
 - 10 quick tips for a successful evaluation process
 - Marketer's perspective on how to choose the right social ad platform

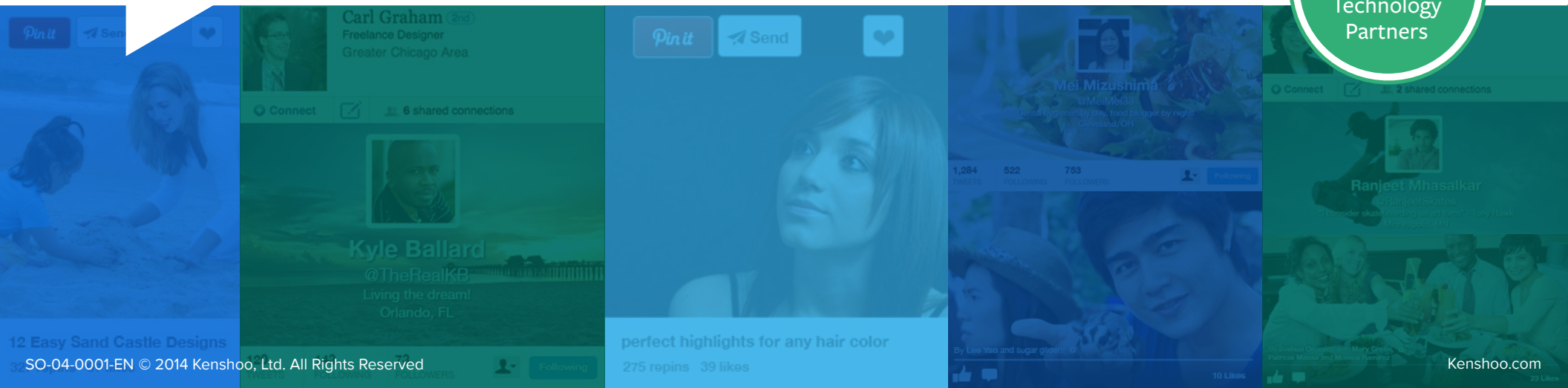


Table of Contents

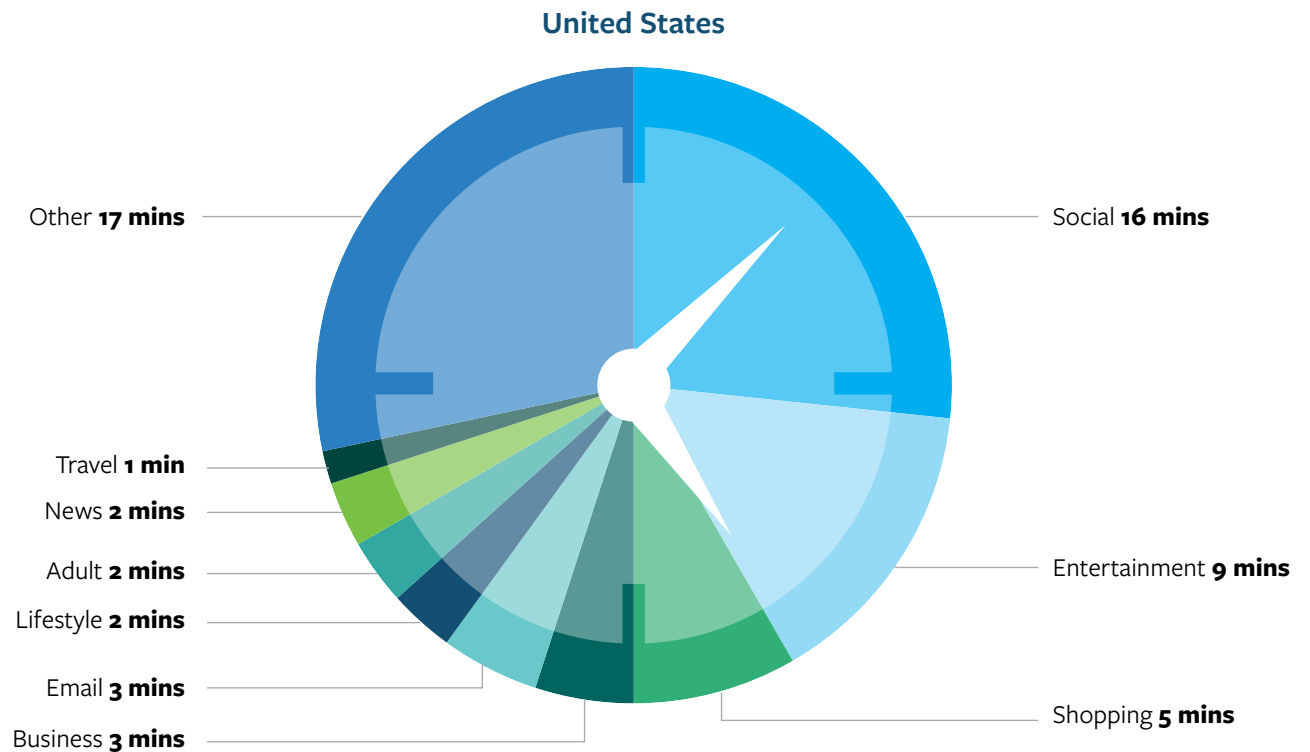
The Rise of Social Advertising	3
The Business Case for Adopting a Third Party Technology Platform.	6
The Benefits of Social Ad Management Technology	.6
A Basic Return-on-Investment (ROI) Calculation to See if You're Ready for a Social Ad Platform	.7
The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform (and what you need to look for).	8
Workflow & User Interface (UI)	.8
Reporting and Analytics	10
Optimization	12
Advanced Functionality	14
Intangibles	16
Resources for Evaluating Technology Partners	18
Self-Assessment Quiz: Are You Ready for a Social Advertising Technology Platform?	19
Action Plan for the Evaluation Process.	20
The Evaluation Worksheet.	22
How to Get the Most Out of Demos	23
Questions to Ask During Reference Calls	25
10 Quick Tips for a Successful Platform Evaluation Process	26
Independent Research - Excerpt From The Forrester Wave™: Social Advertising Platforms, Q4 2013	28
Marketer's Perspective	29
Closing Thoughts	30

The Rise of Social Advertising



Social media has quickly become one of the most fundamental digital activities for consumers around the world. People visit Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks almost daily from a variety of web-enabled devices to stay in touch with friends and family, interact with their favorite celebrities and brands, play games, and engage in many other socially-focused online activities.

Of all the time spent on the Internet for personal computers, 27 percent is spent on social media across the U.S., U.K. and Australia



Source: Experian Marketing Services

Understandably, businesses have followed consumers to social networks with 93% of advertisers now using social marketing as part of their overall plan.

The Rise of Social Advertising

Social media vs. social advertising

- ▶ **Social media** includes organic marketing tactics that social web properties don't charge for, such as branded pages, branded applications, and branded posts on social networks.
- ▶ **Social advertising** includes paid tactics such as ads and promoted content on social networks, promoted content on microblogs, and ads on business-focused social networks.

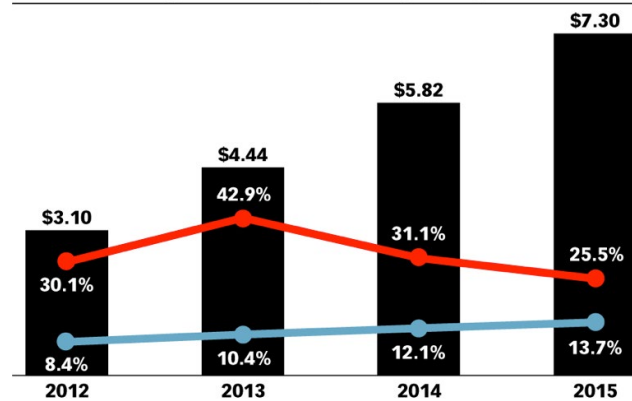
Although clearly different, these two marketing tactics are often used together. In *The Key to Successful Social Advertising: How to Choose the Right Tactics to Achieve your Social Advertising Objectives*, a Forrester Consulting study commissioned by Kenshoo Social, one of the key recommendations to marketers was to:

“Promote your brand and your content. Many marketers still think of social media as a free channel. But the data is clear: Marketers who used paid social tactics — be it paying for social advertising or paying to promote social content — say that they’re more successful than those who don’t. The lesson? Social marketing can be free — but if you want it to deliver results, it shouldn’t be free.”

The rise of social advertising

U.S. social advertising revenues are expected to grow to \$11 billion by 2017 per BIA/Kelsey, becoming one of the most popular digital channels in the annual marketing plan. In fact, per Nielsen, 75% of advertisers and 81% of agencies surveyed said they have already either purchased media or sponsored content on social networks.

US Social Network Ad Spending, 2012-2015
billions, % change and % of digital ad spending



■ Social network ad revenues
■ % change ■ % of digital ad spending

Note: includes paid advertising appearing within social network sites, social network games and social network applications; excludes spending by marketers that goes toward developing or maintaining a social network presence
Source: eMarketer, Dec 2013

166351

www.eMarketer.com

Facebook organic reach of brand posts is declining to well below 15%

SOURCE: MediaPost

US Social Network Ad Revenues, by Venue, 2012-2015
millions and % change

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Facebook	\$2,182.3	\$3,168.7	\$3,947.0	\$4,778.4
—% change	25.8%	45.2%	24.6%	21.1%
Twitter	\$219.0	\$421.3	\$790.5	\$1,178.8
—% change	199.3%	92.4%	87.6%	49.1%
LinkedIn	\$164.0	\$233.0	\$327.0	\$450.2
—% change	54.7%	42.1%	40.3%	37.7%
Social games	\$189.2	\$222.9	\$273.9	\$311.2
—% change	39.7%	17.8%	22.9%	13.6%
Other	\$349.5	\$390.4	\$479.3	\$584.0
—% change	4.1%	11.7%	22.8%	21.9%
Total	\$3,103.9	\$4,436.3	\$5,817.6	\$7,302.5
—% change	30.1%	42.9%	31.1%	25.5%

Note: includes paid advertising appearing within social network sites, social network games and social network applications; excludes spending by marketers that goes toward developing or maintaining a social network presence; numbers may not add up to total due to rounding
Source: eMarketer, Dec 2013

166356

www.eMarketer.com

The Rise of Social Advertising

Examples of Paid Social Advertising

Facebook Page Post Ads

Boosted posts appear in News Feed and show up higher, so there's a better chance the audience for the posts will see them. Boosted posts are labeled *Sponsored*.



Kenshoo Social shared a link.
December 17, 2013

Kenshoo named the sole Leader in the Forrester Wave: Social Ad Platforms, Q4 2013. Thanks to our clients for pushing us to be the best! Read more about this achievement in our latest blog post.

For a breakdown of all Facebook ad formats, download the report from Kenshoo Social and Resolution Media: [Social Media Insights: Metrics that Matter](#).

Twitter Promoted Tweets

Promoted Tweets are Tweets purchased by advertisers who want to reach a wider group of users or to spark engagement from their existing followers. Promoted Tweets are clearly labeled as *Promoted* when an advertiser is paying for their placement on Twitter.

In every other respect, Promoted Tweets act just like regular Tweets and can be retweeted, replied to, favorited and more. Users who dislike a Promoted Tweet can simply dismiss it from their timeline with a single click, using the "Dismiss" button that appears as part of the Tweet.

For more information, check out the Kenshoo Social infographic, [The Twitter Advertising Opportunity](#).



Kenshoo Social @kenshoosocial Jan 14
Tips for evaluating social ad platforms: Join Kenshoo + guest @ZacharyRD of @Forrester for a Jan 30 webinar. Register ow.ly/sA8jN

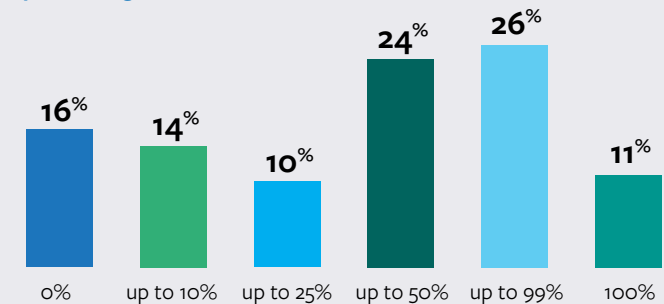
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Over 61% of social marketers spend at least half of their Facebook advertising on promoting content

How much of your Facebook advertising is spent on promoting content?



SOURCE: socialbakers

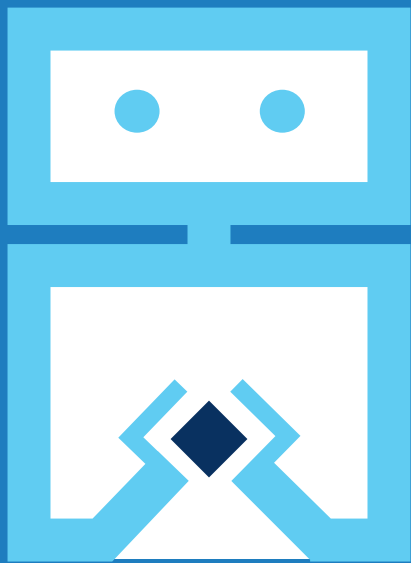


What a \$4 Mil. Super Bowl Ad Could Buy a Marketer on Twitter

Promoted trends on the social network currently sell for up to \$120,000 a day. Based on that figure, \$4 million would afford you the paid placement every day for at least a month.



The Business Case for Adopting a Third Party Technology Platform



When social networks first began selling advertising, many marketers approached the opportunity as merely a sub-channel to their social media programs. However, social advertising is now considered closer to paid media than *social* media.

Many social ad formats are sold via the search advertising Pay-Per-Click (PPC), auction-based model, in which advertisers are not charged for ad impressions but rather only when consumers click. Because of this, many brands have migrated their social advertising efforts to their search departments and agencies that are biddable media experts while leaving their social media work of engaging with fans to their PR and social media teams.

The Benefits Of Social Ad Management Technology

For large advertisers, bid management platforms have been the key to successful PPC campaigns and that holds true with social advertising. However, with social advertising, it's not only bids that require optimizing, but targeting and creative messaging as well.

When it comes to media optimization, there are simply just some things that computers are better at than humans. For example, humans are better at writing compelling ad creative, but analyzing massive data sets to figure out the key periods of the day when you should increase your bids is something computer processing power can do many, many times faster than people.

Advertisers should leverage technology when appropriate in order to free up time so that their teams can focus on the things that technology can't do well.

A few of the benefits of using a social ad platform include:

Improved workflow through automation

Many platforms offer advanced functionality that goes beyond what the social network ad solutions provide. Capabilities such as automated scheduling to turn ads and campaigns off or on and the ability to increase or decrease bids in the middle of the night or on weekends can be extremely helpful. In terms of workflow, although social networks are great at being social networks, they may not be experts at bid management. Third party social advertising platforms can provide a much easier and faster interface to work with than the native tools.

Increased scale

For small social ad programs, a third party platform may not be needed, but as advertisers begin to ramp up their efforts, the time investment in man-hours may far eclipse the cost of bringing in a platform to accomplish the same goals. Setting up hundreds of creative image variations or applying bulk copy changes to accounts, for example, may take hours to do manually but possibly just seconds for a social advertising platform.

The Business Case for Adopting a Third Party Technology Platform

Deep reporting and analytics

With thousands or even millions of dollars being invested, marketers need to be able to dig into the performance of their social advertising campaigns and mine insights that can be used to optimize not only their social ads, but also provide data nuggets that can inform and improve other aspects of their business. For instance, an apparel retailer may be able to gain valuable market research based on which ads consumers click from its new clothing line.

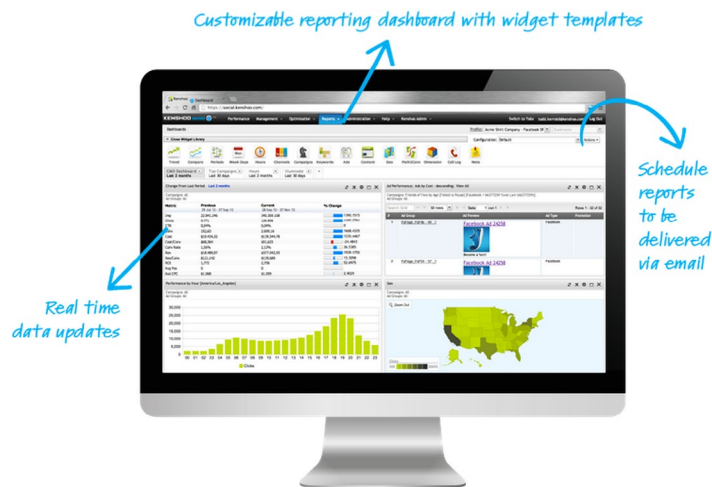
Advanced optimization

Perhaps the most valuable benefit from using an advanced platform for your social advertising programs is the higher ROI that can be garnered by leveraging rules-based and algorithmic optimization functionality. There are just too many variables involved in setting the proper bids across hundreds or thousands of social ads for humans to efficiently manage.

As well, bid management platforms are less than optimal within the social network native tools and third-party technologies can help to fill this gap. The very best social advertising platforms have innovative, cutting-edge technology (some even have machine-learning) that helps marketers achieve the best results from their social spend.

Integration opportunities

Digital marketers have to approach all of their channels holistically to put together the best mix of proprietary, native, and third party tools to engineer a tech stack that can work best together. Some social advertising platforms can connect better to the rest of your current technology partners than the native ad tools provided by social media publishers.



A Basic Return-On-Investment (ROI) Calculation to See if You're Ready for a Social Ad Platform

Social ad management platforms should immediately be able to increase the ROI of a manually managed campaign by 10-30% with potentially much higher returns when used expertly over time. However, due to the cost, some advertisers may not be sure if the value outweighs the investment.

The value calculation here is fairly simple:

► Without a platform:

Ad Revenue - Ad Spend = ROI

► With a platform:

Low Range =

Ad Revenue + 10% - (Ad Spend + Cost of Platform)

High Range =

Ad Revenue + 30% - (Ad Spend + Cost of Platform)

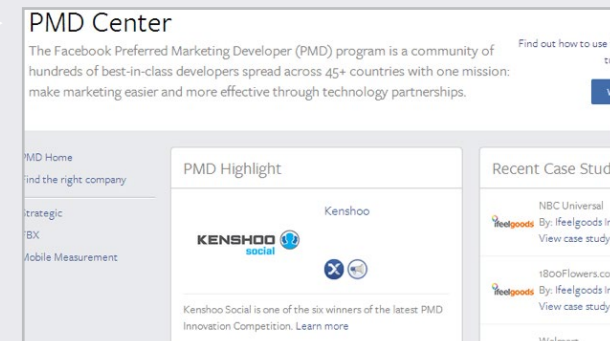
Example: Each month, Advertiser X generates \$1,000,000 in revenue from \$200,000 in social advertising spend. The platform the advertiser is considering charges 5% of ad spend.

► **Without a platform** ROI = \$800k (\$1M - \$200k)

► **With a platform** Low Range ROI = \$890k (\$1M x 10%) = \$200K spend + \$10k platform cost

► **With a platform** High Range ROI = \$1,090,000 (\$1M x 30%) = \$200k spend + \$10k platform cost

Annualized, this advertiser would generate between \$1,080,000 (\$90k x 12) and \$3,480,000 (\$290K x 12) in incremental revenue by using a platform.



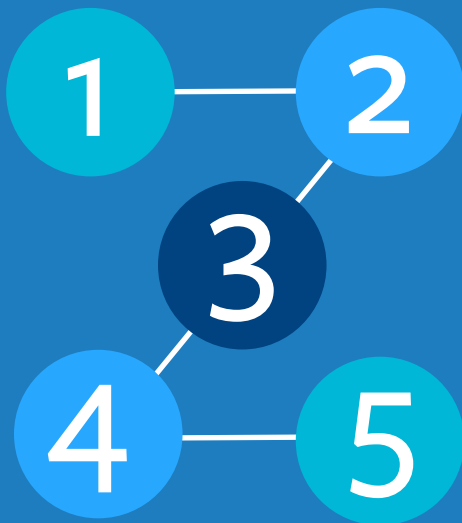
Partner Resources

Some social networks have very active relationships with third party technology platforms that can help marketers better understand which partners may be the proper fit for their social ad programs. For example, Facebook has the Preferred Marketing Developer (PMD) program that lists the best-in-class platforms that plug into their system and a more distinguished tier for the top marketing developers, Strategic Preferred Marketing Developers (sPMD).



The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform

(and what you need to look for)



1. Workflow & User Interface (UI)

One of the most important aspects of a social ad platform is if it is set up for easy workflow and has a streamlined UI. Even if a platform has very deep analytics and optimization capabilities, it can become a nightmare for your team if it is hard to work with and not intuitive to navigate. There have been many instances where powerful platforms simply don't get adopted because they're too complicated for busy marketers to figure out.

Is it easy to use and customizable?

A social ad platform that is designed well should be very intuitive. It should be obvious how to navigate through the platform and provide clear instructions when you reach complex features. Pages should open quickly and fonts should be easy to read without needless clutter or other distracting elements.

The benchmark of an easy-to-use platform is if you feel you can get started right away without a ton of time wasted learning the layout. If components are in obvious places and menus seem to flow naturally, then that's a good sign.

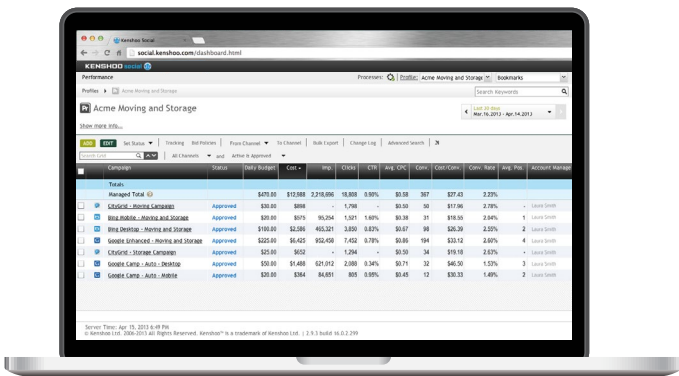
Another good thing to think about is if the UI has a flexible, adaptable design. Can it be customized to your team's desired workflow for management and optimization? You can expect that you may have to change your methods slightly with a new platform, but you won't want to completely rewrite your processes.

Does the platform help identify mistakes such as accuracy issues?

One of the major problems with executing social ad campaigns using the native tools and manual processes is that errors seem to be par for the course. There are a lot of moving parts to social ad campaigns and even simple mistakes can be like a monkey wrench thrown into a highly complex machine. Third party technologies can provide help to alleviate these issues and effectively reduce errors.

For example, some platforms have a change log so you can go back through manual mistakes to see where and why they occurred so you can make sure they don't happen again.

The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform



Category	Sub-category	Status	Budget	Spent	Clicks	Conversions	CPA	ROI	ROAS	Impressions	Click Rate	Conversion Rate	Avg. Price	Account Name
Managed Total			\$470.00	\$12,000	2,310,000	18,000	0.00%	\$0.00	307	\$27.42	2.37%			
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$10.00	\$804	1,700	-	\$0.00	30	\$17.96	2.37%				1 - CLASSIC
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$10.00	\$875	90,204	1,320	1.80%	\$0.00	31	\$19.50	2.84%			1 - CLASSIC
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$100.00	\$2,000	410,321	3,800	0.92%	\$0.00	98	\$20.30	2.55%			2 - CLASSIC
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$225.00	\$6,420	952,450	7,400	0.78%	\$0.00	194	\$33.12	2.80%			4 - CLASSIC
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$210.00	\$600	1,200	-	\$0.00	34	\$19.10	2.57%				1 - CLASSIC
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$50.00	\$1,400	621,012	2,000	0.34%	\$0.00	32	\$46.50	1.57%			3 - CLASSIC
CLASSIC - ADVERTISING	Approved		\$20.00	\$504	\$4,001	800	0.00%	\$0.00	12	\$30.33	1.49%			2 - CLASSIC

Another common functionality is an alerts feature, which can email your team when certain negative benchmarks occur such as if spend or clicks drop below a specified level. This way you can act quickly to fix small problems so they don't become big ones.

Is it better than the native platform?

Ultimately, if a third party platform isn't clearly better than the native UI, then it might be hard to justify the cost. What are some of the issues you and your team have with the native tools and does the third party platform fix them? What are some of the things you and your team like about the native tools and does the third party platform enhance and improve upon them?

There should be valuable, robust functionality within the platform you're evaluating that solves the major flaws found in the native tool.

Does it have a really great help section?

A simple platform may be easy to use but might not have the powerful functionality you really need. The only way a third party platform will be of any value is if it is complex, and that means that sometimes your team will get stuck at certain places and need help. Make sure to check out the help and support features when you do your demo, because there are often great disparities among platforms. Some platforms don't invest enough in this area, because they focus more on the attention grabbing features during a sales process. Unfortunately, even some of the most mature platforms fail here.

Is the help section interactive? Is it easy to figure things out on your own or will it always require an email to the support team which slows down the execution process? Are there on-demand videos? Is there a self-service training program? Is the help section embedded in the platform so you can easily bring up support assets or do you have to navigate to another platform?

The Bottom Line: The workflow and UI should take your social ad practice to the next level

The hallmark of a top-notch third party social ad platform is that it doesn't just help your team perform tasks faster and easier but also if it can provide ways to raise your game from either good to great or great to best-in-class. Is it obvious that your team can now output twice as much work in the same amount of time? Is it clear that the platform will cut down on errors and simple mistakes that bog down your campaign management?

More importantly, does the platform itself push your team to think smarter about how to steward social advertising campaigns? Elite social ad platforms have an intelligent point-of-view on how to properly manage the channel and integrate best practices within the UI functionality and options.

Your platform should feel like a partner in your social ad practice. It should pick up the slack where you have gaps in your program, and it should allow your team to do things they just couldn't do without it.

Will this save time? (Time = money)

Time savings is one of the main reasons why marketers make the investment in man-hours and money for onboarding a third party platform. So, one of the biggest things to consider is whether or not this platform will shave time off your day or simply be another thing that bogs down the execution process for social advertising. Does the platform make it easy to do bulk operations? Can it create large scale campaigns quickly and easily?

One of the ways to vet this during the demo process is to have the technology partner take you and your team through a standard campaign creation and launch process. You should be able to clearly see if shortcuts exist and how your team could save valuable time if they used the platform.

The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform



2. Reporting and Analytics

One of the core benefits of digital advertising is how well it can be tracked and measured. By reviewing granular campaign data, social advertising can be optimized for maximum performance.

- ▶ **Reporting** is a critical function of media execution. It's the record of how the advertising performed so that all stakeholders can be on the same page about what occurred during the campaign.
- ▶ **Analytics** are how marketers slice and dice the performance data in order to uncover valuable insights that help to explain why media performed the way it did.

Ideally, social marketers can use the nuggets of truth from their platform's reporting and analytics to make the smart decisions on how to best manage their social ad budget as well as inform cross-channel activity.

Does the reporting suite have the basics?

Even if, on the surface, it seems that a platform's reporting capabilities are up to par, many marketers have had buyer's remorse because they didn't think to ask about some of the basics, incorrectly assuming that they would be in there. Does the platform offer automation to drop reports into your inbox or an ftp site on a recurring basis? Does it just output to the screen or can you download via excel, pdf, ppt, etc? You should definitely ask if the reporting suite analyzes all of the data or just a sample in order keep processing time down.

One important thing to know is that sophistication around conversion tracking and reporting varies widely between platforms. At the low end, some platforms only track if a consumer reached a certain page, and you won't be able to pull very robust reports. However, as more money flows into social advertising, marketers will be expected to track the same, more advanced conversion variables that the mature platforms in SEM and online display offer, including the ability to pull in granular order details from ecommerce shopping carts.

How deep (and wide) is the analytics offering?

Beyond the reporting basics, does the social advertising platform you're evaluating go to the next level in terms of analytics? Best-in-class media management platforms push the envelope and continuously innovate their reporting and analytics capabilities. This may sound like a tall order, but each platform should offer unique, proprietary functionality and some bells and whistles that the other platforms don't have.

The only way you're going to get an edge on your competition is if your social ad platform can provide data insights that aren't the basic, standard-level information. Make sure to ask the technology partner during the demo to highlight the latest reporting capabilities of their platform so you can vet just how deep and wide they are able to go.

How does the platform handle Big Data? (Speed matters)

Social ad campaigns can easily span millions of clicks and billions of impressions creating daunting challenges for any data system to handle. However, nothing is more frustrating to marketers than having to wait while their ad platform crunches the numbers. Many platforms can hook into a social network's advertising APIs but very few (especially because this channel is rather nascent) have the mature data infrastructure to truly handle "Big Data."

Very few computing systems can instantly pop out a report from huge, highly granular data sets (meaning millions and millions of rows), but marketers should expect quick results from simple, top-level queries. During the demo, make sure to speed test the system. You should also ask if the demo system is a live environment like you will have or if it's static data on its own dedicated server. You will want to see the live environment when you are benchmarking any system.

Can the platform adapt to you?

For this part of the evaluation process, you and your team must have a deep understanding of your needs so that you don't end up choosing a technology that ultimately can't do what you want it to do. However, you'll never be able to identify every feature need you'll have, so one major thing to consider at this stage is if the platform's reporting and analytics are flexible enough to adjust to your marketing organization.

A good example of this is custom metrics. A social ad platform may provide reporting on a variety of metrics, but, at some point down the road, you may want to analyze a data point based on a unique metric that isn't supported out of the box. Platforms that provide custom metrics capabilities allow you to choose virtually any combination of data points and build new blended metrics from them.



The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform

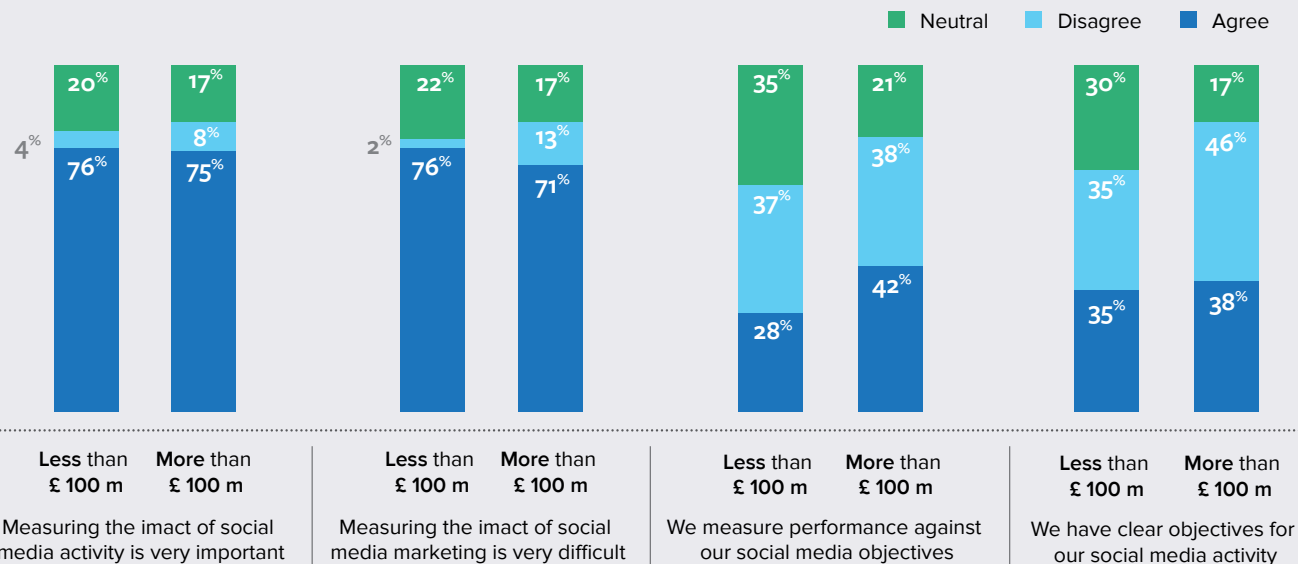
Do you also get a crystal ball?

Forecasting and predictive modeling have become critical features for marketers. Looking through the rear-view mirror helps you see what happened behind you, but it's a clear windshield that helps you drive. As you spend more on social advertising, you will want to know where to invest incremental dollars into your program, and you need your platform of choice to help you make wise decisions.

Advanced predictive modeling can do the big data number crunching to help you understand if you've maxed out on a tactic or if you can continue to feed the beast. By getting accurate performance forecasts, you will be able to better plan not only your social advertising, but also deliver stronger insights to the rest of the marketing team about how your channel is going to perform during key spikes and dips throughout the year.

Even though a majority of marketers feel that determining the impact of their social advertising is important, most also feel that it is difficult – less than half have clear measurement goals or are able to accomplish this goal.

Sophistication of Social Media Measurement by Company Size



SOURCE: Quarterly Digital Intelligence Briefing: Managing and Measuring Social — Econsultancy, September 2012

The Bottom Line: Demand actionability from your analytics

Certainly, being able to go deep and wide within a social ad platform's reporting and analytics suite is absolutely crucial and a very important component to the overall offering. But, as these platforms evolve, marketers should expect more than just displaying the data – after all, the end goal of social advertising is not to display media performance but to drive business goals such as sales, leads, downloads, etc.

How does the platform connect the analytics insights with optimization process? Do you, the marketer, have to analyze the data and then manually make adjustments using those insights or can the system ingest the data and then close the loop by adjusting your social ads program accordingly? Actionability is the next step following analytics and top-tier platforms have various ways to tie the two together.



The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform



3. Optimization

The main reason why marketers bring in a third party social ad platform is to help with advanced optimization needs including:

- ▶ **Bid & budget management** – generating the highest return from your social ad budget
- ▶ **Targeting & expansion** – zeroing in on your most valuable audiences
- ▶ **Creative refinement** – refreshing and rotating messages

Assessing media optimization technology is typically the hardest part of the entire platform evaluation. Workflow and UI differences are relatively easy to see, and reporting capabilities can be appraised quickly; however, even if an optimization platform has worked for the last 100 marketers, there's always a chance that it won't have much positive impact on your unique, marketing environment.

So, if optimization features are the most important consideration for a social ad platform, and optimization is the hardest thing to evaluate, what does a marketer do?

Marketers must try to answer a variety of descriptive questions and see if one technology provider rises to the top.

How long has the core optimization technology been live and in market?

Sometimes you just have to approach technology evaluations like you would any other purchase. You wouldn't necessarily want to buy a house from a first-time home builder would you? Of course not. The same applies here.

Is the optimization technology (not the company but the algorithmic core of the platform) new or has been it been around for a while? How many iterations has it gone through and what version is it on? What's been planned for the next version? Do your research, and see what you can find out.

Does the optimization methodology make sense?

Don't be intimidated by words like "machine-learning", "data clusters", or "portfolio bidding". Just listen to what the vendors say, ask for clarification, and see if it rings true. Trust your experience and your gut. You don't have to understand it completely, but ask smart questions. If you can find anything that doesn't make sense or if it seems too simple – those should be red flags.

Social ad platform sales teams may not be able to articulate the details of the solution at the level you need. It may take a second meeting with one of their engineers to better explain the math and science that goes into their approach. Ultimately, you are going to want to be able to have base level understanding of the optimization methodology of the platform you end up choosing so you may as well get some clarification now.

What kind of inputs does the optimization technology use to make decisions?

One of the best pieces to vet while the technology provider is explaining its methodology is to find out what inputs the optimization science uses to make decisions. Make sure you get an explanation that's more than: "If it's working, the system bids it up and if it's not, the system bids it down." What you're looking for is some sort of innovative approach that uses many types of data points to arrive at complex conclusions.

Certainly, if a system is not able to accept inputs from a multi-touch attribution system, then that too is a red flag. Your social ad program is interacting with your other online media, and each channel is impacting and influencing consumers to take action in a holistic manner. Your bidding systems should take into account when it's getting assists from other media and what parts of the social ad program are able to close sales on their own.

The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform

Optimization systems can also ingest third party data from other systems in order to better inform the overall decision making. Any platform that is extremely closed off and cannot integrate well with other parts of your tech stack should get a few points knocked off in your final evaluation.

Does the optimization go beyond bids?

Advanced optimization platforms help marketers perform a variety of optimization functions. What are the solutions the platform offers beyond bid and budget management? Are there optimization tools for audience discovery and targeting? What about creative optimization? It should be clear that the optimization options go beyond just bidding to allow marketers improve all aspects of their campaigns.

How does the platform recommend audiences to target? Does it offer algorithms that use keywords to suggest new audiences based on cluster analysis of demographics and performance metrics of existing Facebook audiences applied across channels? What about algorithms that automatically identify ads showing signs of performance decay and take actions such as pause, refresh, rotate, etc.? Creative tools should be available that automatically identify ads that are working after the initial launch and promote them while also making sure low performing ads are moved out of the rotation.

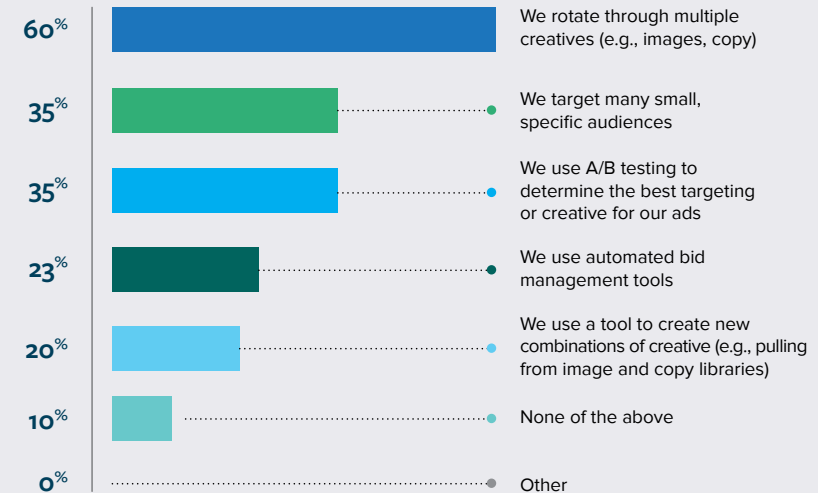
The Bottom Line: Talk to current (and previous) clients to gauge optimization capabilities

The very best kind of research you can do to see if a social ad platform's optimization technology is effective is to speak to the solution provider's current, and if possible, previous clients. Ask for references and then schedule quick calls with a solid list of predetermined questions. ([See Questions to Ask During Reference Calls found in the Resources section of this guide](#)).

Don't be shy. This is your best chance for collecting solid research on how well the technology of the solution provider has worked for others. Take into account the context of the answers with regards to how difficult it might be for any technology to optimize that particular brand's social advertising. If the person you're speaking to seems overly positive, it's okay to dive deeper. As well, if someone seems overly negative, make sure to get a better understanding of their issues before making a final decision.

Social advertisers focus on ad rotation, but it's not the key to successful social advertising. Marketers must incorporate multiple optimization tactics and tools.

"Which of the following practices do you use when buying ads or paying to promote content on social media properties?"



Base: 105 US social media/advertising professionals

SOURCE: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Kenshoo Social, Q1 2013

The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform



4. Advanced Functionality

Much of which has been described in the previous three sections is virtually table-stakes for social advertising technology platforms. If a platform provider can't deliver a smooth workflow, advanced reporting, or effective optimization capabilities then it shouldn't even be considered for your toolbox.

Platform providers are on a constant innovation cycle in order to one-up their competitors and create compelling differentiators with advanced functionality. Marketers look to partner with companies that can provide the base-level components and but also judge the field based on additional proprietary solutions.

In fact, after comparing the field and seeing the same base feature set across many providers, your decision may come down to the advanced functionality that best fits your objectives with social advertising.

Do you need a global platform?

Global brands require technology partners that can support their global efforts, and this impacts many aspects of the entire solution. Is the UI available in multiple languages? Are the training documents multi-lingual? Are there in-language account managers to assist your international teams? What about support? Is it 24/7 or just during U.S. business hours? If a provider does offer always-on support, is it just for basic questions or can any deep issue be handled?

If you are a global marketing organization, one of the best ways to know if a solution is truly aligned is to find out how many international clients they have. Some providers may say they support international campaigns but that just means that their U.S. clients can use the standard country targeting offered by the social network ad platforms via their APIs.

How well does the platform integrate and activate other channels?

In the first era of digital marketing, single-point solutions arose to handle the most critical tasks. As this industry has evolved over the last twenty years, more and more marketers are looking to connect their individual platforms to each other to build bigger, badder technology stacks that can accomplish more than the sum of their parts.

Social advertising is one of the most interconnected channels and has the ability to influence and impact consumers very strongly alongside other media, both online and offline. Even if you're not currently trying to connect your social advertising to the rest of your marketing efforts, make sure to think ahead just in case things change down the road. You want to be sure that you're working with the social ad platform that is not only the right partner now but also in the near future.

A great question to ask the platform provider is whether or not it can leverage insights from one channel (such as paid search) to improve your social advertising. Conversely, is there data that can be garnered from your social advertising that can improve your other channels? For example, are there interesting insights about which ads social consumers are clicking that can be used to improve copywriting on other ad formats?

Some other advanced functionality you may look for includes:

► Multi-users and collaboration

In today's business world, your team may be spread out across floors, buildings, states, countries, and even continents. Modern web-based platforms can offer functionality that can help to ease the collaboration process.

► Cutting-edge targeting

One of the reasons social advertising is growing so rapidly is that it offers amazing targeting options – who has more information on consumers than their social networks? Social ad platforms can provide unique targeting options outside of the native tools and can help you both narrow and expand your reach for better targeting.

► Inventory and feed sync

Many advertisers have feeds that contain hundreds of thousands or millions of products. Some social platforms have really smart ways to take your feed and generate ads automatically and even pause those ads immediately when it detects a product is out-of-stock.



The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform

► Owned media integration

Many social advertising platforms can integrate with your owned and earned tools (aka social relationship and depth platforms) as well so that you can get a holistic window into how all of your social efforts are impacting customer journeys. Furthermore, these integrations can help you automatically promote the best performing pieces of organic content via paid ads.

► Mobile support

You can't mention social media without mobile as many consumers access their social profiles with their smart phones and tablets, which has drawn the attention of advertisers. Your social ad platform must have the ability to play in this space with features to drive installs and track in-app conversion metrics.

► Custom attribution modeling

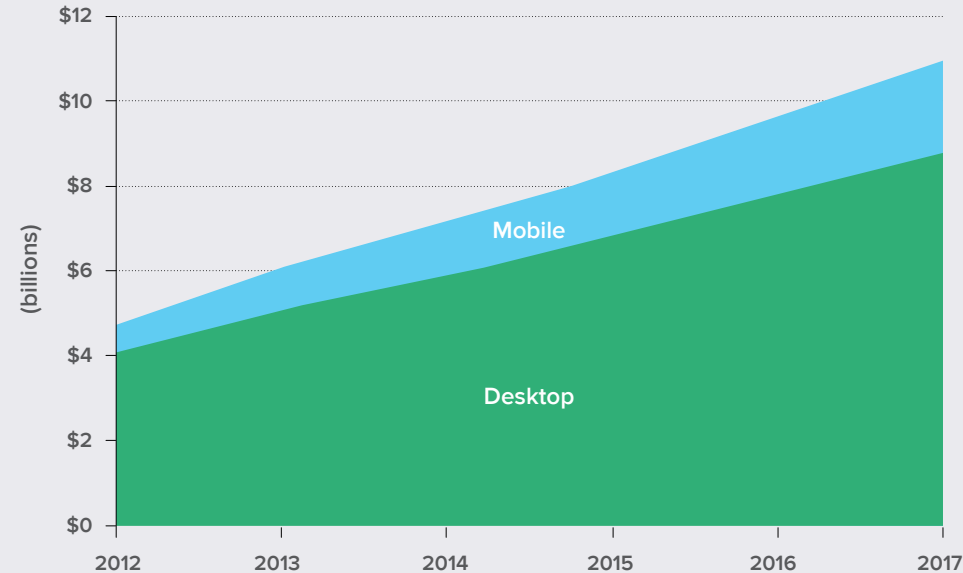
Standard, "last click" conversion tracking does not accurately report which elements of your campaigns are driving the most impact and influence. Top-tier platforms let you adjust your conversion attribution model to better reflect the true performance of your social advertising.

The Bottom Line: Prioritize functionality that best fits your needs and objectives

Baseline functionality across platforms will tend to be similar so dig in and find out what truly sets one platform apart from another. That being said, be more attuned to the components that will be valuable to you and your organization now or in the future. If you have no plans to go global and multi-language support is not a priority for you, then don't focus too much time and energy on this topic.

Mobile growing as a percentage of social advertising spending

U.S. Social Ad Forecast By Device



SOURCE: BIA/Kelsey

The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform



5. Intangibles

When evaluating social advertising platforms, marketers should not just consider the technology, but also the partner behind the solution. After all, this is more of a partner relationship rather than a buyer/seller affiliation.

However, it can be difficult to know where to draw the line. How much should the intangibles about the provider solution weigh into your final decision? Should you go with what might be a superior platform if the company is sub-par or does an inferior solution get the nod because the company seems excellent? There's no right answer to this question. It's certainly a sliding scale but you will need to make your decision with these considerations in mind.

What is the company history? What other clients does it have? Has it won any awards or third party accolades?

These are some of the common things you would consider about any partner before signing up with them. Even though social advertising is a relatively nascent category, there are companies with years of history that indicate stability and maturity. Signs of instability can be very troublesome, because if you're going to plan a multi-year strategy with this partner, you need to know that it is going to be around for a while.

When asking about current clients, you should look for some marquee names and a mix of different industries. Does the solution provider have any experience in your category? What awards has it won? Make sure to do your homework to make sure that the company can really handle your business.

What is the current roadmap and future vision of the social advertising platform?

It is very common during the evaluation process to ask to see what's on the provider's current roadmap to see if there's anything within its plan that might make you lean a bit closer to them during your decision making. Maybe the provider is a close second, and you're not really sold on your top choice, but something within the roadmap that truly speaks to your marketing organizations needs could make that difference.

The future vision of the provider is just as important as next quarter's roadmap. Is this a company that's just going to put out a tool and sell sell sell or does it clearly have a culture of innovation that's going to keep evolving and improving? Remember, some functionality may take many months or even years to develop. The future is always foggy so you need a partner that is keeping its eye on industry trends so that it is always offering a best-in-breed platform.

Does the company provide other things such as complementary tools or managed services?

During the evaluation process, you should find out everything that the company offers, even if it seems right now that you wouldn't necessarily need anything else. You never know when you'll want to make a change or switch directions, so a partner you can grow with should receive extra points versus one that only offers the basics of social advertising.

Some platforms have paid search solutions, attribution measurement, and other complementary tools that integrate with their social ad technology. Managed service can also be a worthwhile option as you try to scale your business with your current team.

What is the price-to-value ratio?

Pricing should not be the most important input into your final decision – value should be what you're looking for most. There are platforms that may cost less than premium solutions, but if a more robust platform can drive twice the performance, does it matter if you're paying a little more for it?

The 5 Key Components of a Social Advertising Platform

Price-to-value is a rather difficult thing to figure out during the evaluation process, but as long as you focus on figuring out the value that a platform can offer, you should be in the right frame of mind when it comes time to judge if the platform is worth the investment or overpriced. Of course, you may be constrained by a specific price range that is out of your hands. If that's the case, don't immediately cut out a provider if it's over your allotted amount; be honest with the partner and see if you can come to an agreement to get down to your budget level for an initial test period as you ramp up your volume.

What is the onboarding process and ongoing support?

Support was one of the things mentioned in the workflow and UI section of this guide, but it definitely goes beyond just what you find within the platform. Do you get a dedicated rep to help you? Is it free or is there a charge? Is there even a mixed pricing model where you get a specified number of hours for free and then you have to pay on top of that for extra support that go beyond the basic package? It's very important to make sure you have a very clear understanding of any soft costs you may end up incurring via support.

Is there a training program? Does it offer certification? Are there on-demand video trainings? Are there personal training sessions or is every question to them answered with an impersonal link to their training manual? Platform media buying can be very detailed and constantly change as new functionality is introduced. You need to make sure you're working with a partner who is invested in making sure you and your team are fully trained on its platform.

The Bottom Line: Don't buy on functionality alone

Intangibles are a key component of any social advertising platform. Remember, you're partnering with a company, not just a platform. As great as the platform may be, if you're not comfortable with the team, the roadmap, or any other aspect of the company, you won't be happy with your final purchase.

Do your research and make sure to weigh in these intangibles as well as the other 4 key components during the evaluation process.

Resources for Evaluating Technology Partners



Self-Assessment Quiz: Are You Ready for a Social Advertising Technology Platform?

Take this quiz to see if your social ad program could benefit from a technology platform.

Action Plan for the Evaluation Process

Step-by-step, top-level approach for a successful social ad platform evaluation.

The Evaluation Worksheet

Blank scorecard to track the platforms you evaluate.

How to Get the Most Out of Demos

Things to make sure you ask to see while in a social ad platform demo.

Questions to Ask During Reference Calls

Short list of interview questions when speaking to social ad platform clients.



Self-Assessment Quiz: Are You Ready for a Social Advertising Technology Platform?

Directions: Give yourself 1 point for every question you answer YES. Total up your points and check the scale to see where you rank.

0-4 points	You may not need a social ad platform at this time.
5-8 points	A social ad platform is probably in your future, if not right now. Schedule time with a vendor to see the benefits firsthand and see what you are missing.
9-13 points	You are likely leaving major money on the table in terms of time savings and marketing return if you are not using a social advertising platform.
14-18 points	You have a major need for a social ad platform now!

1. Has your social advertising budget grown significantly over the last 12 months?

☐ yes ☐ no

2. Has the volume of your social ads grown to the point where your team is spending more time on execution than on strategy?

☐ yes ☐ no

3. Has the workload grown so much that you have to de-prioritize things like optimization or testing?

☐ yes ☐ no

4. Do you have a huge product catalog?

☐ yes ☐ no

5. Could your team benefit from having a platform that can schedule and automate recurring tasks related to social advertising execution?

☐ yes ☐ no

6. Do you feel that you waste too much of your budget on testing to find new audiences or other tactics?

☐ yes ☐ no

7. Does your performance reporting take hours?

☐ yes ☐ no

8. Do you feel that the reporting and analytics you have now do not dive deep enough?

☐ yes ☐ no

9. Are you unable to effectively react to ad/campaign performance and quickly shift budget to the campaigns that are performing best?

☐ yes ☐ no

10. Has campaign performance plateaued and you can't figure out how to improve results?

☐ yes ☐ no

11. Have you had trouble measuring performance or demonstrating the success of your programs?

☐ yes ☐ no

12. If driving mobile app installs is a strategic part of your overall social media campaigns, do you want to measure every in-app interaction and purchase and associate it back to the ad that drove the install so you can understand lifetime value of your campaigns?

☐ yes ☐ no

13. Do you want to better understand the customer journey and all the interactions across paid and owned social media?

☐ yes ☐ no

14. Is your team randomly promoting organic posts based on likes instead of actual sales/revenue they generate?

☐ yes ☐ no

15. Do you think your campaign performance is suffering from using last click attribution only? (ie, Could search or other channels be receiving credit from your efforts?)

☐ yes ☐ no

16. Even if you don't know why right now, does partnering with a social ad platform seem like something you should be doing?

☐ yes ☐ no

17. Do you suspect (or know) that your competitors are using a social advertising platform?

☐ yes ☐ no

18. Do you plan to dramatically scale up your spend or scope in the near future?

☐ yes ☐ no



Action Plan for the Evaluation Process

Approximate time: 3-6 weeks depending on the complexity of your social advertising needs



Step #1 – Identify social advertising technology platforms

It's important to be fairly comprehensive in this first group so ask colleagues and check the partner pages of the social networks where you will be advertising. Check out third party resources such as trade publications and independent research firms that publish buyer's guides on social advertising platforms. Don't worry about trying to edit your list at this point – that's the next step. Just make sure you don't leave any companies out that might be a good fit for you.



Step #2 – Narrow the list to a small handful

If there are any platforms that you know should be on the short list, then start there. For the others, check out their websites. Do they seem to do what you are looking for? You may even need to call them up and ask some precursory questions to make sure you understand their offering. Some social media platforms focus on engaging with fans and followers via organic posts and aren't equipped for true social advertising. Also, look to see who they say are their clients. That should help you narrow the list down.



Step #3 – Start a relationship with your short list

Chances are one or more of the platforms on your list have already reached out to you so check your deleted mail folder. If need be, fill out a request for information form or just call the main office line. Let the vendors know you're about to start a review and that you want to invite them to participate. Someone will reach out to you! If they don't, then that speaks volumes on what working with them is going to be like, so scratch them off your list. What you're looking for is one person to be your main liaison throughout the process.



Step #4 - Make sure the platforms are right for you (and you're right for them)

Tell your liaisons what you're trying to accomplish with a social advertising platform and make sure it's a good fit for both of you. For example, if you need international support and that's a showstopper, then let them know that in case they don't offer that. As well, you might be too small for them, and it's good to know that up front. It's okay to ask for base level pricing at this point just to get a feel for how much they charge. Be prepared to provide details about your social ad program so the sales reps can give you the right pricing – it's rarely one price for everyone.



Step #5 – Create your Evaluation Worksheet

Your Evaluation Worksheet (see later in this section for a generic one) is a scorecard for what you believe are the most important aspects of social advertising technology platforms. As you collect information about the providers, you will score them based on how well you feel they address each point based on your expectations. You can tweak this scorecard later to better reflect how each platform scores against each other so do your best at this point and don't feel locked in to your scoring system right now. You should also take notes on this worksheet that will help you in the final decision process.

The Evaluation Worksheet is not only important to keep track of everything during this long process, but also will be used in the final step when you sell the platform into your team and key stakeholders, i.e. "As you can see, this platform scored highest in these categories".



Step #6 – Send out your Request for Proposal (RFP)

RFP's don't have to be long and should be a reflection of the key criteria you identified in your Evaluation Worksheet. Just make sure you communicate all of the very important aspects that you need for your social advertising goals. You also may need to vet out companies you're might be working with in case there are conflicts (such as the platform is owned by one of your competitors). You may also have specific requirements that you know have been concerns in the past (i.e. the strict guidelines around pharmaceutical marketing) and want to make sure the platform can address these issues before you move forward.

Give the providers ample time to answer your RFP. Be clear about how you want the RFP answered because companies labor over the wording of every sentence. If you're fine with short answers, then please let them know that.

Action Plan for the Evaluation Process

Approximate time: 3-6 weeks depending on the complexity of your social advertising needs



Step #7 – Review the RFPs and narrow down your choices to 2 or 3 max

You're going to be spending some time with these companies so you can only manage this process well with a few providers at a time. Be professional and let the providers who you aren't moving forward with know that they've been eliminated from the process. It's always advisable to keep bridges open as you never know if your needs will change or if reps will move from one company to another.



Step #8 – The Demo

The biggest mistake many marketers make when evaluating technology is to not have an agenda for the demo (see later in this section for a generic demo agenda template). Come prepared to see what you need to see in order to move to the next stage in the process. It should be a good mix of letting them take you through their standard demo (they've done this a thousand times) with you asking questions throughout. Feel free to stop the demo at any time and ask follow-up questions for clarification.

Note – Make sure the team that is going to be touching this platform every day is able to sit in on the demo. You need their input.



Step #9 – The final Evaluation Worksheet

Throughout this process, you've been scoring each company based on your expectations of social advertising technology. Now that you've vetted your final group, you can go back through and change your scoring in relation to each other. So, if a platform received a 7 (out of 10) on something and after seeing the field you know they deserve a 9, then you should make that change.

Based on your final scoring, you should have a clear winner. The hardest part is the intangibles and how much you should weight them. There's no right answer here. You will have to weight them according to your own experience and trust your process was thorough. Pricing is generally one of the biggest influencers at this step. Remember to look for value, not just price.

If you are split between two providers, it's perfectly fine to do a few more rounds of meetings and even another demo. Do not rush this decision.



Step #10 – Make your decision and sell it in to the team

Congratulations! You've made your decision. Thank the providers that you didn't pick for their time. Set a meeting with your team and key stakeholders and go through your evaluation process and scoring so they can see why you made the decision that you did.

This will also be a good time to set solid expectations on what your new partner should bring to the equation. If you chose a platform because of its incredible optimization technology, then make sure your team knows it can push hard on that aspect of the platform.

The Evaluation Worksheet

Using the accompanying worksheet, you will be able to score each vendor based on the five key components of social advertising technology platforms. As you score each platform, you will eventually get a final vendor score which will help you with your final decision.

Choose your evaluation criteria

We have provided some of the common evaluation criteria as a starting point but you should go through and determine the most important features and functionality for your social ad program. Feel free to remove or add categories and sections.

Determine your rating system

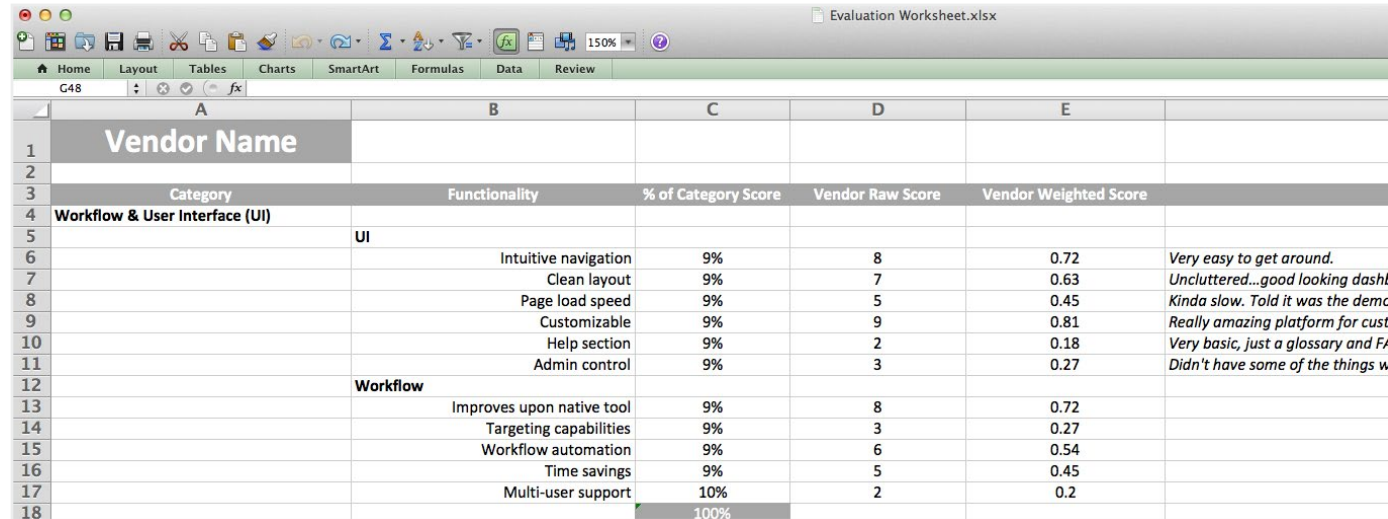
Here's a standard 10 point scoring system:

- 10** Absolute leader in this category
- 8 - 9** Strong player
- 6 - 7** Fair but could do better
- 4 - 5** Some capability here but not any strength
- 2 - 3** Very concerning
- 0 - 1** Complete lack of functionality

Once again, this is a starting point. You can simplify this rating down to a 3 or 5 point system or even increase it up to 0-100% percentages for each.

Define your scoring system

Not every category or functionality should have equal weighting in your final decision. Go through and set weighting by section and then again by category.



	A	B	C	D	E	
1	Vendor Name					
2						
3	Category	Functionality	% of Category Score	Vendor Raw Score	Vendor Weighted Score	
4	Workflow & User Interface (UI)					
5		UI				
6		Intuitive navigation	9%	8	0.72	Very easy to get around.
7		Clean layout	9%	7	0.63	Uncluttered...good looking dashb
8		Page load speed	9%	5	0.45	Kinda slow. Told it was the demo
9		Customizable	9%	9	0.81	Really amazing platform for cust
10		Help section	9%	2	0.18	Very basic, just a glossary and Fa
11		Admin control	9%	3	0.27	Didn't have some of the things w
12		Workflow				
13		Improves upon native tool	9%	8	0.72	
14		Targeting capabilities	9%	3	0.27	
15		Workflow automation	9%	6	0.54	
16		Time savings	9%	5	0.45	
17		Multi-user support	10%	2	0.2	
18			100%			

Evaluate the platforms

Via your RFP, demo, reference calls, and other processes, you will be able to score each category accordingly. As you go through the process, you will become more educated on how to score each provider so it's okay to go back and change your scoring. For example, you may rank a provider low for a category in the beginning of your evaluation process but then realize after seeing all of the vendors that they are actually doing better (or worse) than you originally thought. It's okay to go back and modify the score, but make sure of your decision before you make any change.

There's a notes field provided for you to keep track of anything you want to remember later. This can be very helpful as the evaluation process may span weeks or even months. The better notes you take, the easier your final review will be.

Final scoring

Just because one provider has a higher score than the rest, the final decision is still up to you. You may end up going with the second provider on the list for business reasons that far outweigh the actual the scoring calculations. This evaluation worksheet is only meant to be a helpful tool during the process and feel free to use it as such.

How to Get the Most Out of Demos

What you learn during the demo session will probably be the most important inputs to your overall vendor evaluation scoring. You could simply sit back and let the platform provider to take you through their usual pitch but, if you focus on a few of the following things, you can get the most out of your session.

Setup

Make sure you schedule ample time to go through the demo. If this is just a preliminary session, you may be able to get an overview but, generally, you will want at least an hour when you are doing your deep dive. Because you will only be doing demos with your short list of platform candidates, do not feel that you might be wasting a provider's time – the demo is their best chance to sell to you.

When it comes to scheduling, bring your team. You may not be able to invite everyone, but you definitely want to get input from the actual people who will be using the platform on a daily basis. If you have technology leads, bring them too as you may need their input or signoff later and they may find showstoppers about the rest of your technology that would be best to be surfaced now.

On the vendor side, it's a good idea to find out who will be attending to make sure they will be able to ask all of the questions you have. So, for example, if you are a gaming company and will be paying special attention to mobile capabilities, you should let them know that so they can bring the appropriate people to the demo.

Agenda

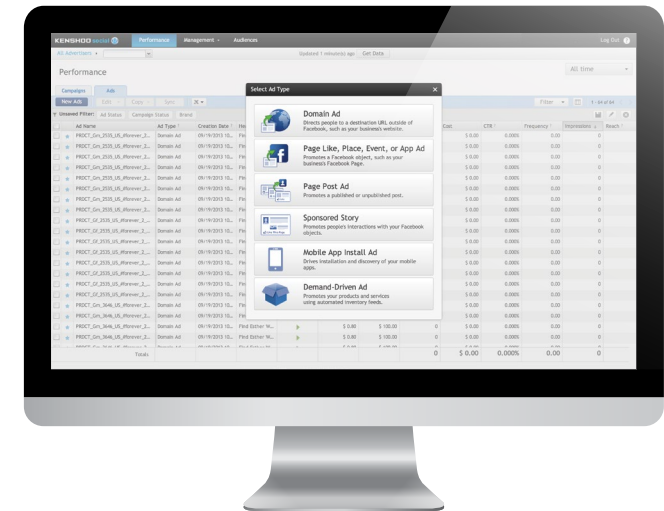
Most enterprise-level social ad platforms may take hours to go through in detail so it's important to set a solid agenda to see the most you can in the shortest amount of time. Platform providers have done a million demos so they'll have their flow and script ready to go. A good seller will reach out to you beforehand to check in and make sure to tailor the session based on the things they know you will be interested in seeing.

The session should start with a quick round of intros if the teams haven't all met each other yet. The evaluation team needs to know about the provider speakers so they can put into context the information they will be receiving. The same applies to your team as well. When one of your team asks a question, it will help provide the platform team the context they need to craft a useful answer.

Q&A

Many demos are often derailed when someone from the evaluation team attempts to dive very deep into the platform in order to understand how his or her most important issue is being addressed by the solution. It's okay to interrupt the demo speaker and ask clarifying questions, but it's best to instruct your team to write down their deep questions during the session and ask them either at the end or at stopping points throughout.

Sometimes it's even best to set up another time to dive into these types of complex inquiries so that you can continue the demo. You should coach your team about on this issue beforehand but, if you notice that one person is monopolizing the conversation, break in and request that you move on so that the demo time can best serve everyone's needs.



Test drive real scenarios

As you're taken through the demo, the best way to evaluate a social ad platform is to be taken through actual scenarios that are common to your team. For example, ask the vendor to take you through the campaign creation process for ad formats you typically use. Request to build a report on the fly so you can see how it works. This is the only way to really judge if a social ad platform will work for you.

Look for page and report load times. Ask about some of your current pet peeves at each step to see how the solution addresses them. Definitely try to push the envelope. The platform may work well for basic operations but it could have limitations that you can only discover using real scenarios.

How to Get the Most Out of Demos

What you learn during the demo session will probably be the most important inputs to your overall vendor evaluation scoring. You could simply sit back and let the platform provider to take you through their usual pitch but, if you focus on a few of the following things, you can get the most out of your session.

Show me – don't just tell me – your differentiators

At this point, you've heard their pitch and read their marketing materials. The demo is where you can see if the proof is in the pudding. Some solutions may oversell their capabilities and sound amazing but then fall short in reality. The demo is your time to test the bells and whistles the solution claims to be earthshattering – sometimes they will and sometimes they won't.

You will also want to use this time to double check that the key differentiators that have attracted you to this platform are actually in the platform. Some platform providers tout their features and benefits in their pitches but sometimes that functionality just doesn't make it to the UI. They may have back end processes and tools to be able to perform that function, which is fine, but it's good to know what's actually self-service in the UI before you make your final decision.

What's on the roadmap?

After you've seen the demo, it's a good idea to now talk through the roadmap as most of it will probably be improvements on the current platform versus brand new functionality. Some of these things may get surfaced throughout the demo but it's good to have a section just devoted to this so everyone on your team can get on the same page.

Although you should judge a platform just on its current capabilities, you should also take into account what might be launching in a few weeks or months. That might be the difference between choosing one platform over another. That being said, many marketers can get wrapped up in the pie-in-the-sky roadmap and end up scoring a platform a bit too high based on planned functionality that never gets added or is pushed back quarter after quarter.

The Bottom Line: Make sure you know everything that's not in the base pricing and package

Technology platforms are generally modular in design so that clients who only require core functionalities can pay the lowest price. Some of the bells and whistles you see in the demo may actually have their own, separate pricing. Make sure to ask the demo provider before you start to identify any functionality that is not included in the base pricing.

Questions to Ask During Reference Calls



Background

- ▶ When did you begin working with this provider?
- ▶ Was this your first third party social ad platform or did you transition from another provider?

Exploratory

- ▶ What were the main deciding factors on why you picked this platform? Have those factors met or exceeded your expectations?
- ▶ How long did it take you to onboard the platform and get your campaigns up and running?
- ▶ Now that you've been using it for a while, how would you rate the platform overall?
- ▶ Has performance on your social advertising program increased since using the platform?
- ▶ Has been the response time and service level been satisfactory?

Bottom Line

- ▶ What question do you wish you had asked (and what part of the demo should you have asked to see) before you signed up with this provider?
- ▶ On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the most likely, how likely would you be to recommend this platform to a colleague?

10 Quick Tips for a Successful Platform Evaluation Process



1. Be realistic on what's out there

You must begin the evaluation process knowing that there's not a single platform that can do 100% of what you want. A provider sometimes reaches 95% of your needs but don't expect anything higher than that. It's impossible and unrealistic. Evaluate the field against what's actually available, not your dream tool.

2. Follow your evaluation plan

Use the criteria you set at the beginning so you're not swayed during the process by the sales and marketing tactics of the various providers. Of course, the evaluation process will educate you on what's possible with social advertising platforms. You may realize midway through that your weighting needs to change, but only do this in extreme circumstances.

3. Keep the process a bit formal

It's a seller's job to build a relationship with you, but it's your job to stay objective and bring in the right platform for the job. Keep it formal and treat each of the providers equally. Also, watch what you say! Smart sellers will also try to use the evaluation process to educate themselves about their competitors, but it's bad form for you to give away any of this information.

4. Be as honest as you can

Sometimes you may feel that you shouldn't show your cards to technology sellers during the evaluation process but, unless it's trade secrets, you should open up. The better you're able to articulate your essentials, the better the providers will be able to show you how their platform matches up to your needs.

5. Ask for differentiators

There are more similarities between social ad platforms than differences. For you to be able to really compare platforms for your final decision, you'll need to know what sets them apart from the others.

6. Get your team's input

Everyone who's going to be spending significant time within the platform should have input into the decision. They don't all need to be in on every conversation, but make sure to include them at the key milestones such as during the demo.

7. Approach it as an educational experience too

You are going to learn a lot about social advertising and social advertising platforms by talking to technology providers for hours on end. Make sure you use the time wisely to educate yourself on the category. You may learn useful tidbits that can make you a better marketer.

8. Meet your account team

If possible, everyone on your team that will be using the tool should meet the platform team that will be working with you. This is not a mandatory step, but it will be valuable to see if there's immediately good chemistry or clearly not a fit.

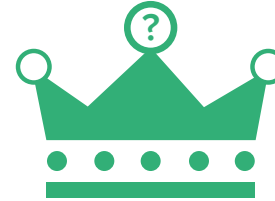
10 Quick Tips for a Successful Platform Evaluation Process

9. After the process is over, call your vendor rep and explain (in 5 minutes) why you didn't select them

This is just being a good partner. Many marketers either don't even communicate that they've gone a different direction. The platform provider may have put in many hours of work and possibly even out-of-pocket cash (travel expenses, etc.) during the evaluation process. Be a professional and let them know over the phone a few of the reasons why you didn't pick them. It's very valuable feedback and, as long as they've been a good partner throughout the process, then you owe it to them.

10. Stay on top of the vendor landscape between evaluations

If you're a social marketer, you should stay current on the trends and the ecosystem. When it comes time for you to do another evaluation, you should already be fairly well-versed on what's available and which providers you should consider.



The Golden Question for Evaluating Advertising Technology Providers

“What would your clients say are the three things they hate about your platform?”

Yes, it's kind of a toughie.

Poor sellers will balk at the question and “get back to you.”

Good sellers will be able to fire off seemingly benign answers and try to turn them into benefits such as “Well, we generate so much new business for our clients that they have trouble keeping up!”

However, the best sellers will be honest with you and tell you some of the challenges you may face. They don't want you to sign a contract and then become a problem because you're very frustrated over something that the platform can't do. This could lead to many man-hours lost in back and forth communication or even a cancelation of the contract. The best sellers know this and their goal is to make great partnerships, not headaches for all involved.

Independent Research - Excerpt From The Forrester Wave™: Social Advertising Platforms, Q4 2013

In its report, Forrester researched, analyzed, and scored 7 companies against 45 criteria to evaluate proprietary platforms for managing paid social media. The companies chosen were from a large pool of social advertising technologies with the initial cut based on the following criteria:

- ▶ The vendor has a standalone social advertising platform and is capable of placing ads on Facebook.
- ▶ Over 50% of the vendor's user base uses its self-service platform.
- ▶ Marketers have spent over \$50M on social advertising in the last 12 months via the platform.
- ▶ The vendor has at least 80 named customers, with at least half of those over \$1B in revenue.

Go to www.Kenshoo.com/ForresterSocialWave to download the entire report.

Here is an excerpt from “The Forrester Wave™: Social Advertising Platforms, Q4 2013” authored by Forrester analyst Zachary Reiss-Davis with David Truog and Sara Takvorian.

KENSHOO LAPS THE PACK IN CURRENT OFFERING AND LEADS IN STRATEGY

Kenshoo, the sole Leader in our study, is the surest option for a mainstream marketer looking to invest in social advertising. Even though it has one of the smallest user bases, both in terms of number of customers and social advertising dollars spent through the platform, its customers were extremely satisfied with it, giving it an impressive 5 out of 5 points on all eight customer-satisfaction questions. Customers especially praised its analytics, reporting, and optimization capabilities as well as its ability to combine search and social advertising data. Kenshoo has aggressively expanded its partnerships and integrations for tools it has not built itself, including partnering with Shoutlet, Spreadfast, and Tigerlily for social relationship and listening and with a wide range of marketing automation and CRM vendors. As of now, only its Facebook ads are fully self-service, and it requires managedservices to run ads on Twitter or LinkedIn.



FORRESTER WAVE™:
Social Ad Platforms, Q4 '13

Marketer's Perspective



João Gonçalves, Marketing Director
Schibsted Classified Media, bomnegocio.com



When it came time for our team to review social advertising technology platforms, there were 4 keys pieces if functionality that we were looking for in a partner.

1 - Bulk creation and bulk editing tools to enlarge the scope of our testing, improving performance in a very practical way

By allowing to bulk-edit and bulk-create ads, we wanted a platform that offered great tools to help any marketer in his or her day-to-day work. This way, we'd have a simple way to perform several A/B tests and could more quickly achieve a desired level of optimization.

2 - Ability to manage a large volume of campaigns, making it easy to manage big social advertising accounts

Having the ability to manage a large volume of campaigns without having performance problems in the platform does make the difference on your day-to-day life, particularly if you work at/for a big advertiser. This capability is just as relevant by itself, as it allows you to refine your targeting accuracy in a way which would be impossible if solely human-based.

3 - Best-in-class dashboards and straightforward KPI definitions, allowing us to focus on what really matters to our business at a managerial level

In any corporation there are several levels of analysis and details. We needed an easy way to define custom metrics and dashboards so the relevant information could be accessible to different levels of decision making in our organization.

4 - Great bid policies and automated tools reduce the human work to the relevant tasks on a day-to-day basis

This is the end-result we were looking for -- the ability to optimize large campaigns with a quality standard, which will optimize and leverage the potential return on your marketing investment. Normally, advertisers have a trade-off between human resources dedicated to social marketing and accurate optimization. We wanted to have less human time dedicated to maintenance activities and accurate optimization of our spend.

The key to finding the right social advertising technology partner is to determine up front what is most important to you and your business. This way, you have clear goals during the evaluation, making the process run much smoother.



Closing Thoughts

Nate Luman

*Director of Strategic Services,
Kenshoo Social*



Thank you for taking the time to read our guide. We trust that you found it valuable and hope you're able to put it to practice. I have some closing thoughts to leave you with:

I'm sure you've heard all the pitches. "Create and upload thousands of ad variations in seconds," they enthusiastically pitch. "Our algos are the best in the business." Not too long ago I was you. While building and leading Zappos' social advertising program, much of my time was spent ensuring that we were utilizing the best technology available. That meant constantly talking with prospective vendors about their unique and revolutionary tools. It was a great experience and I actually miss it a little. There are some incredible companies out there innovating in our space and you can learn a lot from them.

But with hundreds of agencies and platforms out there, how do you identify the one that best fits your needs? Facebook has graciously done most of the research for you and has narrowed your choices to fourteen strategic Preferred Marketing Developers that stand out from the rest. Start there. Each one brings a unique perspective to the game. Some came from display. Some from search. Some are purely focused on social. Some offer social as a product of a suite of tools for marketers. Find one that speaks your language and is focused on what you care about most. If you are a performance marketer, find the ones with measurement, results, and direct response in their DNA.

Unfortunately it is too common to be pitched on vaporware. "Can your platform do this or that?" "Of course it can." There's no way of knowing exactly what the tool offers unless you're able to get under the hood. What features are most important to you? How do you currently manage your workflow? Ask them to demo your workflow on their platform. Maybe you're looking for a platform and strategic direction. Platforms aren't all built with the same methods and workflow in mind. Do you have a well-thought-out method that a platform would need to

adapt to or are you willing to change your workflow to adapt to the platform's way of doing things?

When you select a platform, you're not merely licensing software or hiring an agency, you're investing in a company. That company needs to be visionary and innovative. Check out Facebook's regular innovation competition results to see which PMDs are consistently pushing the boundaries. Does the company hold regular hackathons? You might like the product you see right now, but who's going to determine what it is going to look like in six months or a year? Since I was licensing technology, I wanted to invest in a company built on product development and research. Either before or during a sales pitch, I would visit the company's job board and see if they were hiring more sales or engineers. You're selecting technology. Don't get caught up on bells and whistles and a fancy pitch.

Take advantage of a product demo to learn as much as you can. Why are some PMDs building similar technology? Maybe they're responding to market needs that you aren't yet familiar with. PMDs that use their own tools or have large, thought-leading clients will evolve their product to adapt to those clients' needs. Watch how the sales rep walks you through the platform and demonstrates workflow. It may be a more effective way than you are currently employing.

So get out there and start doing it. Make a list of features you need in a platform. Talk with vendors. Learn from the industry. Within this guide you'll find all you need to consider when choosing a social ad management platform.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nate Luman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a stylized 'N' and 'L'.