

sproutsocial

Social Media Management Buyer's Guide

**Choosing the right platform
for maximum impact**

Executive summary

Today, if you aren't investing in social media, you're falling behind. Most companies have only scratched the surface of what social can do to drive revenue. To build and maintain a successful brand, you must understand, leverage and, in many ways, start with social. Insights from social provide a direct line to your customers that will help you rise above your competition and ensure the long-term health of your business.

Navigating all that social can offer can be overwhelming, but the right social media management platform can unlock the power of what social can do for your business. With the innovations brought about by AI, businesses can leverage automated analysis and content generation to streamline their social efforts—ensuring teams spend time on the most important work and the most refined strategies. Selecting the right platform is the key to solidifying the connection between social and your company's goals.

We built this guide to provide expert guidance on how to conduct a social media management platform evaluation that prioritizes ROI, efficiency and the needs that matter most to your business.



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What is a social media management platform?

At its core, a social media management platform is software designed to manage a company's social media profiles across multiple networks in one centralized place. As social has evolved, these platforms have matured past this core function to deliver so much more.

A sophisticated platform empowers you to:

Establish operational efficiencies by automating manual tasks, enabling your team to prioritize their most important work and make time for creativity and innovation

Understand your customers at every stage of their journey, so you can provide a personalized customer experience that exceeds expectations

Guide your company with an organization-wide strategic vision fueled by data-driven, AI-powered insights at your fingertips

Gain valuable market intelligence that propels you to lead in your industry and deliver meaningful revenue for your business

How to start harnessing social to future-proof your business

Advanced social media management unlocks company-wide insights that transform the way you do business. It's imperative to empower your team with the right tools to meet your marketing and communications goals, and to expand the value of social beyond those teams.

When you're up against tight budgets and looming uncertainty, investing in social prevents your competitors from swooping in and gaining an advantage. It's the key to future-proofing your business and coming out ahead. The right social media management platform should be powerful enough to handle all your unique use cases and intuitive enough for your team to adopt and uncover insights.

Social data is a source of truth that will help your company refine product development, strengthen your employer brand and recruit top talent, and directly drive revenue gains—essential steps toward growing your bottom line. Used correctly, social insights make it easy to prove organization-wide value, facilitate cross-collaboration and ensure customer care, HR and R&D buy-in on your initiatives.

78%
85%

78% of marketers in leadership positions and 85% of executives say that it's clear how social impacts their bottom line (The Sprout Social Index™)

Investing in a social media management platform gives your entire company the tools to propel your business forward and is table stakes for brands who want to grow or maintain brand relevance. Simply put, if you want to rise to the top of your industry, you can't afford not to invest in social.

The impact of social media management across every part of your organization

When social teams are equipped with the right solutions, they can bring more value to not only the marketing organization, but their entire company. According to The 2023 State of Social Media Report, 95% of business leaders agree companies must rely more heavily on social media data to inform business decisions outside of marketing, but 69% admit social media data and insights are currently underutilized. Social media management platforms enable teams to measure, scale and expand the scope of their work, offering quick access to information that can shape product development, sales and expansion decisions.

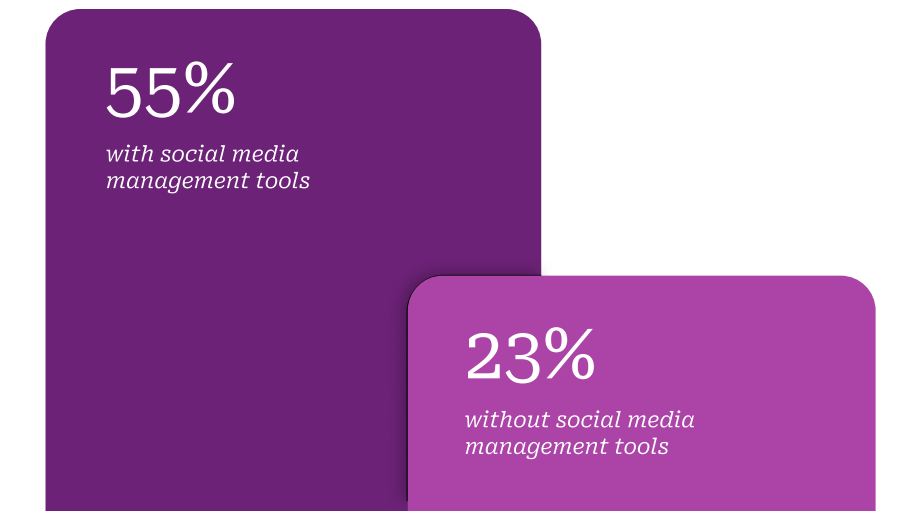
95%

69%

95% of business leaders agree companies must rely more heavily on social media data to inform business decisions outside of marketing. 69% admit social data is underutilized.

Having the right platform is also essential to proving social's impact on the bottom line. Today, 90% of all social marketers indicate that social media efforts significantly or somewhat contribute to revenue. **But without a social media management tool, drawing a throughline from social to revenue is more challenging.** Almost twice as many social media marketers who use a dedicated social media management platform say their brand's social media efforts contribute significantly to revenue compared to those without, according to The Social Media Productivity Report.

Social media marketers who say their brand's social efforts contribute to revenue

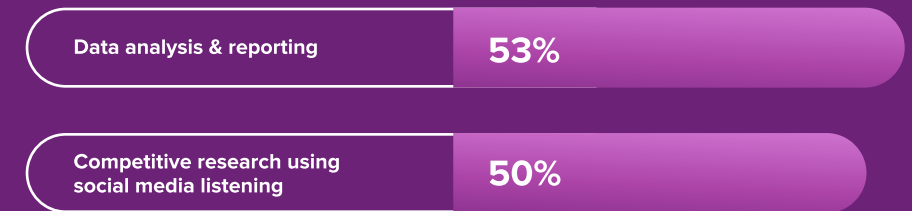


Though 70% of social media marketers use a social media management platform, there is a disconnect between how much leaders think their teams use these tools and how much they actually are.

If your team has only scratched the surface of social's potential, it's because having a platform alone isn't enough. The technology has to work with and for your entire organization—not just marketing.

For example, when AI tools are too difficult to use or train (rather than embedded in the platform), it negatively impacts your team's adoption rate. But when AI is seamlessly integrated into teams' workflows, they're empowered to make it a part of their day-to-day.

Tasks social teams perform without social media management tools or with a hybrid approach



If you want social insights to have an organization-wide impact, investing in a data-driven social media management platform is the best place to start. Your platform will help you promote stronger internal visibility and cross-collaboration between social and other departments, making your team the linchpin for making key business decisions.

Here are a few ways the right social media management platform can help you use insights to drive results:

- Scale the process of high-volume data ingestion and analysis with AI-driven technology, making it easier to find the most important insights
- Integrate social data into KPI dashboards to show a holistic view of business results
- Gather consumer feedback to present R&D with timely, authentic insights to inform product decisions
- Empower your care team with the right context on the customer by layering social insights on customer profiles
- Distribute key competitive insights to help your sales team combat marketplace FUD



Why social media management platforms are a critical source of business intelligence

Social media is home to trillions of customer insights that go largely unused by brands. On social right now, your customers are having conversations about your company—both what they love and what they want you to change. There are also conversations taking place about your competitors, trending topics and what's next in your industry.

Without a sophisticated platform, the process of accessing, contextualizing and sharing social data is complex. Native platforms collect different metrics, which means your team has to take on the tedious responsibility of manually pulling data, making sense of it and creating presentation-ready reports. If you want to compare your engagement data to other metrics like customer care response rate or brand sentiment, the process becomes even more complicated and time-consuming.

A social media management platform unifies your social presences and your existing tech stack—streamlining data from many different sources and making it easily shareable. This saves your team time, while preventing the data from being siloed in the marketing team. Enabling different teams to leverage social data prevents unnecessary costs.

For example, rather than investing in expensive focus groups, your product development team can tap into unfiltered social insights to learn how consumers are reacting to your products, what they think about your competitors and use social to inform their future strategy. Armed with insights from social, your team will be empowered to identify industry gaps and leverage opportunities to differentiate your business.



Why enriching your customer experiences starts with social media management

Today, building a customer-centric business begins on social. Social is where consumers go to discover new brands and products, talk to experts on your team, make purchases, seek out customer support and share feedback about your brand.

By using a central platform, you can provide an unforgettable customer experience and build lasting customer relationships—never missing a message or brand mention and providing the right support every step of the way.

For example, when someone talks about your brand on social (even if you aren't tagged or @mentioned), using a social media management platform will help your team respond in a timely manner, easily access past exchanges with that customer to provide a personalized response and connect them with a customer care rep if necessary.

Customer exchanges like this uncover valuable data about customer needs and pain points. A social media management platform will transform these conversations into insights that will help you improve your customer care operations, iterate on product design and increase loyalty and evangelism.



How social media management platforms impact revenue gains

Social media is ever-present in the sales funnel. From generating awareness through organic campaigns to supporting transactions with social commerce, social plays a key role in acquiring and holding onto customers.

According to the Index, sales strategy is the number one use case for social data. That's because social media helps you better understand what your buyers want and need. With their feedback on hand, you can improve and optimize every part of your sales strategy—from social selling to your website to your customer outreach.

You must ensure the social media management platform you choose delivers a wide breadth of actionable insights that fully harness the potential of social data, or you risk missing opportunities to grow your revenue.



What to know before investing in a social media management platform

All social media management platforms are not created equal. While they all work off the same APIs and face the same social network limitations, it's really **how** they build their platforms that matters most to your business. Platforms should be elegantly designed to drive adoption across a robust team, built to move at the speed of social and provide access to key insights that your whole organization can leverage. Your platform of choice should prioritize innovation without renovation and clunky re-training that costs your business time and money. Here's everything you need to know before making an investment.

6 essential steps to evaluate social media management platforms

- 01 Audit** your team's current workflows, use of social data and the needs of other teams across your organization. For example, is your team using social to perform customer care? Where does your social data live, and is it usable? Where is your team using AI now? Where should they be using it more? Which internal teams should be using your platform?
- 02 Research** platform options to create your short list. Use your audit findings to determine your needs—including the metrics you want to drive, how you want to level up your team's operations, your compliance needs and which teams should use the platform. Start building the case to secure budget and buy-in for your platform of choice.
- 03 Experience** the tools to test ease of adoption and customer support through both demos and trials. This allows your team to test drive the platform and have ample time with their "hands on the keyboard." Ask your team for feedback, including how compatible the platform is with your existing tech stack, how much time it helps them save and how well it serves their workflows. Do they need to reach out to support to use the AI capabilities? Is extensive training required to get up-and-running in the platform?
- 04 Inquire** about what kind of support and partnership your team will receive to drive your business outcomes. Examples of support including ongoing strategic education, regular performance discussions and access to a community of your peers.
- 05 Seek** clarity about the platform's long-term investment and vision. Make sure the vendor can support your social strategy for the long haul. Keep reading for the exact questions you should ask when evaluating a platform to ensure full transparency.
- 06 Analyze** the complete ROI of using the platform, including the cost reduction benefits and the productivity gains your team will make. Use these metrics to finalize your internal pitch and business case.



An overview of the social media management competitive landscape

There are hundreds of social media management platforms today, but most lack the roadmap and commitment to service necessary to meet a business' long-term needs. Mergers and acquisitions have led to disparate offerings being haphazardly pieced together, resulting in a difficult user experience for large, sophisticated teams. The businesses often prioritize cost efficiency and short-term investment over customer service and innovation, leaving customers in the dark.

Maximize your investment in social media management by choosing a platform that supports its customers, has a robust platform built for the long-run and consistently invests in R&D. Your platform of choice should be a true product-led company.



Questions to ask while evaluating social media management platforms

Here are the essential questions to ask during platform evaluations to ensure you select the right social media management platform for your organization. The purpose of these questions is to help you paint a clear picture of what a long-term partnership with the prospective vendor will look like—and identify any red flags before investing time and money in a new product.

Strategic vision and roadmap

Understanding the depth of the platform's product innovations and their approach to social network and partner integrations will help you see which vendors are a long-term fit. It's important to select a platform that will grow and evolve with you.

How does your product stay ahead of network-specific trends?

How do you approach new network or partner integrations?

How is customer feedback integrated into your product roadmap?

What AI and automation capabilities do you offer? How do they minimize manual effort and scale business-critical tasks (like surfacing data-driven insights and improving customer care)?

How time-intensive is your AI model to train? How much effort will it require from our team?

Where do you see social going in the next 6-12 months and how will your product evolve accordingly?

Customer support

Investigate the specifics of the platform's customer support offerings. When you run into a roadblock, will you connect with a person with platform experience, or does the vendor outsource customer support? Feel confident that your platform of choice will have your team's back.

Are your customer support team members social experts?

Can your support team advise beyond tactical questions?

What other customer care avenues do you offer your customers?

How does your team foster community with other social media experts?

What additional resources and training opportunities will you provide?

Product adoption and cross-team collaboration

Knowing the scalability of the platform is critical to understanding if it's a fit for your team and timeline. Most brands need to be up and running as soon as possible, with little to no downtime.

What is your speed to value? How many months will it take to see payback?

How much training is required to get my team comfortable with and using your product?

How will your product fit into my broader tech stack?

Does your product enable my team to share results outside the platform or with non-platform users?

Security and compliance

Frequent service interruptions and poor user experience are not always revealed in the sales process. Consider how factors like frequent downtime and slow updates will impact your overall investment. You also need to make sure your sensitive company and customer information is kept safe and secure.

How much downtime should we expect when you update your platform?

Will my company's information and customer data be secure in your platform?

How will you help me protect my social log-ins and access?

Does your platform use SSO? What security certifications do you have?

Actionable insights and analytics

It's one thing to gather social data, but contextualizing data and providing actionable insights is what sets leading platforms apart. You need to be able to use the data you source, and share it with your entire organization.

How will you help me prove the value of social to my senior leadership team?

How will your platform help my team go beyond tactical work, so they can focus on their strategic plans?

How will your platform help me get ahead of a crisis?

How will you help me better understand my competitive landscape and industry?

Organizational impact and proving ROI

You want to choose a partner that can help you clearly communicate the impact of your social performance across your organization. If they can't, it's not a good fit.

How will you help my social and marketing teams demonstrate their revenue impact?

How will the social data you provide help me inform my company's big-picture strategy?

What can I learn from your platform that will enable me to make better investments?

How does AI play a role in your platform's sentiment analysis and reporting capabilities?

How does your platform demonstrate a clear impact on my company's bottom line?

Workflow optimization and efficiency

Nearly half (48%) of social media marketers feel they sometimes or rarely have enough time to get their work done, per The Social Media Productivity Report. You need a partner who is committed to making your team's workflow smoother and more efficient.

How do your integrations and tools support smoother workflows across teams?

How do your AI capabilities fit into our team's everyday workflows? What time-savings should our brand expect?

Can you handle customer care needs directly from your platform? If so, what other customer data is available in-platform when responding to customers?

How long does it take for practitioners to surface business-critical social listening data and insights? Where does AI play a role in this process?



Approach your decision with confidence

We get it. Investing in the right social media management platform is non-negotiable for you and your company.

With this guide on-hand, approach your platform evaluation with confidence, knowing you have the tools to select the social media management platform that delivers the value you need and has the power to transform every area of your organization. A platform like Sprout Social.





Why choose Sprout Social?

See social differently

At Sprout, we know the importance of selecting a social media management platform, because social is in our DNA. Founded in 2010, we've evolved with social and are trusted by 34,000 brands to power their social programs. Our expertise is grounded in our laser-focus on the current state of social and what's coming next.



We are committed to building for the long-run and investing in our products. Over the past two years we:

- Launched our TikTok and Threads integrations to ensure our customers have access to these growing networks
- Announced a global partnership with Salesforce that allows our customers to have a true 360 view of their customers—no matter the channel
- Acquired Repustate, an innovative sentiment analysis and natural language processing company, to help our customers automate their work as much as possible
- Acquired Tagger Media, a leading influencer marketing and social intelligence platform, to help marketers execute holistic social strategies at scale

Thanks to our customers and their timely, authentic reviews, we were recognized by G2's Best of Software Awards for the eighth consecutive year, and named best software product.



“Successful businesses are integrating social media into every corner of their organizations for unparalleled access to their customers, business intelligence and mission-critical insights.

Sprout Social enables world-leading brands to capitalize on the full potential of social while also preparing them for what's next, from advancements in AI to vital shifts in consumer behavior.”

Ryan Barretto

President (incoming CEO) of Sprout Social



Your partner in unlocking the full value of social

Our elegant platform is designed to help you connect social across your business so you can drive meaningful impact. We're your unparalleled social experts—staying ahead of the social industry so you don't have to.

We provide you with access to the value of our deep partnerships with leading technology organizations across the globe. By building hand-in-hand with our partners, Sprout provides customers with the most important channels, information and integrations to take their business strategy to the next level. Our relationships with every major social network and top SaaS products drive before-market access to new APIs and updates, which means customers benefit from first access to product enhancements.

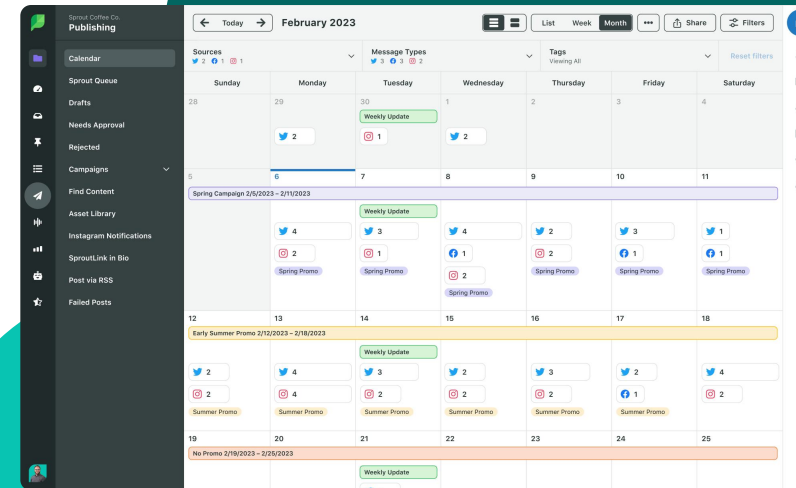
This shared vision between Sprout and its partners also ensures customers are armed with the critical business tools needed to build a cohesive and efficient tech stack. We move at the speed of social, so that you can too.



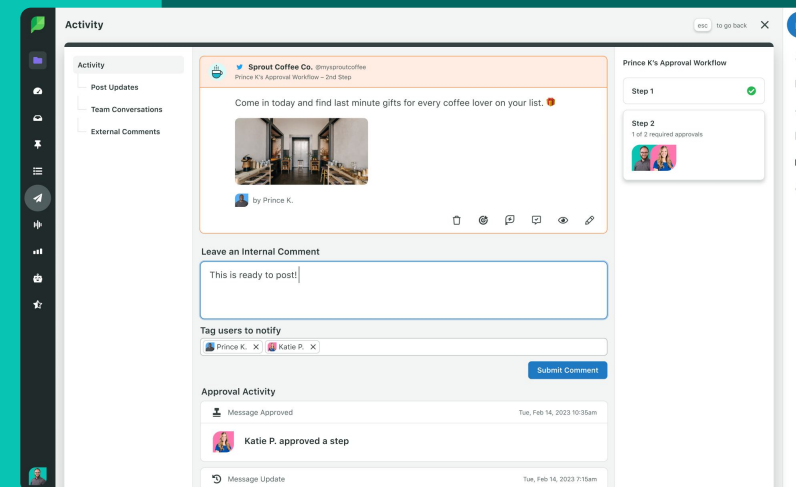
Boost efficiency with one intuitive, central platform

Marketing teams today rely on a varied ecosystem of tools to execute their work: CRMs, social media, customer service, e-commerce, design, web analytics and more. While these tools are essential, switching between multiple platforms and tools causes information silos between teams that lead to inefficiencies.

Sprout's platform connects multiple data sources and business tools to increase and scale efficiency. We take it further than workflow management—we create cleaner collaboration across your team and enable automation that streamlines common processes so that your team can focus on industry-leading innovation. We're ready to grow with you as your social program evolves.



Sprout's Publishing Calendar enables you to plan your publishing strategy and maintain oversight from a central hub.



Message Approval Workflows help teams collaborate and confirm every important step with internal and external stakeholders.

Capture and deepen customer loyalty

Customer service on social media is a non-negotiable part of an omnichannel support strategy. Consumers tag and direct message brands to resolve their issues across platforms, and demand swift, helpful and personalized responses in return. According to Index data, more than three-quarters of consumers expect a response on social media within 24 hours.

The Sprout platform provides customer care capabilities that help you win and keep customers. For those working in-platform, Social Customer Care by Sprout Social transforms every care interaction into a competitive advantage. Our platform consolidates billions of social media messages across networks, integrations, geographies, languages and teams in mere seconds—powering faster, more effective support where and when customers need it most. For care teams working in the Salesforce ecosystem, we've built a best-in-class Service Cloud integration that helps your team personalize their messages with extra, comprehensive details about the customer that one-off messages can't provide.

Create new rule

Title (Required)

Description

Rule Type

All Received | Inbox Messages | Reviews | Published Posts

If a received inbox message or review

Has the sentiment(s)

Click to select sentiment(s)...

☐ Positive

☐ Neutral

☒ Negative

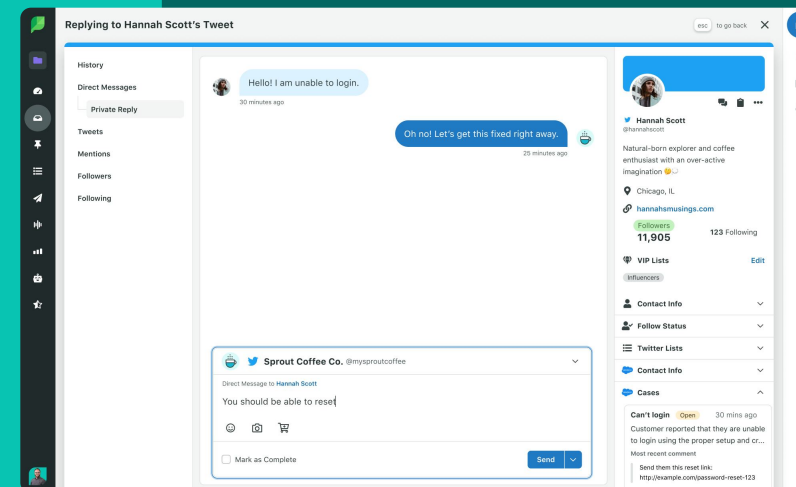
☐ Unclassified

Then take these actions

Select an action

Cancel Save

Sprout's AI and automation assigns priority status to incoming customer messages in the Smart Inbox so your team can stay focused, determine if a response is required and address messages in order of importance.

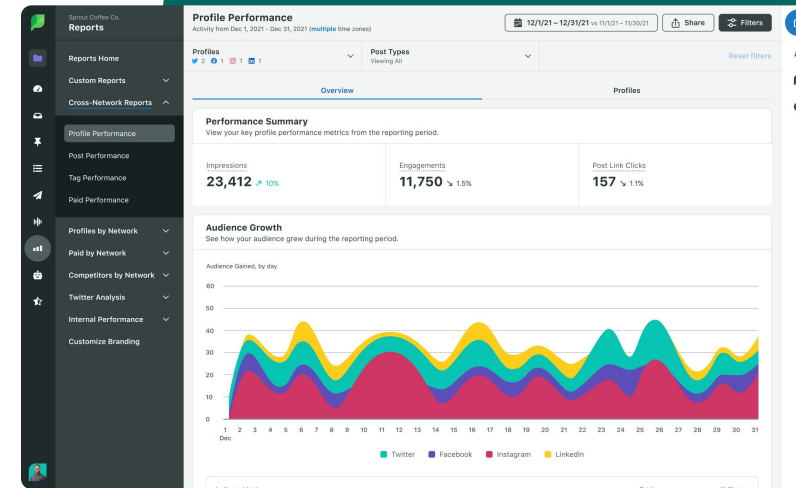


Using Contact Profile Views, you can see a customer's contact information, social media and message history, and Salesforce data to provide an informed response.

Harness social to drive revenue and business impact

Making sense of social data can be challenging. Without the intel you need, it's impossible to get buy-in from internal stakeholders, optimize social selling efforts and provide a seamless customer experience.

With Sprout's analytics reports, you can easily see how much value your team drives for the organization. The data provides proof points you need to guide your paid spending, optimize your social presence for increased conversions and sales, secure an increased social budget and plan for a stronger future. Sprout's integrations with other products like Tableau empower teams to see how social interacts with other business efforts, increase data integrity and meet the customer where they are.



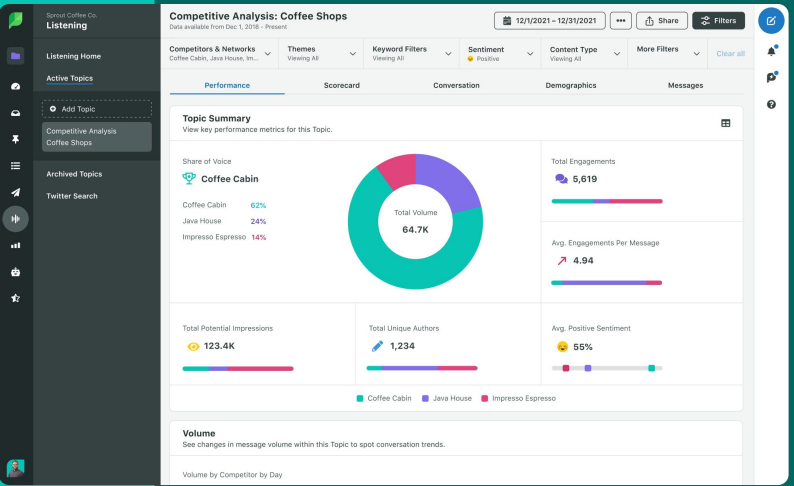
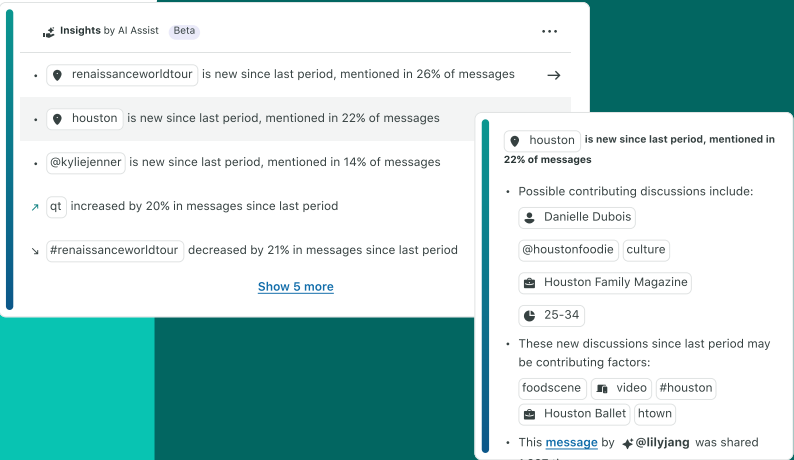
Presentation-ready reports aggregate your social analytics so you can keep a pulse on social performance and share company-wide.



Strengthen your market position with actionable insights

Today, reaching your target audience is more complex than ever. Conducting audience research, staying up-to-date on industry trends and determining effective targeting can be tedious and costly.

With our Listening solution and suite of competitor reports, we provide deep insights that help teams identify points of differentiation and ways to optimize campaigns, strategies and priorities. With constant access to these insights, your brand has a strong competitive advantage that keeps you ahead in the market.



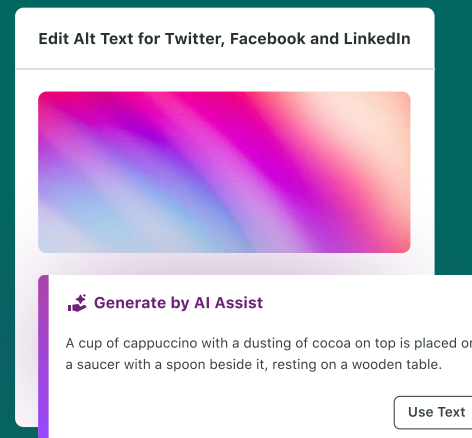
Sprout's AI-driven Listening solution synthesizes billions of data points to surface trends, patterns and sentiment that matter to your business. Queries by AI Assist generates keyword suggestions to make your Listening outputs more precise—providing even richer insights.

Get started quickly with Sprout's Listening templates and build side-by-side competitor comparisons, brand awareness topics and more.

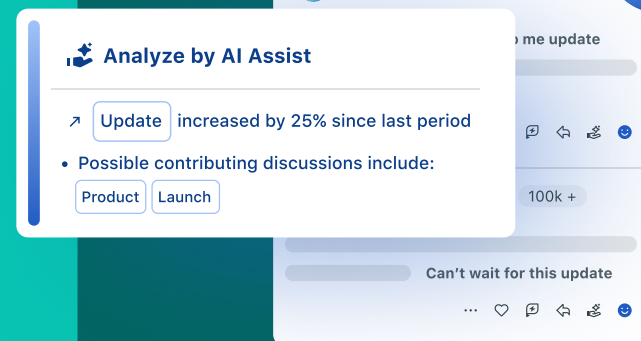
Let your team's creativity and strategic thinking take center stage

According to The Social Media Productivity Report, 63% of social media marketers agree manual tasks prevent them from doing high-impact work. Having a social media management tool with embedded AI capabilities helps teams expedite the AI learning curve, while eliminating unnecessary manual efforts, so they can get valuable time back.

Sprout's AI and automation spans across our platform, enabling teams to work smarter, unlock creativity and increase social media's business impact exponentially. Our platform alleviates repetitive, manual tasks, so that your teams can make better decisions, elevate customer interactions and accelerate productivity.



Find the right words in seconds with copy and alt text suggestions powered by AI Assist, Sprout's generative AI models built from deep learning technology.



Analyze by AI Assist uncovers significant metrics, hashtags, keywords, Smart Categories and emojis—saving you time and removing the guesswork out of finding meaningful insights.

The future of social media management

You want to build an industry-leading brand and offer your customers a world-class experience. To do that, your team needs a powerful social media management platform that will immediately maximize business impact. Use the knowledge, evaluation criteria and questions in this guide to make the right investment.

Need help evaluating the different options? **[Request a personalized demo](#)** to speak with a member of the Sprout Social team. We look forward to showing you how our platform's powerful data, flexible tools and intuitive user experience can help you connect with your audience at scale and gather critical insights that move your business forward.





Sprout Social is a global leader in social media management and analytics software. Sprout's unified platform puts powerful social data into the hands of more than 34,000 brands so they can make strategic decisions that drive business growth and innovation. With a full suite of social media management solutions, Sprout offers comprehensive publishing and engagement functionality, customer care, connected workflows and AI-powered business intelligence. Sprout's **award-winning** software operates across all major social media networks and digital platforms. For more information about Sprout Social (NASDAQ: SPT), visit sproutsocial.com.

Ready to get started? Request a demo