



***Think Out Loud* Online Outreach Overview**

As part of its marketing efforts, OPB hired a consultant for an intensive online outreach and community-building effort around *Think Out Loud*. Our objectives included increasing traffic to the *Think Out Loud* website, bringing new viewers and commenters to the site, and getting the word out about the program in the blogosphere.

OPB hired a blogger with extensive online and community organizing experience to work with the program for six weeks. She sat in on program editorial meetings, worked with show producers to get a feel for show topics, and then did online outreach to communities of interest for those programs. She used Twitter to alert people to upcoming programs, and notified other targeted blogs and sites with an interest in certain show topics. She added *Think Out Loud's* website to local aggregated newsfeeder websites. She also organized three “meet-ups” for staff to meet members of our audience. She also developed a database of contact information for future use.

As a result of her efforts, there was a steady overall increase in activity by a number of analytic measures:

Monthly Averages vs. Month of July and Month of August

| | Jan - August | July | August |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Page Views per Month | 16,933 | 15,810 | 20,822 |
| Visitors per Month | 7,705 | 7,470 | 9,581 |
| User Comments | 813 | 858 | 977 |
| New User Registrations | 568 | 430 | 555 |

The month of August (which was the project timeframe) showed increased page views and visitors to the site, compared to July and compared to the monthly averages from January (when the show launched) through August. User comments also increased. New user registrations for the month of August (registration is required to post comments) did not increase, though they were higher than the month of July.

Based on her work with *Think Out Loud*, the consultant made the following recommendations, as “best practices” for online outreach that is connected to a radio program:

Outreach and Involvement Planning

Based on this project and OPB goals, determine specific goals and metrics for *Think Out Loud* in the next 6-12 months. Determine which activities are pure marketing and which are more journalistic in nature to help gauge the division of labor between the *Think Out Loud* team and OPB’s Marketing department. Using this as a guide, develop a specific outreach plan to help prioritize ongoing and special activities and plan accordingly. This

should also include monthly analytics reporting that can be used for further planning, reporting and budgeting/funding.

Activities

Successful outreach and involvement requires consistency and ongoing activities. As standard practice, *Think Out Loud* (TOL) should:

- Identify online influencers and community connectors, with a special emphasis on hard to reach communities. **Online influencers** refers to those with a large online presence including bloggers and other online media and online community groups. **Community connectors** refers to individuals and groups that are entrenched and engaged with specific communities (such as the high tech community), and/or difficult to reach communities (such as minority or ethnic communities). Community connectors may or may not have a strong online presence.
- Outreach to online influencers through direct emails, comments on their blogs and websites, postings on listservs and online community bulletin boards around specific TOL shows that may be of interest to them.
- Encourage guests on TOL to post about the show on their websites, blogs and to inform their communities about the show through emails, their own social networking sites and professional listserves. This should be done for every guest (as appropriate).
- Continue to add and monitor the TOL webpage on news feeder sites.
- Continue to encourage listeners to engage in the show online: before, after and during the show.
- Consider adding some special content only available online. This has been very successful for other media outlets.
- Stay active on social networking sites, especially Twitter, to help further spread the word about the show.
- Conduct occasional in-person events focused around *Think Out Loud* such as small informal meet-ups and large "TOL Live" events. Promote these events on the TOL website and on other online outlets. Schedule these as far in advance as possible, preferably one month.
- TOL representatives should also attend events conducted by other groups - especially if these groups have a large presence online or are considered "influencers" in social media networking.
- Add TOL and TOL content (as appropriate) to Wikipedia, YouTube and Slideshare. These will assist in increased search optimization and social media optimization.
- Utilize existing contacts from the TOL database. Directly contact individuals through e-mail and phone calls to help spread the word about TOL and TOL shows, as appropriate.
- Scan of community groups, known members, community leaders etc. to get names and contact information. This is especially useful in hard to reach communities. Contact these groups and individuals directly by email and phone to help spread the word about specific shows.
- Traditional marketing methods through OPB – radio promotion, TV ads, print ads, etc.

- Consider either a rotating or a designated web-only host. This role is to help further encourage discussion on the TOL website before, during and after the show. This role would also include visiting and commenting on other sites and blogs around specific show topics. This is a content function, not a marketing function.
- Live blogging at TOL "live" events, with terminals to encourage audience members/participants to comment on the site while the show is live.
- Hands-on education about TOL and how to engage online. Many OPB listeners are not savvy about new media technologies. This might help address that issue.
- Online contest or incentives to encourage participation on the show.
- Consider occasionally adding guest bloggers on the website around specific topics as it will bring new audiences in. This has been extremely effective for some mainstream media outlets in increasing their online activity.
- Consider the idea of a group of "community connectors" who are monitored, but are allowed to post on the website and maintain a presence on the site in the sidebar. These can be "influencers" and connectors to difficult to reach communities. This group could be drawn from PIN and through traditional outreach methods. These community connectors will help attract and engage new and underrepresented communities to TOL, but should be trained.

Analytics

Analytics are important for gauging success and weak points, in budgeting and in reporting to funders. Analytics should be conducted on a regular basis and include a combination of methods including standard radio market share analytics, search engine optimization (SEO), social media optimization (SMO), web analytics and scans, surveys and focus groups. Best practices include:

- The right web analytic tools, set up in the correct manner, are very easy to run and generate statistically viable reports. OPB should install Google Analytics and another counter (such as StatCounter) on the TOL site and make sure that they allow for drill down analytics over time. Web analytics should be run monthly, quarterly and yearly.
- Web scans and other SMO analytics refers to looking at the TOL presence online. What other sites is TOL appearing on? Who is linking to TOL? How many referrals is this yielding? This includes Twitter and other social networking sites, on blogs and on websites. This could be done on a show-by-show basis, or monthly. This includes examining the TOL site using above analytic tools but also outside web scan tools such as Technorati and IceRocket.com.
- SEO analytics should be run on a regular basis. This can, and should, result in changing meta-tags for the show on the website, and in individual posts.