

Yammer:

What 'Good' Looks Like and How to Get There

How do you measure Yammer use and adoption? What does 'good' look like? These were key questions that originally triggered us to benchmark Yammer networks three years ago. We've now published our [fourth annual report](#), and that - combined with the research collaborations we have with several universities and our internal research - has enabled us to put together detailed guidance for what 'good' looks like, how to get there, and to provide you with examples of what our benchmark leaders have done.

Before we go deep, let's introduce the concept of Lagging and Leading indicators.

Lagging indicators help us understand past performance. In a hospital setting for example, the amount of time you have to wait for elective surgery is a lagging indicator. Lagging indicators like this one are easy to understand and communicate, and that makes them very attractive. In SWOOP, our primary lagging indicator for Yammer is the percentage of 'interactive' users, ie the proportion of people who have actively used Yammer by posting, replying or liking.

However, if you **only** use lagging indicators, you automatically put yourself in a position of disadvantage since you are measuring past performance and don't have any way of predicting if things are going to get better or worse. Therefore, if you want to actively drive change, you'll need to look at relevant leading indicators.

Leading indicators help us predict what future performance might look like, so if we want to actively drive change, we need to look at these. Using the hospital example, a leading indicator of waiting time is the number of trained surgeons. If you have fewer surgeons, it's only a matter of time before the waiting list starts to grow. In SWOOP, we've selected the following leading indicators from our global benchmarking metrics which we suggest, based on our research, are best suited to drive future impact:

- » **Response Rate** (if people don't get a response, they stop using Yammer)
- » **Curiosity Index** (questions get more replies)
- » **Mention Index** (when people are @ mentioned you get more replies)

Further below we take you through practical things you can do to improve all three, as well as examples of what our benchmarked leaders have done, but let's start with focusing on what numbers you should aim for.

Type	Indicator	Global Average	Strongest	Weakest	Target
Lagging	Percent interactive user	42%	98%	6%	50%
Leading	Response rate	46%	72%	1%	50%
	Curiosity index	14%	30.5%	3%	17%
	Mention index	6.6%	18.8%	0.6%	10%

Table 1 - Selected SWOOP 2019 Yammer Benchmark Report Metrics

The table above outlines what 'normal', 'best', 'weakest' means and what we suggest is a reasonable target. SWOOP includes all of the four indicators listed above, so if you are a SWOOP customer you can start comparing your own performance against these straight away. Having said that, you might have a special set of circumstances which means the suggested targets aren't right for you. For example, you may know the sponsorship required is still being built, and therefore a 40% interactive user target is more realistic.

Best practice and insights to start improving today

To uncover best practice, SWOOP has been interviewing our benchmark leaders, and we've undertaken additional research to determine what increases the level of active participation. Below we've handpicked insights and lessons learned that will help you address the leading indicators and get you off to a flying start.

RESPONSE RATE

How do you get to a place where at least 50% of messages are responded to? Best practice includes the use of community managers, active participation of senior leaders and being smart about how and what you write. Let's have a closer look at these.

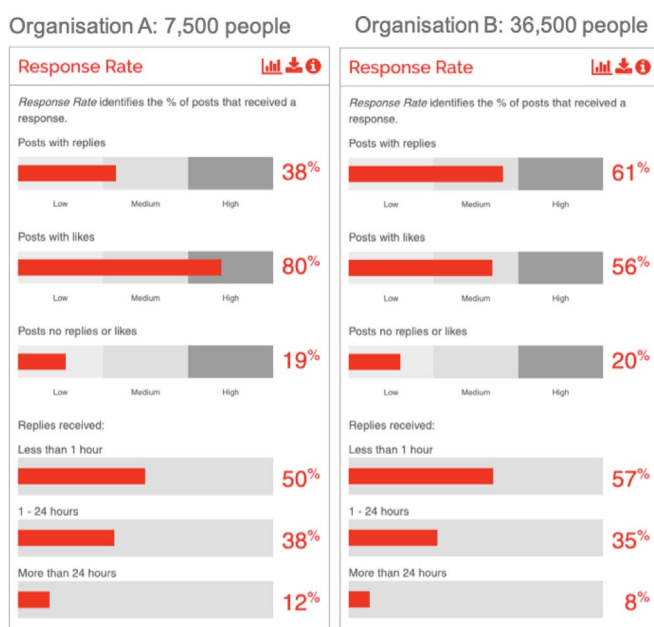


Figure 1

Community managers help set expectations and ensure posts are being answered, or the post is moved - or shared - into a more relevant group where required. Ensuring that content is relevant is also a typical responsibility for many community managers, and the point about relevancy is highlighted by KFC in the [benchmarking report](#). The amount of community management effort invested varies greatly, but nearly all high performers had at least one person performing either a part- or full-time role as a community manager. One of the 2019 award recipients employs four full-time community managers, but for others it's a part-time job.

The example in Figure 1 shows two organizations with very different response rates. Organization A is an example of 'broadcasting' where you can see that only 38% of posts get a reply. However, getting a 'like' is much more likely with 80% of posts receiving at least one. For Organization B, in contrast, 61% of posts get a reply and 56% get a 'like'. If your aim for Yammer is to be a platform for conversation, it is clear that organization B is significantly more successful than A. In this case it also happens that B has dedicated community managers whereas A does not.

Another characteristic of high performers is active participation by leadership. This not only endorses the use of Yammer, but also dramatically increases the usage of those who are being replied to (or liked) by senior leaders. Read <https://www.swoopanalytics.com/what-impact-do-leaders-have-on-collaboration-show-me-the-numbers/> for more detail.

For those looking to build the skills of senior leaders we have provided a set of practical tips that apply to senior leaders. It boils down to simple things that be done in just 5 minutes per day. Read the article here - <https://www.swoopanalytics.com/engagement-at-scale-what-senior-leaders-need-to-do>.

But beware. Advice from most of the community managers is not to allow internal communicators to write posts on behalf of leaders. "You can smell a corporate comms post from a mile away," says [ANZ Bank's](#) Social Business Development Manager, Ryan Crocker.

"It's always just too perfect and it doesn't come across as authentic."

When leaders genuinely share on Yammer, it also requires them to listen to their employees. "More important than posting, is listening. Leaders can only listen effectively if they do it themselves," Ryan said.

"Leaders need to listen and look at what people are talking about. If they don't take the time to listen first, it's kind of like rocking up to a party two hours late, walking up to a group of people talking about the latest Netflix drama and chiming in with a story about your cat's new pyjamas. That's not exactly engaging."

We've also researched how long, or short, you'll need to write to get the best response rate. In summary, don't write too short (less than 500 characters) or too long (more than 2000 characters). Read <https://www.swoopanalytics.com/less-is-not-always-more-with-enterprise-social/> for more detail.

Also related to the content side, our latest research into the impact of posting attachments shows that adding an image to a message can lead to 50% more replies and 40% more likes. Adding a video is even more impactful leading to 95% more replies and 82% more likes. See <https://www.swoopanalytics.com/do-photos-and-videos-spark-conversation-and-engagement-on-enterprise-social-networks/> for more detail.

Finally, there's also an important point about how Yammer is being positioned. Is it a 'megaphone' for anyone wanting to get a message out, or as platform for conversation, ie a 'hearing aid'? We suggest there is most business value to be gained from the latter. A very practical rule to get the balance right between talking and listening is the 1-2-3 rule: For every 1 post, make 2 replies and 3 likes. If you have proportionally fewer replies and/or likes, then you're more megaphone than heading aid.

To demonstrate what this looks like in real life we've provided two examples of senior leaders below.

Leader A is showing typical 'broadcasting' behaviors, ie is posting, but isn't replying. Also, Leader A is not clicking 'like' very often and that suggests the person is using Yammer as a megaphone and is missing the opportunity to create meaningful dialogue with staff.

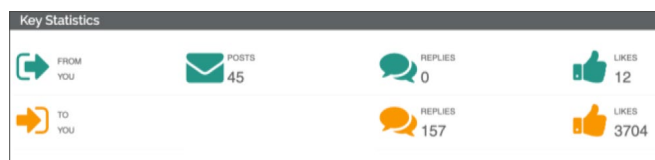


Figure 2 - Leader A

Leader B has a much better split between posting (69), replying (104) and liking (1023). This person is clearly using Yammer much more as a hearing aid. The high number of likes demonstrates to staff that the person is listening, as receiving a like sends a signal “I’ve heard you.”

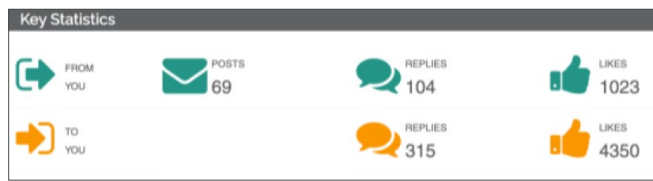


Figure 3 - Leader B

CURIOSITY INDEX

Asking questions has a very significant impact on the response rate. Our research has shown the average number of replies to messages with a question is 150% higher than those without a question. While the global average is 14% and recommended target is 17%, we also believe that goal could be increased to 20% for senior leaders. When senior leaders ask genuine questions, they are showing everyone they participate, and encourage others to participate too.

For instance, [ANZ bank CEO Shayne Elliott](#) asked in a sustainability group for ideas on what could be reused or recycled. Responses came flooding in and it became one of the most engaging posts.

Global publishing company Wiley found problem solving also starts with a question. An employee was posting about receiving a voicemail they needed to listen to from an editor. But the voicemail was in Korean and the recipient didn't speak Korean. “Can anyone help?” the employee asked on Yammer. Another employee, in another office, saw the post and while they couldn't speak Korean either, they knew someone who could. The Korean speaker was tagged into the post and replied they could translate the message. The problem was solved quickly, at no expense.

Both these examples are described in more detail in the benchmarking report, but what appears to work particularly well are questions that are relevant for the target audience and are framed in a way that makes it easy to answer.

In this blog post - <https://www.swoopanalytics.com/the-power-of-the/> - we outline more of our findings plus provide ideas for the type of questions you might consider asking.

MENTION INDEX

It turns out people are responding more when we engage them directly in a conversation. When we say; “Hey Mary, do you know how I get from A to B?” we get more replies compared with “What’s the best way of getting from A to B?” But what do you do if you don't know who to ask? The tip here is to @ mention someone who might know who to ask. So you could ask; “Hey Brian and James, could you possibly tag a couple of people who might know how I get from A to B?”.

Teaching people to write in a more engaging way using the Refer/Build/Engage methods also increases participation. The Refer/Build/Engage (RBE) method was developed by our partners in the Netherlands, [Orange Trail](#) and is used to train people in employee engagement and collaboration. Refer/Build/Engage refers to a way to structure a post for maximum engagement. According to co-founder [Phil Kropp](#) it goes like this when responding to a post:

(R) @jamestyer, thanks for sharing your insights about employee engagement. I'm really interested to hear the results of that research! **(B)** We also use the @ a lot to activate people or to show people something valuable on the platform. **(E)** @caikjaer, do we have anything we can share with them on this topic?

You can see how this method of writing draws in both the original poster as well as motivates the person who is @ mentioned to contribute. Read our blog post on the research we've done on the art of @ mentioning and the impact it has on your response rate here - <https://www.swoopanalytics.com/now-that-you-mention-it>

Australian state government agency [NSW Customer Service](#) ran a highly successful 'Thank You' initiative that saw colleagues acknowledging each other for a job well done, while @ mentioning them at the same time. This saw a dramatic increase in usage and tied in with the organization's focus on employee recognition. Read the full case-study from NSW Customer Service in the [benchmarking report](#).

Helping people change behaviors

The leading indicators and their respective goals can easily be replicated as goals for individuals. In SWOOP, every person can see how they perform on getting responses to their posts, asking questions and mentioning others. Creating awareness about your own practices is the first step to start improving, and without it you're really flying blind.

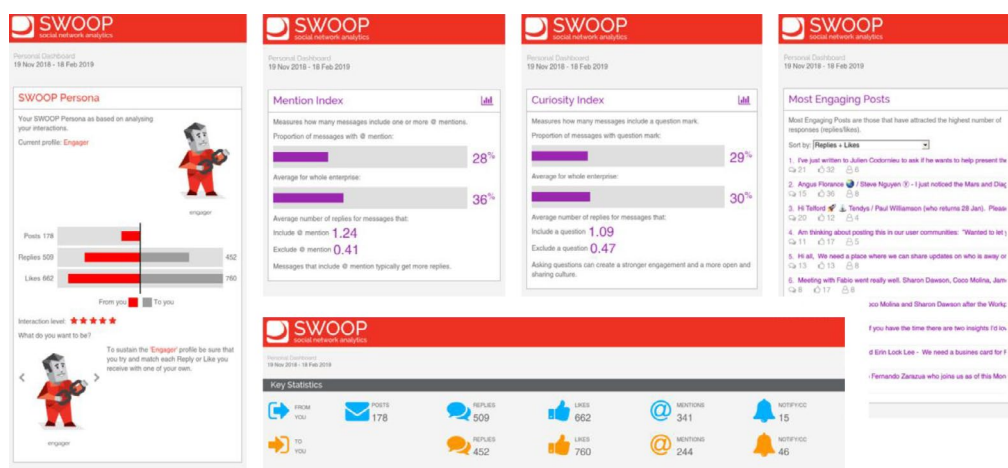


Figure 4 - SWOOP metrics at the individual level

The default setting in SWOOP is that everyone has access. But not everyone knows they have it. At Australian health insurer Medibank, the People & Culture group of 120 people were all actively encouraged to access to SWOOP. The response was immediate, resulting in changes in behavior. Medibank's Employee communications advisor Bailey Cunningham said people were instantly saying they needed to reply or like more often.

We recommend you educate your colleagues about practical things such as how best to write, how to tag people and how to ask questions. It is these behaviors which – when done well – will lead to an overall lift in use and business value from Yammer. You can use this quick guide to get you started - <https://support.swoopanalytics.com/hc/en-us/articles/360033997592-Six-easy-ways-to-become-a-better-collaborator-Yammer->

To make it easy, SWOOP includes for every person a 'nudge' widget which will suggest an action for the person to take. For instance, if the person's Curiosity Index is 0% then the person will be nudged to ask a question. Read more about nudges in SWOOP here - <https://support.swoopanalytics.com/hc/en-us/articles/360022817771-Behavioural-change-with-nudges-Yammer->

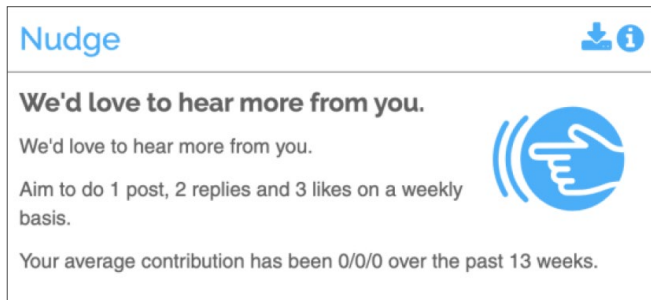


Figure 5 - Nudge Feature in SWOOP

Getting More Sophisticated – Qualitative Measures

The benefit of focusing on leading and lagging indicators as mentioned above is that it is relatively easy to get your head around it. The problem with simplicity is that it is also skipping a lot of nuance and complexity. For instance, you could have an enterprise social network that is meeting all of the goals above but none of the discussions are adding any business value. Alternatively, it could be that while the purpose of the network was to 'connect the company', the active groups have just reinforced existing organisational silos. Or while the CEO is very active, all the activity is happening in a closed group with the other members of the senior leadership team.

It soon becomes clear that we are in need of additional quantitative and qualitative measures. For qualitative measures the best we can do is to suggest some for you to consider, but given they are qualitative we cannot put numbers against them. For example:

- » Are the discussions relevant for current business challenges?
- » Is there an appropriate split between work and social groups?
- » Are the right people active?
- » Have we managed to connect people across geographic and functional areas in a way that drives better business outcomes?
- » Is the culture supportive of a transparency?

We will leave it up to you to determine what the relevant qualitative metrics are for your own organisation. Instead we'll provide a set of additional quantitative measures from our global benchmarking study which are important to consider but cannot easily be labelled as either lagging nor leading indicators. We call these indicators 'collaboration dynamics' as they focus more on the intent and purpose that most organizations have for implementing an enterprise social network. If we were to use a road-trip analogy you could say that if speed and distance are our lagging indicators, then direction and fuel-level are leading indicators, and the number of passengers who have a driver's licence, and how often they change seats are the collaboration dynamics indicators.

Collaboration dynamics indicators:

- » Influencer Risk (relying on a small group of people to drive collaboration)
- » Diversity Index (active in different groups to maximise diversity of thought)
- » Reciprocity (high level of reciprocity means greater levels of cohesion)
- » Percent messages in public groups (indicates level of transparency)

Similar to leading and lagging indicators we are able to provide you with a picture of what 'good' looks like for the collaboration dynamics indicators:

Type	Indicator	Global Average	Strongest	Weakest	Suggested Goal
Collaboration dynamics	Influencer risk	31%	2.4%	78.7%	Max 20%
	Diversity index	42.9%	70%	1%	50%+
	Reciprocity (Two-way relationships)	24.3%	41.64%	7.69%	35%+ (<1000 users) 30%+ (<5000 users) 25% (+5000 users)
	Percent public messages	70%	100%	7%	80%+

Table 2 - SWOOP 2019 Yammer Benchmark Report Metrics

INFLUENCER RISK

As the score increases beyond 20% it means that you're starting to see a stronger reliance on a select small set of people. The risk here is two-fold: 1) If these people were to leave, you are exposed; 2) Others might feel that these people are too dominant. Practical tips include coaching those very active people in bringing more colleagues into the online conversations. See our points regarding the Mention Index above for how to do this.

Recommended target: Max 20%

DIVERSITY

Innovation comes from being exposed to different ways of thinking and new information. This indicator tells us if your people are active in different groups. As the number increases it means people are active in more and more groups.

Recommended target: Min 50%

RECIPROCITY

We call this for 'Two-Way Relationships' in the SWOOP platform, but it is the same metric. Higher levels of reciprocity are achieved when people engage with each other in a two-way relationship, ie A responds to B, and B responds to A. Using methods such as the Refer/Build/Engage and asking questions contribute to increase the reciprocity rate. Also, when you start to like and reply to others, it is three times more likely you will receive likes and replies from these people.

Recommended target: 25% - 35% depending on size of organisation.

PUBLIC MESSAGES

Most organizations implement enterprise social networks to connect people across organizational boundaries. If all the activity is happening within closed groups, then it isn't possible for knowledge and information to flow freely.

Recommended target: Min 80%

Summary

We hope we've motivated you to start measuring and improving your organization's collaboration on Yammer. By setting targets that are evidence-based and providing you with direction on what has the greatest impact, we are delivering on our mission: To make enterprises and individuals better at collaborating.