



SOCIAL MEDIA FOR B2B, CORPORATE AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

**WITH A PRIMARY FOCUS ON INDUSTRIAL,
ENVIRONMENTAL AND AGRIBUSINESS SECTORS**

June 2011



Contents

Executive Summary	p.3
Introduction	p.6
1 Overview of platforms and functionality	p.8
2 How are communicators using social media?	p.20
3 How are business decision-makers using social media?	p.25
4 The power of social media in a crisis	p.35
5 Conclusions and recommendations	p.37
Appendix: tried and tested tips	p.40

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With thanks to Lin Macdonald

A Conversation



Image created by Khalid Albaih

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Executive Summary

This report aims to help organisations that carry out B2B or corporate communications, yet who don't commonly use social media or have a social media strategy in place, to understand the basics about the platforms and benefits available.

The mainstream social media sites in use today include LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. In addition to these, wikis – specifically Wikipedia – and blogs are playing an increasingly important role. Also worth considering are SlideShare, a relatively low-reach but potentially extremely useful platform to share presentation materials, Flickr, an image and video hosting website, and Quora, one of the newest arrivals on the scene that aggregates questions and answers to topics and allows users to collaborate on them by voting up or suggesting edits.

How are communicators using social media?

We conducted a qualitative survey of marketing and communications professionals across the waste, environmental services, energy, construction, food and chemicals industries to determine how they are currently using social media and whether their organisations could benefit from greater use. We had 50 responses, sufficient to indicate potential trends which could serve as the basis for larger-scale research in future.

The survey indicated that social media use is characterised by a rather shallow approach which focuses on limited and one-way communications, rather than establishing a dialogue. While 44% of businesses in the survey are using Twitter to disseminate information, only 21% are using it for two-way discussion. Similar patterns are seen in Facebook usage.

The fact that 54% of the businesses we surveyed do not have a social media strategy is likely to be a factor in relatively shallow engagement – while organisations feel that they need to be using social media in some way at the moment, insufficient attention is being paid to how each platform can be used most effectively.

However, the respondents appear to have high motivation to use social media. 73% think that their target audience uses social media, and that 'social media is a worthwhile investment of human and financial resources'. Many also disagree with some common negative assumptions about social media. For example, 69% disagree with the statements that 'social media is too informal for my business message' and 'social media is too risky', and 74% disagree with the statement that 'social media will become less popular in time'.

However, organisations are unable to confidently develop their social media presence due to several important obstacles. 67% feel they cannot measure the impact that social media has on profits and business objectives, and 48% feel that they do not know enough about social media to use it confidently for business purposes. Furthermore, only 51% agree with the statement that 'the senior management team supports the use of social media'. 77% also want to maintain 'tight control over how the business is represented'.

How are business decision-makers using social media?

Businesses must also understand how their target audiences are using and receiving social media in order to shape their own strategy. Existing research into business decision-maker behaviour can improve our understanding in this area. The key findings are that:

- Decision-makers are still more reliant on traditional than social media
- There is a great deal of variation in the extent and type of influence achievable through different platforms
- Decision-makers primarily use social media to seek out third-party content
- Decision-makers do not prioritise interaction when using social media for business decision-making
- Engagement varies significantly by sector

With business decision-makers continuing to rely more heavily on traditional than social media, so social media can still only form one part of any marketing and PR strategy. But while other forms of media continue to be rated as more influential, for those who are using it, its impact is high.

The most effective use of social media appears to be to encourage independent commentators to discuss the business in a positive way. Of course, ultimately this can only be achieved through ensuring good customer service and a healthy relationship with audiences – especially influential bloggers. Businesses can then encourage positive discussion of their achievements by ensuring that all content posted on a business's website and social media platforms is of high value to readers.

While interaction may not directly win a sale, it's important to note that a business which is successfully interacting through social media **will** improve its online corporate image. This will then serve to influence a passive audience.

The power of social media in a crisis

Social media has radically changed the dynamics through which a crisis unfolds and can play a crucial function in corporate communications – in keeping customers and other stakeholders informed of breaking news. Having a presence on social media platforms gives an instant ability to correct, clarify, dispense news from source and allow a two-way conversation. Equally, having no presence can leave businesses woefully unable to communicate to certain stakeholders – in the B2B context these could be local communities or downstream customers, a void which will be quickly filled by others.

Conclusions

On the basis of all these findings, the report concludes by recommending a strategic approach to communication, giving a summary of the benefits to using the platforms discussed and highlighting three key findings with regard to best practice:

1. The key goal for communicators using social media should be to influence what **other people** are saying about their business. These independent third parties are the conduit to potential business customers. Trying to use social media to directly influence potential prospects is less likely to succeed.
2. Achieving a profitable social media presence is therefore a **two stage process** – firstly you produce engaging content and interact effectively with readers and viewers. Then you reap the reputation and revenue benefits of the resultant positive third-party commentary produced by these readers and viewers – these third parties are the conduit to your business customers.
3. An important outcome of this argument is that social media is a tool for **in-bound**, not out-bound marketing. Businesses using social media to spam contacts with unresponsive marketing messages will lose them as advocates.
4. Social media has an evolving and important role to play in **crisis management**; conversations will continue regardless of whether you are a participant or not, so best to be involved.

If you are wondering which of social media platforms might be useful to you, a quick and simple experiment may help your decision. Make a list of the last 10 key business contacts that you have developed a relationship with and search for them on the platforms listed within this report. Look at whether and how they are using the platform. If they are using it for business purposes, it is likely to be a sensible place for you to communicate. A list of the main stakeholders who could damage your business in the case of a crisis, and where they obtain their information, will be equally revealing.

Introduction

This report aims to help organisations that carry out B2B or corporate communications, yet who don't commonly use social media or have a social media strategy in place, to understand the basics about the platforms and benefits available. It discusses current patterns of use in some key industrial and environmental sectors, making use of a survey of 50 communications professionals. It examines how key target audiences 'consume' social media in order to determine whether they can be effectively reached through these platforms. Then, on the basis of all these findings, the final section provides conclusions and recommendations.

What is social media?

'Social media' is broadly understood as web-based services which enable users to interact with each other. Social media first burst on to the scene as Web 2.0 came into being, an evolution of the internet which allowed new interactivity. This paved the way for what has since become known as user-generated content (UGC), allowing users to start or join a conversation with others and interact with web content in what had previously been a viewing-only medium. This new interactivity and social engagement has been most famously documented in the film 'The Social Network' about the birth of Facebook. A short video on YouTube entitled 'Did You Know 4.0' helps to explain the power of social media as it was in 2009¹.

According to proponents of social media, it offers businesses a way to make targeted connections with useful contacts, demonstrate dependability, highlight expertise, raise brand awareness and promote a positive corporate image. However, detractors highlight a superficial level of engagement among users and a tendency to 'graze' or spend a very short time on any one item. In the world of activism and campaigning, the willingness with which the public will support a cause on a social media site, without making further efforts to investigate it, has been described as 'clicktivism'.

The benefits of social media

Several studies have noted that businesses making use of social media are seeing the results in sales. For example, a Regus survey of 15,000 companies worldwide has found that 'two in every five companies (40%) globally have successfully used social networks to find and acquire new customers'.²

As a result, an increasing number of businesses are incorporating social media into their PR or marketing strategies. A 2010 UK survey of 500+ 'advertisers and agencies' has found that:

- 'Two thirds of companies (65%) say they are planning to increase their spending on social media marketing over the next 12 months, an increase from 48% in 2009.'

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lLQrUrEWe8>

² <http://www.regus.presscentre.com/Resource-Library/Social-Success-1cf.aspx>

- 'More than half of companies (56%) are planning to boost social media budgets by more than 20%, while 15% are planning to increase their social media spending by more than 100%.'³

However, these are primarily in consumer sectors, especially fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG); other business sectors have been slower to adopt social media, including those considered in this report. Through a literature search and survey of communications professionals in these sectors, we investigated the following questions:

- Why are these sectors reluctant to use social media?
- Is this reluctance is justified, and why?
- Could these businesses make better use of social media in order to reach their B2B and corporate audiences?
- Does social media have any application in internal communications?

We found that for many businesses, social media could well be a useful component of their marketing and PR toolbox, but its role should not be overstated given the continuing predominance of other types of communication. While there has been increasing fragmentation of the media with many more outlets available and media consumed in many more ways, the way in which the information is assimilated and acted upon from different sources also needs to be taken into account.

The key to social media appears to be to use it in a conversational manner rather than for overt self-promotion, with the goal of generating positive third-party commentary rather than as a direct route to sales. While content from the business can reach the target audiences direct rather than being distilled through, for example, a journalist, it also requires a greater deal of transparency as raising heads above the parapet can attract negative comment as well as positive.

Relinquishing an element of control is one aspect businesses find hardest to stomach about social media - though it also offers the chance to take control and act more quickly on any negative feedback received, thus reducing the impact it may have.

³<http://econsultancy.com/reports/uk-search-engine-marketing-benchmark-report>

1 – Overview of platforms and functionality

The term social media covers a huge range of platforms and applications, ranging from: blogging and microblogging; location-based networks; wikis; bookmarks; video, music, image and game sharing; to question-answering.

The mainstream social media sites in use today include LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.⁴ In addition to these, wikis – specifically Wikipedia – and blogs are playing an increasingly important role. This section will introduce these platforms and provide an overview of their content and functionality. SlideShare, a relatively low-reach but potentially extremely useful platform, will also be discussed, as will Flickr, an image and video hosting website, and Quora, one of the newest arrivals on the scene that aggregates questions and answers to topics and allows users to collaborate on them by voting up or suggesting edits. We will also touch briefly on petition sites.

The platforms are ordered according to how intensively they are used for business purposes, for example with reference to the proportion of Fortune 500 companies currently making use of them.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is widely recognised as a key site for B2B communications. LeadFormix notes that 'LinkedIn accounts for the maximum number of visitors from any social media site to a B2B website.'⁵ LinkedIn enables users to interact directly with particular B2B prospects. Users can also participate in groups, discussions and polls. Such activity is a chance to demonstrate the expertise of a business to a larger number of people. As a result, one survey of 400 companies and agencies has found that 'almost three-quarters of companies (73%) that are exclusively focused on the B2B space say that they use LinkedIn as part of their social media strategy.'⁶ 100% of Fortune 500 Companies have a LinkedIn presence.⁷

Despite the potential benefits of using LinkedIn as a route to B2B sales, at present its heaviest users are job-seekers, rather than people looking to make business purchases (see Section 3 for further discussion of audience use). However, a 'question-answering' function is gaining popularity and may become a more mainstream platform through which businesses can promote their expertise in the future.

A basic LinkedIn account is free. It is also possible to buy premium accounts which provide access to greater information and functionality.

⁴<http://econsultancy.com/reports/value-of-social-media-report> p. 1

⁵<https://www.LeadFormix.com/social-media-for-b2b-lead-generation/sm-b2b-report.html#Data>

⁶<http://econsultancy.com/reports/value-of-social-media-report> p. 2

⁷http://money.cnn.com/2010/03/24/technology/linkedin_social_networking.fortune/

Twitter

Twitter content is comprised of 140 character 'tweets' created by Twitter members, which means it is commonly referred to as 'microblogging'. These tweets are viewed by those who 'follow' their activity. 65% of Fortune Global 100 companies have a Twitter account.⁸

The personal style of Twitter can make businesses appear human and approachable. This means it is a useful method of credible corporate communication. However, trying to use Twitter as a one-way PR/marketing mouthpiece is a waste of time. Audiences do not wish to be targeted with overt promotional messages through Twitter, and will simply stop following organisations that use the platform in this way. The key is to participate in conversations which publicly demonstrate expertise and reliability.⁹

Twitter can also be useful for businesses because it allows them to monitor what their customers are saying about them, respond to comments, and make improvements to products and services in response. All this is done in real-time, meaning information can be gathered quickly and problems dealt with immediately.

However, using Twitter as a way to communicate with prospects or customers will not suit companies whose clientele do not want to conduct such conversations in public. This will be the case for many B2B clients – for example, public discussion of problems they are having with their suppliers may make them appear less reliable in the eyes of their own customers. Twitter is thus far more relevant for corporate PR than it is for B2B communication in our sectors of interest.

Facebook

54% of Fortune Global 100 companies have a Facebook page.¹⁰ Having a page means that other people can 'like' the business. Pages have a 'wall' for updates, an information section, plus sections for photos, discussion, events etc. as desired. Users can issue 'status updates'; similar to tweets, these will be visible to all fans. Users can join Facebook groups, and the platform can also be used to plan and publicise events through uploading details and inviting attendees.

Facebook is predominantly used for social and leisure purposes. Therefore Facebook can be an effective marketing route for businesses which can attract large numbers of page 'fans' through offering content which is entertaining or topical.¹¹ Using Facebook for corporate PR will be particularly relevant for renewable energy and green / environmental services that can tap into the phenomenon of 'Facebook Activism'. However, given its informal style,

⁸http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Documents/Burson-Marsteller%202010%20Global%20Social%20Media%20Check-up%20white%20paper.pdf p. 3.

⁹http://business.twitter.com/twitter101/case_jetblue

¹⁰http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Documents/Burson-Marsteller%202010%20Global%20Social%20Media%20Check-up%20white%20paper.pdf p. 3.

¹¹<http://techcrunch.com/2010/04/22/statcounter-facebook-stumbleupon-generate-more-traffic-than-twitter/>

Facebook is not likely to yield significant benefits for B2B and corporate communication for most businesses in our sectors of interest.

Having a carefully moderated Facebook page may, however, be a useful internal communication tool (see below). The 'events' function may prove particularly useful for internal communications.

YouTube

YouTube is a platform which allows users to upload videos. Other users can view and comment on these videos. Some businesses have chosen to set up a YouTube channel to which users can subscribe.¹²

YouTube is useful for B2B and corporate communication because it allows businesses to demonstrate their products or services visually, publish testimonials, and so on.¹³ It is also a way to demonstrate expertise and dependability, for example through publishing 'how-to' guides and speeches. It's also a way to make businesses appear more 'human', and is therefore often used for crisis management, such as CEO apologies.¹⁴

A further benefit is that this type of multi-media content may be more likely to be embedded in a third-party's website (for example an industry blog) than text-based content given the engaging nature of video. 50% of Fortune Global 100 companies have a YouTube channel.¹⁵

YouTube already has a large reach in the UK (much higher than LinkedIn, Twitter and SlideShare); it is the second largest search engine in the world, second behind Google, and the third most visited website on the internet¹⁶. This is a major benefit for business communicators but also means content can get 'lost'. Therefore it's important to publicise and link to content from elsewhere, such as company websites and Twitter.

Wikis and Wikipedia

A wiki allows the creation and editing of interlinked web pages. Its most famous sites are Wikileaks, which allows the uploading of restricted or sensitive documents, and Wikipedia. They are often referred to as 'knowledge management systems' and while they can be edited by anyone, they often require the use of a specialised language, references and seemingly impartial, factual content.

¹² See, for example, the Kodak channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/KodakTube?gl=GB>

¹³ Using YouTube for commercial content used to be banned, but this has changed; Google's own B2B guide notes the potential for B2B communications through YouTube, including 'product showcases and demos'.

¹⁴ <http://socialmediab2b.com/2010/04/b2b-ceo-youtube/>

¹⁵ http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Documents/Burson-Marsteller%202010%20Global%20Social%20Media%20Check-up%20white%20paper.pdf p. 3.

¹⁶ <http://www.businessinsider.com/youtube-2010-11#ixzz1MVuPrJds>

Many organisations don't check or monitor their listing on Wikipedia; equally, a small business obtaining a listing on Wikipedia can find it helps with its credibility. However, a group of moderators frequently audit content and can remove or suspend it if they feel it is overly commercial, biased or unreferenced.

Ward Cunningham, the developer of the first wiki software, WikiWikiWeb, originally described it as "the simplest online database that could possibly work". 'Wiki' is a Hawaiian word for 'fast'.

Corporate or Personal Blog

33% of Fortune Global 100 companies have corporate blogs.¹⁷ Blogs offer businesses a way to add value to their website through providing engaging content which is not necessarily directly related to their own business or products. This will encourage more visitors to the website (one study has indicated that SMEs with blogs get 55% more web visitors than those who do not),¹⁸ and allows businesses to demonstrate knowledge and participate in industry-wide online discussion. Blogs can be used to convey the human side of a company by letting bloggers inject their own personality into their writing.¹⁹

Blogs with comments sections also provide businesses with a two-way communication channel. While this is a major benefit which should be capitalised upon, it is also important to have a strategy in place to deal with negative comments. In many cases, this will involve engaging in discussion, rather than shutting it down.²⁰ It is also important to carefully mediate comments before allowing them to be posted to ensure that 'spammers' do not post direct links to plug their own business/product.

Blogs are very easy to set up and personalise professionally through packages such as [Wordpress](#) or [Blogger](#). However, as with other forms of social media, blogs require a commitment of time and energy; a neglected blog on which commenters are ignored will have a negative impact on a business's online image. Like other social media platforms, blogs should not be used simplistically as a one-way marketing or PR communications tool, as this will deter readers.²¹

We are seeing the rise of personal blogs as well. From a corporate reputation management perspective, a personal blogger can become as influential as a mainstream journalist. That is why social media campaigns can often now include contact with particularly influential bloggers in that sphere as that individual can determine the success or failure of a

¹⁷ http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Documents/Burson-Marsteller%202010%20Global%20Social%20Media%20Check-up%20white%20paper.pdf p. 3

¹⁸ <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/5014/Study-Shows-Small-Businesses-That-Blog-Get-55-More-Website-Visitors.aspx>

¹⁹ <http://mashable.com/2010/07/20/corporate-blogging-tips/>

²⁰ <http://mashable.com/2010/07/20/corporate-blogging-tips/>;
<http://www.openforum.com/idea-hub/topics/managing/article/how-to-deal-with-negative-feedback-josh-catone>

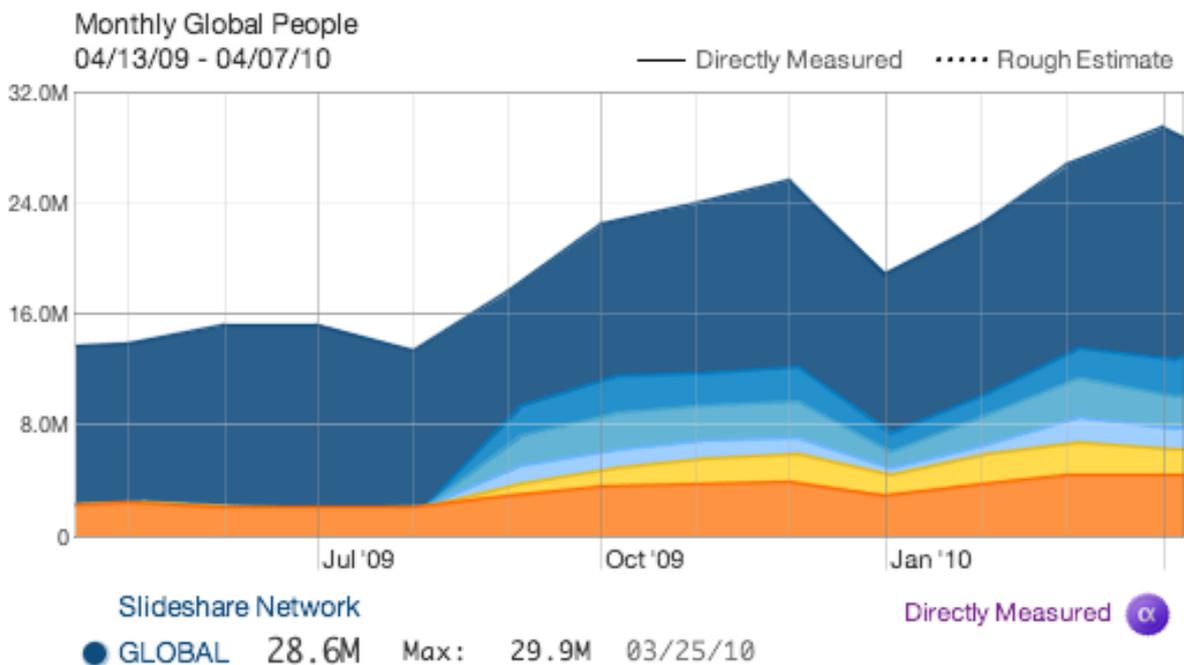
²¹ <http://technorati.com/business/gurus/article/five-reasons-why-corporate-blogs-fail/page-2/>

campaign. Some businesses, especially those with highly technical or specialised employees, are harnessing the personal blogging powers of their own staff to help communicate. Either way, it's extremely important to be transparent and above board in all dealings with bloggers, and in fact in the whole social media space.

SlideShare

SlideShare is a platform which allows users to share presentations by uploading them onto the site. Other users can then view and comment. Content can also be shared privately with specific recipients; a potentially useful internal communications tool. Users can also join groups and publicise events. Businesses can purchase a 'channel', which allows them to use analytics to track the use of their content.

The key benefit of SlideShare is that it allows businesses to demonstrate their expertise. Professionals use it for research and so it allows organisations to demonstrate their knowledge and attract potential clients and partners.²² Given the platform's comparatively low reach, it is important to publicise SlideShare context through other media, for example by linking to it from a LinkedIn page, business blog or website. Despite its current low reach, Slideshare is growing fast:



²² <http://www.slideshare.net/rashmi/slide-share-business-final>
 Neal Schaffer, 'My Favorite 6 Social Media Sites for B2B Social Media Marketing', *Customer Think*, July 15 2010, http://www.customerthink.com/blog/my_favorite_6_social_media_sites_for_b2b_social_media_marketing?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

Flickr

Flickr is a popular online photo management and sharing application that requires a Yahoo! ID to sign up. It has a strong and active user base – known as the Flickr community – that comprises individuals sharing personal photographs as well as bloggers using it to host images that they embed into blogs and social media.²³ In September 2010, it reported it was hosting more than 5 billion images.²⁴ Though the Flickr terms of use forbid posting of photos specifically for commercial purposes, when used properly Flickr can be an effective marketing tool by displaying your company's products and services.²⁵

For example, some renewable energy companies use it to show new products and record the progress of technical installations.²⁶

Photos can be organised into sets or collections, relevant descriptions or 'tags' added, then shared with groups the user has joined. Companies can make their logo their 'buddy icon', or avatar, and use their company web address as their Flickr screen for indirect marketing exposure, particularly when posting on group discussions. Furthermore, creating a prominent link to a Flickr account from a company website allows it to be found by more search engines.

Finally, searching for photo tags relevant to your business may show you negative as well as positive views of your company or product, functioning as a useful avenue for monitoring customer feedback.

Quora

Quora is designed to be an online social form of a knowledge market, adding a more professional feel to existing knowledge sharing sites like Wikianswers. Rather than answers from members of the general public, responses from those clearly in a position to 'know' become highly rated.

Users follow topics they are interested in and questions about those topics are displayed in the user's news feed. The service allows questions to be asked and answers given. Additionally, users can comment on the questions and answers and rate the answers. An 'Answer Summary' can be created to reflect the consensus of the community. This summary is a wiki that can be edited by any registered user.

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr#cite_note-flickr-photo-use-by-bloggers-1

²⁴ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/catimages/collections/72157611590855059/>

²⁵ <http://www.smallbusinesssem.com/articles/marketing-on-flickr/>

²⁶ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cleanenergy-uk/> or <http://www.flickr.com/photos/catimages/page3/>

Petition sites

There has been a recent rise in the use of petition sites, through which any user can register a cause and promote it through other forms of social media, for example Twitter or Facebook. Facebook in itself is a form of a petition site; one well documented campaign on Facebook has been the pressure placed on Cadbury to reintroduce Wispa bars.²⁷ Some cynics have suggested that the whole campaign was orchestrated by Cadbury but this has not been proven. Either way, it was an extremely clever and effective campaign that allowed Cadbury an excellent opportunity to be seen as listening to its consumers.

Recently, specialised petition sites have risen in popularity, for example <http://38degrees.org.uk/> and www.petition.co.uk/. These allow anyone to create a petition that can then be communicated and promoted through other channels. Very often, the rationale for the petition is unchecked, can be emotive or incorrect, and can lead to huge numbers signing a petition which has no substantiation or is irrelevant across country borders. Nevertheless these are very effective sites at harnessing public feeling.

Social media cross-over

One of the successes of social media is the way in which a number of different platforms interact to create a more effective communication. Blogs can be promoted through Twitter Facebook or LinkedIn; petitions can be bookmarked. This capability means that social media content, if it has the right qualities, can become viral and spread wildly. This is very desirable in a managed campaign but can be a nightmare in corporate reputation management.

²⁷ <http://www.brandrepublic.com/bulletin/brandrepublicnewsbulletin/article/732258/Cadbury-resurrect-Wispa-social-network-pressure/>

Additional Benefits: Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

The significant role played by web searches and supplier websites in business decision-making (see Section 3) highlights the need for businesses to ensure that their content appears at the top of results lists when people carry out a web search for a product or service.

Fans and users of social media argue that it should be central to any online marketing strategy, serving as a method of encouraging more visits to a business's website and ensuring that links to the website appear frequently in third-party content. According to Teddie Cowell, SEO director at Guava:

“There is a very strong relationship between search engine marketing and social media. Anything that raises awareness of a brand or particular website, such that it encourages people to search specifically for the brand or website, or increases the probability that a searcher might select that brand or particular website over another within a search engine results page (SERP), is always good for search engine marketing.

“There is also a very positive effect in terms of reaching large numbers of people and therefore gaining more links, which is one of the key factors search engines such as Google look at when ranking web pages.”²⁸

However, as EConsultancy notes, this perception is not universal among online marketers, for example due to ‘the difficulty in getting people in the social media arena to link *en masse* to a site in the first place, the random nature of such links and the difficulty in systematically driving links to the right page on a website’.²⁹ Therefore while social media may contribute to SEO, it should not be relied upon or used solely for this purpose.

Additional Benefits: Internal Communications

Although some companies may be reluctant to adopt social media for internal communications because of concerns over privacy and time-wasting, the experience of companies that have embraced it suggests that the potential benefits outweigh the drawbacks. In addition, negative outcomes can be largely avoided with an effective internal social media policy e.g. tough moderation and a ban on anonymous posting.³⁰

²⁸ <http://econsultancy.com/blog/3832-does-social-media-activity-really-help-seo>

²⁹ <http://econsultancy.com/blog/3832-does-social-media-activity-really-help-seo>

³⁰ <http://www.goodcompanyblog.com/2009/08/12/is-social-media-a-good-idea-for-internal-communications-5-reasons-why-companies-should-consider-it/>

Key benefits:

- Social media enables employees who are separated by distance or departmental divisions to make contact with each other, share information, and collaborate in ways which can benefit the business as a whole.³¹ Social media supports this type of interaction far better than traditional communication routes, such as email or print. IBM has made effective use of social media in this way.³²
- Social media can break down internal hierarchy, helping management to gather information and employee views. This promotes good morale by ensuring that employees feel included in decision-making, and enables businesses to gather information on a scale and at a speed which is not easily achieved through other forms of communication.³³
- Social media can also promote employee morale more generally, through encouraging a communicative and inclusive workplace. For example, Deloitte has found that internal social media systems have increased 'retention among people who hadn't [previously] felt a strong sense of belonging.'³⁴
- Social media which enables employees to participate in information-sharing (e.g. wikis, blogs, video and podcasts) can contribute to knowledge-development and lead to better practice. BT has made effective use of such tools.³⁵
- As many employees are already familiar with social networking sites like Facebook, introducing this type of communication in the workplace can help save time and money because less training is required.³⁶ However, it is strongly advised that a Social Media Policy be put in place beforehand with full training for staff on company aims, objectives and expectations.

³¹ http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/322857/The_new_employee_connection_Social_networking_behind_the_firewall

³² http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/322857/The_new_employee_connection_Social_networking_behind_the_firewall?taxonomyId=16&pageNumber=3

³³ <http://www.goodcompanyblog.com/2009/08/12/is-social-media-a-good-idea-for-internal-communications-5-reasons-why-companies-should-consider-it/>

³⁴ http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/322857/The_new_employee_connection_Social_networking_behind_the_firewall

³⁵ See e.g. <http://www.slideshare.net/markmorrell/how-bt-uses-social-media-with-internal-communication>

³⁶ See <http://www.skillssoft.com/infocenter/whitepapers/documents/social-networking-in-the-business-environment.pdf>

Which platform?

CMO has developed a useful chart – albeit for B2C purposes – which helps those starting out using social media to gauge the relative benefits and drawbacks of each platform:

THE CMO'S GUIDE TO: THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

2010 IS THE YEAR CMOs WILL HEAVILY INVEST IN SOCIAL MEDIA. HERE'S A GUIDE TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HOW BEST TO LEVERAGE MAJOR SOCIAL MEDIA SITES.

GOOD! **OK.** **BAD!**

WEBSITE	CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION	BRAND EXPOSURE	TRAFFIC TO YOUR SITE	SEO
 A microblogging site that enables users to send 'tweets', or messages of 140 characters or less	Use keyword search monitoring through a program such as Hootsuite, Tweetjump or Radian 6 to track what people are saying about you and your competitors.	Offers unique opportunities for Web site integration and to engage with customers in a viral way, helping your company stand out from the masses.	Potential can be large, but promotion is an art form -- promote your brand too heavily and turn off followers, yet don't promote enough and receive little attention.	Value to your site's SEO is limited, but tweets will rank high in search results -- good for ranking your profile name and breaking news, though shortened URLs are of little benefit.
 A social networking site where users can add friend, send messages and build their own profile	Great for engaging people who like your brand, want to share their opinions, and participate in giveaways and contests.	Facebook brand pages are great for brand exposure. Jump-start your brand exposure through the ad platform, or hire a Facebook consultant to help you grow your brand presence.	Traffic is decent and on the rise thanks to share buttons and counters, but don't expect massive numbers of unique visitors to go to your site.	Little to no value, aside from blogs picking up and featuring your posted links. Not worth the time expenditure.
 An image and video hosting website where community members can share and comment on media	Unnecessary to spend too much time on this, though properly tagged photosets of company events can help customers put a face on the team behind your brand.	Participation in industry-related groups might get your photos, and thus your brand, viewed by people with similar interests, but numbers will be small.	Even if you get tens of thousands of visits to a photo hyperlinked with your URL, click-through rates are among the lowest around.	Heavily indexed in search engines, passing links and page ranks. Also helps images rank higher in Google Images and in building inbound links.
 A social networking site for business professionals	Not the primary focus, but customer engagement opportunities are possible by answering industry-related questions, establishing yourself as an expert in the field.	Effective for personal branding and demonstrating your organization's professional prowess. Encouraging employees to maintain complete profiles to strengthen your team's reputation is advisable.	Unlikely to drive any significant traffic to your site, though you never know who those few visits might be from -- perhaps a potential client or customer.	Very high page rank -- almost guaranteed on the first page of search results -- especially for your company name or individual employees' names, but that's about it.
 A video sharing website where users can share and upload new videos	Whether you seek to entertain, inform, or both, video is a powerful channel for quickly engaging your customers, responding to complaints, and demonstrating your social-media savvy.	One of the most powerful branding tools on the Web when you build your channel, promote via high-traffic sites, and brand your videos.	Traffic goes to the videos. If the goal is to get traffic back to your site, then add a hyperlink in the video description, but don't expect traffic to correlate closely with video views.	Very good for building links back to your site because videos rank high. Also a tried-and-true way for your brand to gain exposure.
 A social news site where users can discover and share content	Not the site's primary strength, though occasionally an objective third-party writeup as a PR effort, perhaps to counteract bad press or customer sentiment, can be promoted.	Opportunities are huge, especially for promoting objective press/blog coverage of your brand. Make sure content doesn't read like an ad, or your site might be banned for being overly commercial.	The grandfather of traffic spikes, so become active in the community or find someone who is. If your site is corporate, then consider launching an industry blog on a noncommercial Web domain to establish yourself as a thought leader.	Very good because even if your story doesn't become popular, then your page will still be indexed quickly. If your story does become popular, this is likely the best site in terms of getting linked to by bloggers.
 A social news community where members discover and share webpages	Paid StumbleUpon traffic can be a very targeted method of communicating, but whether you're reaching your existing customers is purely random and costly to determine.	A paid campaign can be good for brand awareness, especially following efforts to get free, organic traffic to your home page. Targeting is very accurate, but keep in mind you're paying 5 cents per visit (\$50 CPM).	Enables a diverse range of people to discover your content and share links via the su.pr link shortener on Twitter. Tagging helps, but you don't want the same people repeatedly giving you a thumbs-up.	Very good if your story makes it to the top page for its tag. StumbleUpon's large user base enables many people to find and link to your stories. For vanity name searches, profile pages rank well, too.
 A social news site where community members can vote on stories	Editor-driven and moderated, so this shouldn't be your primary focus.	Noncommercial sites are heavily favored by moderators, so business sites should not waste time in this uphill battle.	Get in the moderators' good graces, and you have a chance to hit absolutely massive numbers -- but it's a long shot.	If you make the front page of Yahoo, then you will get a ton of backlinks, but chances are unlikely unless you are a large, established brand.



(See full size chart here:

<http://www.cmo.com/sites/default/files/CMO-SOCIAL%20LANDSCAPE-R5.pdf>)

This chart highlights the key role of social bookmarking sites (e.g. Reddit, Stumbleupon) in generating business traffic. These platforms have not been considered in detail in this report because rankings are generated by readers and are less controllable by a business than other forms of social media. However, their significance highlights the need for a business to ensure its online content offers enough value to readers to encourage them to bookmark (see Section 4 for further information on this).

Challenges

The major challenge when using social media is to ensure that content is engaging and effective, rather than using these platforms for the sake of it and ending up with numerous neglected pages on various platforms. This will have a negative impact upon a business's image.³⁷ We will provide general guidance on how to use social media effectively and avoid such pitfalls in Section 4 and the Appendix.

However, measurement and control are two further issues often perceived to be major barrier to social media use.

Measurement

As will be shown in Section 3, it's difficult to accurately determine the impact of social media upon sales figures. Social media use predominantly shapes sales through its influence on corporate reputation in general, rather than in a direct fashion. Measurement of return on investment can therefore be difficult. One survey of 400 companies and agencies has found that:

"The majority of companies have difficulty measuring the return on investment (ROI) from social media. Almost two-thirds of respondents (61%) say their organisations are "poor" (34%) or "very poor" (27%) at measuring ROI."³⁸

³⁷ <http://www.socialsignal.com/dearsosi/what-are-major-risks-social-media-and-how-can-we-avoid-them>

³⁸ <http://econsultancy.com/reports/value-of-social-media-report> p. 1

Businesses should, as far as possible, establish measurable objectives for their social media usage – in part to avoid being taken in by social media ‘snakeoil salesmen’ who persuade businesses that they can, for example, increase their numbers of Facebook followers but fail to provide concrete projections of how this will actually improve sales.³⁹

However, White Horse argue that although “neither B2B nor B2C marketers are measuring direct ROI to any significant degree, the emerging consensus is that such efforts are often fallacious, given the multiple, complex influences that lead to purchase.”⁴⁰ The fact that measuring return on investment through social media can be complicated shouldn’t be seen as a reason to turn away from its benefits.

Control

Some businesses avoid using social media because they want to keep close control over how their business is presented publicly. However, people will be talking about businesses either way, particularly if they hit the headlines for a negative reason. A business’s online image is more effectively controlled through monitoring and effectively participating in conversations taking place on social media platforms than by ignoring them – but you will need to embrace transparency.

The right way to manage risk is therefore to ensure that social media is used when appropriate, and that its use is based on a clear and well-thought out strategy. All staff responsible for social media engagement should be guided by a social media policy (see the Appendix for an example).

³⁹http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09_50/b4159048693735.htm

⁴⁰<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/57449035/B2B-Social-Marketing>

2 – How are communicators using social media?

We conducted a qualitative survey of marketing and communications professionals across the waste, environmental services, energy, construction, food and chemicals industries to determine how they are currently using social media and whether they could benefit from greater use. We had 50 responses, sufficient to indicate potential trends which could serve as the basis for larger-scale research in future.

Our key findings were that while many respondents are strongly motivated to use social media, use is constrained by a reluctance to embrace this form of communication and a strong reliance on traditional forms of media which 'push' out messages rather than engage. This may be due to a failure to adopt a well-planned social media strategy – or simply a lack of time and senior level buy-in for moving in this direction.

We were also able to determine which social media platforms were likely to best support respondents' priorities. These findings are discussed in more depth below.

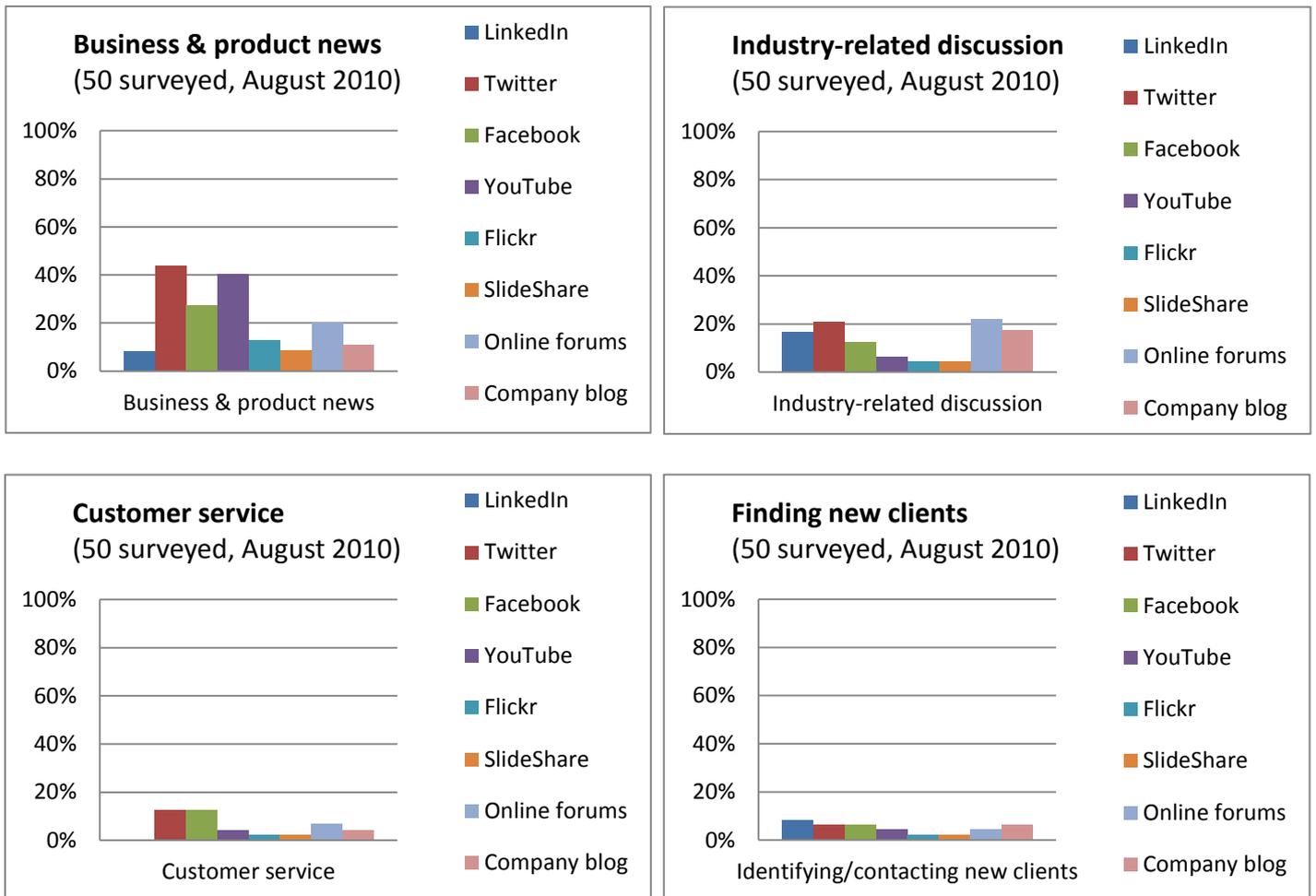
Engagementdb has developed a typology of business social media usage behaviour, as follows:

- **Mavens.** These brands are engaged in seven or more social media channels and have an above-average engagement score. Brands like Starbucks and Dell are able to sustain a high level of engagement across multiple social media channels. Mavens not only have a robust strategy and dedicated teams focused on social media, but also make it a core part of their go-to-market strategy. Companies like these could not imagine operating without a strong presence in social media.
- **Butterflies.** These brands are engaged in seven or more channels but have lower than average engagement scores. Butterflies like American Express and Hyundai have initiatives in many different channels, but tend to spread themselves too thin, investing in a few channels while letting others languish. Their ambition is to be a Maven and they may get there — but they still struggle with getting the full buy-in from their organisations to embrace the full multi-way conversation that deep engagement entails.
- **Selectives.** These brands are engaged in six or fewer channels and have higher than average engagement scores. Selectives like H&M and Philips have a very strong presence in just a few channels where they focus on engaging customers deeply when and where it matters most. The social media initiatives at these brands tend to be lightly staffed — if they are at all, meaning that by default, they have to focus their efforts. These are usually started by an impassioned evangelist on a shoestring budget.

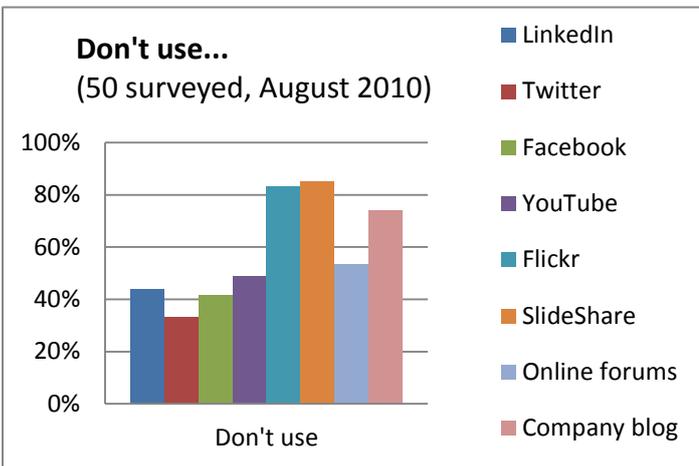
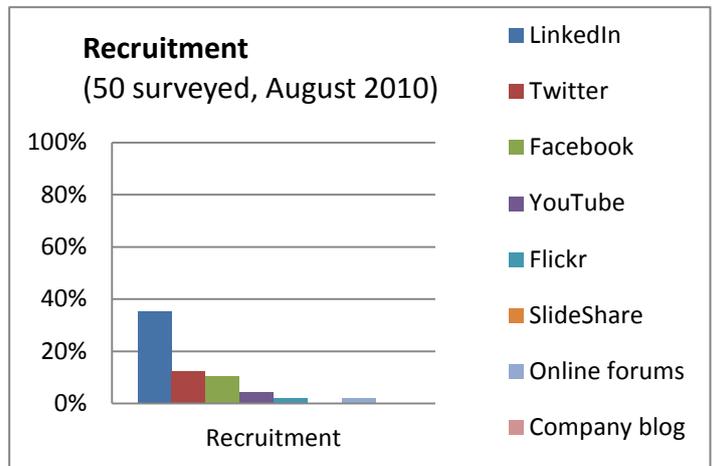
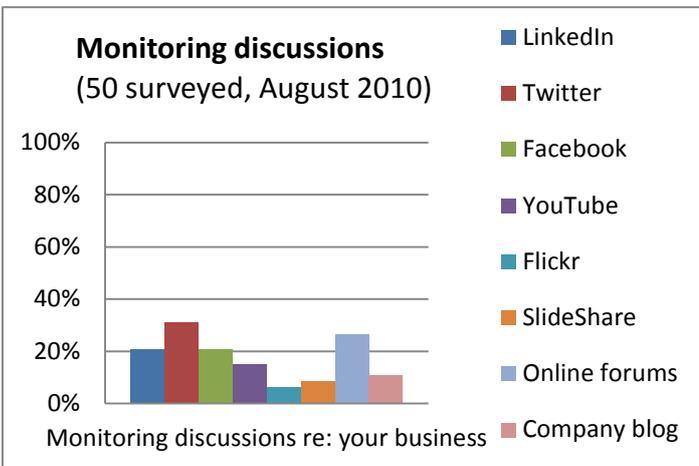
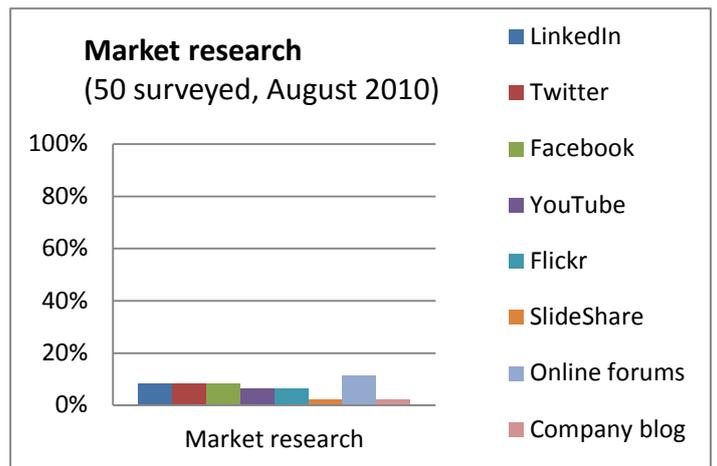
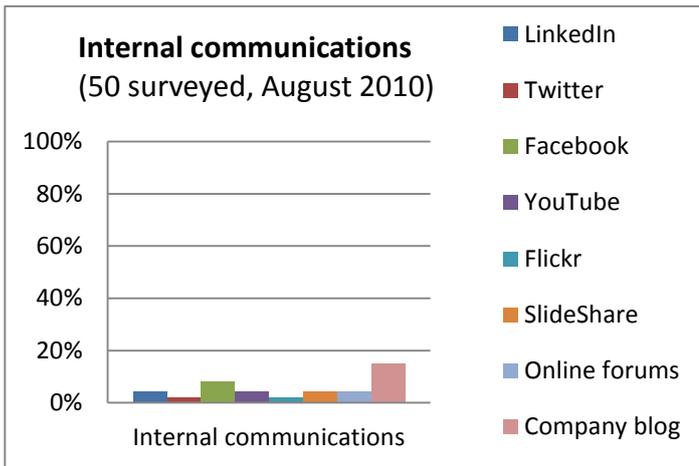
- Wallflowers.** These brands are engaged in six or fewer channels and have below-average engagement scores. Wallflowers like McDonalds and BP are slow or are just getting started, dipping their toes into social media waters. They are still trying to figure out social media by testing just a few channels. They are also cautious about the risks, uncertain about the benefits, and therefore engage only lightly in the channels in which they are present.⁴¹

Patterns of Social Media Use

Many organisations we surveyed fall into either the ‘wallflower’ or the ‘butterfly’ categories outlined above. A high proportion of businesses are not making use of key social media tools, particularly blogs (just 26% use a blog). However, other platforms are more popular – Twitter has the heaviest use, with 67% of businesses making use of it. 56% are using LinkedIn, and 51% are using YouTube. The full results are presented below:



⁴¹http://www.engagementdb.com/downloads/ENGAGEMENTdb_Report_2009.pdf



Social media use is characterised by a rather shallow, 'butterfly'-type approach which focuses on limited and one-way communications, rather than establishing a dialogue. While 44% of businesses are using Twitter to disseminate information, only 21% are using it for two-way discussion. Similar patterns are seen in Facebook usage.

These findings are supported by research conducted by Pauley Creative into the use of social media among top construction companies:⁴²

⁴²<http://blog.pauleycreative.co.uk/2010/06/how-do-the-top-15-construction-companies-fair-on-social-media/>

Construction Companies	Twitter			LinkedIn		Facebook		Website SoMe Links?	Analytics	RSS Feed
	Presence	Tweeting	Engaging	Page	Groups	Page	Fans			
Balfour Beatty	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	0	X	✓	X
Carillion	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	9	X	✓	✓
Laing O Rourke UK	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	44	X	✓	X
Morgan Sindall	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	0	X	✓	✓
Kier	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	0	X	✓	✓
Galliford Try	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	1	X	✓	X
Newarthill (Sir Robert McAlpine)	X	X	X	X	X	✓	1	X	✓	✓
Interserve	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	6	X	✓	✓
BAM (Construct Nutall)	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	0	X	X	X
Babcock (Construction)	X	X	X	X	X	X	N/A	X	✓	X
Amey UK	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓
Skanska UK	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	32	X	X	X
Vinci/Ringway	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	0	X	X	X
Mitie	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	6	✓	X	✓
Bovis Lend Lease	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	21	X	✓	X

What both our study and the Pauley findings show is that companies and individuals are recognising the need to start working with social media, but for many this stops at creating a profile page. This explains the large number of businesses in the Pauley study which have a Facebook profile, but the paltry numbers of ‘fans’. Once the profile is live, businesses are not doing anything to further engage audiences or attract new followers.⁴³

Using social media in this way is counterproductive, because having a neglected Facebook page will create a more negative image for the company than having no page at all.⁴⁴ This underlines the need to focus efforts on the most relevant platforms and invest time and energy in using them effectively. The fact that 54% of the businesses we surveyed do not have a social media strategy is likely to be a factor in relatively shallow engagement – while businesses feel that they need to be using social media in some way (see below), at the moment, insufficient attention is being paid to how each platform can be used most effectively.

Perceptions and Obstacles

The businesses surveyed appear to have high motivation to use social media. 73% think that their target audience uses social media, and that ‘social media is a worthwhile investment of human and financial resources’. Many also disagree with some common negative assumptions about social media. For example, 69% disagree with the statements that ‘social media is too informal for my business message’ and ‘social media is too risky’, and 74% disagree with the statement that ‘social media will become less popular in time’.

However, businesses are unable to confidently develop their social media presence due to several important obstacles. 67% feel they cannot measure the impact that social media has on profits and business objectives, and 48% feel that they do not know enough about social media to use it confidently for business purposes. Furthermore, only 51% agree with the statement that ‘the senior management team supports the use of social media’.

⁴³ <http://blog.pauleycreative.co.uk/2010/06/how-do-the-top-15-construction-companies-fair-on-social-media/>

⁴⁴ http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Documents/Burson-Marsteller%202010%20Global%20Social%20Media%20Check-up%20white%20paper.pdf

A key practical constraint is the fact that many of the businesses surveyed prohibit the use of key social media sites at work. 39% of businesses block Facebook, 35% block Twitter, 20% block LinkedIn, and 47% block YouTube. Clearly, if staff are unable to access these platforms, their use for marketing and communications activities is curtailed.

Social or Traditional Media?

Our respondents' media priorities indicate that for some of their goals, social may be more effective than traditional media. For example, 83% of businesses want to target their B2B or corporate audience directly, rather than through journalists (citing this objective as either 'essential' or 'important'); 83% state that 'responding quickly to negative publicity' is essential or important; and 63% state that 'establishing a two-way conversation' is essential or important.

Looking at particular priorities in more detail suggests that platforms which enable businesses to make contact with particular groups of people, such as LinkedIn, SlideShare or a company blog, may be more relevant than broader-brush methods of communication like Twitter or Facebook – 85% cite 'targeting particular audiences' as essential or important. There is greater ambivalence surrounding the issue of 'reaching large numbers of people' – while just over half (58%) feel that this is essential or important, for 42% this is not a priority.

There are some goals for which the use of traditional media continues to be a necessity. 83% say that 'working through influential media is essential or important'. This priority means that businesses still need to ensure that their organisations are mentioned in high-status trade media.

77% also want to maintain 'tight control over how the business is represented'. While this may deter businesses from making use of social media, participating in discussion through social media may be a better route of controlling reputation than ignoring social media altogether – in fact it may soon be impossible to adequately control reputation without engaging in it. Furthermore, businesses can manage their social media content directly rather than relying on potentially problematic relationships with trade journalists.

3 – How are business decision-makers using social media?

Businesses must understand how their target audiences are using and receiving social media in order to shape their own strategy. Existing research into business decision-maker behaviour, discussed below, can improve our understanding in this area. The key findings are that:

- Decision-makers are still more reliant on traditional than social media
- There is a great deal of variation in the extent and type of influence achievable through different platforms
- Decision-makers primarily use social media to seek out third-party content
- Decision-makers do not prioritise interaction when using social media for business decision-making
- Engagement varies significantly by sector

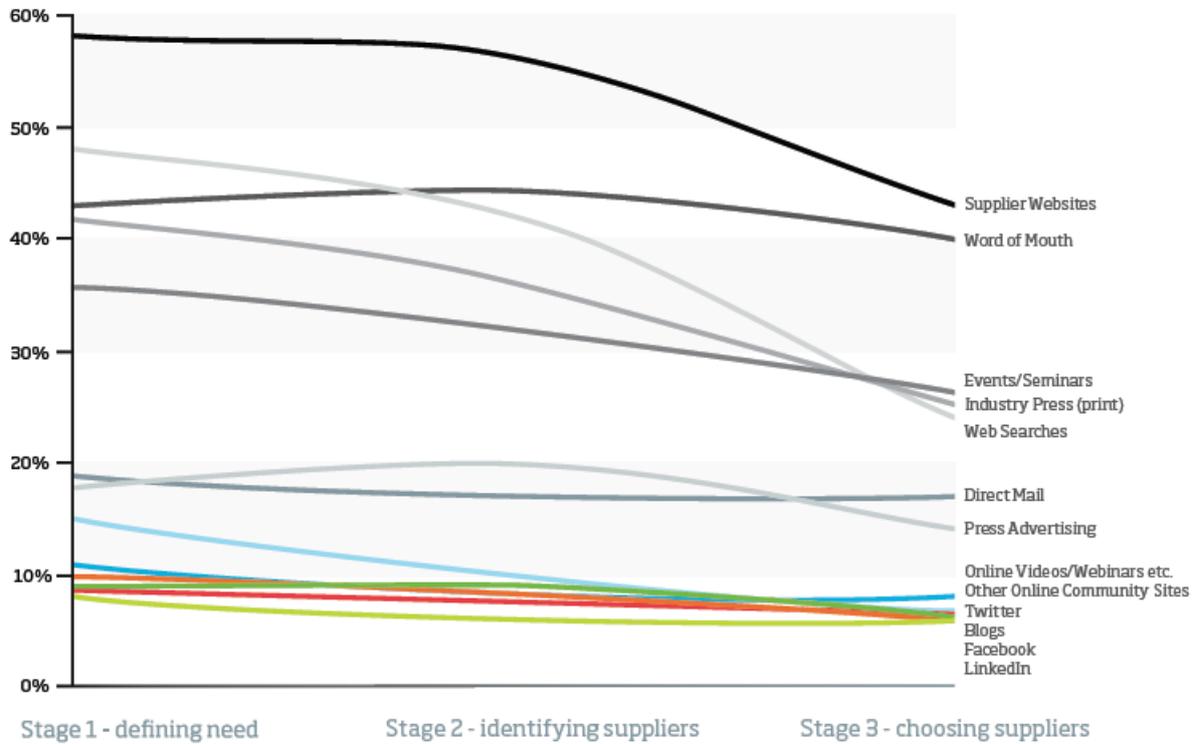
Decision-makers cannot be reached through social media alone

One crucial feature of audience behaviour is that business decision-makers continue to rely more heavily on traditional than social media as a business information resource, and so social media can still only form one part of any marketing and PR strategy.

For example, a Base One study, *Survey of B2B Buyers' use of Social Media*,⁴⁵ notes that 'three fifths [of the sample of 503 buyers] reported weaknesses or difficulties to using social media for business related information' (p. 8).

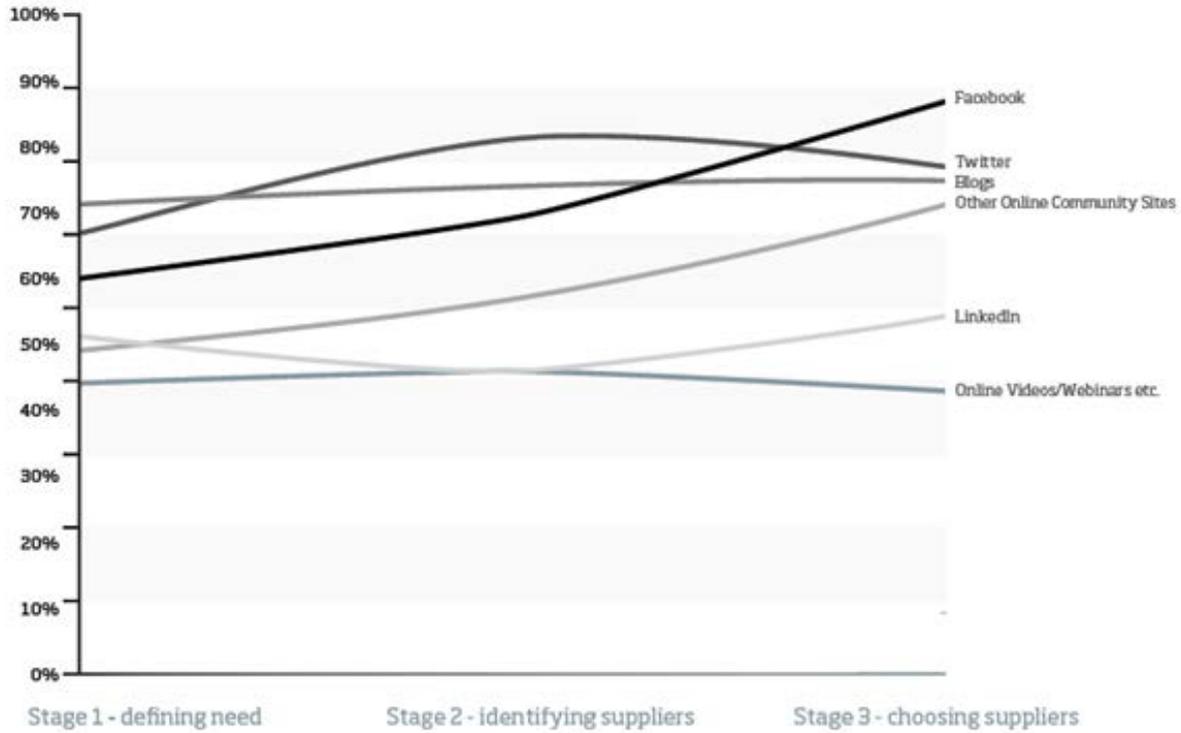
⁴⁵http://www.baseone.co.uk/beyond/Buyersphere_report.pdf

Channels rated very/fairly influential at each stage



These findings are reflected in Base One’s chart on the next page, which shows that other forms of media continue to be rated as more influential than social media at each stage of the purchasing process (stage 1 = ‘identifying the need’, stage 2 = ‘researching potential suppliers’, stage 3 = ‘selecting a supplier’). ‘Supplier websites’ and ‘word of mouth’ are far more influential than social media (p. 24). However, while use of social media during the buying process is low relative to other forms of media, *for those who are using it*, its influence is high, as shown in the following chart:

Social media channels rated very influential at each stage - by users



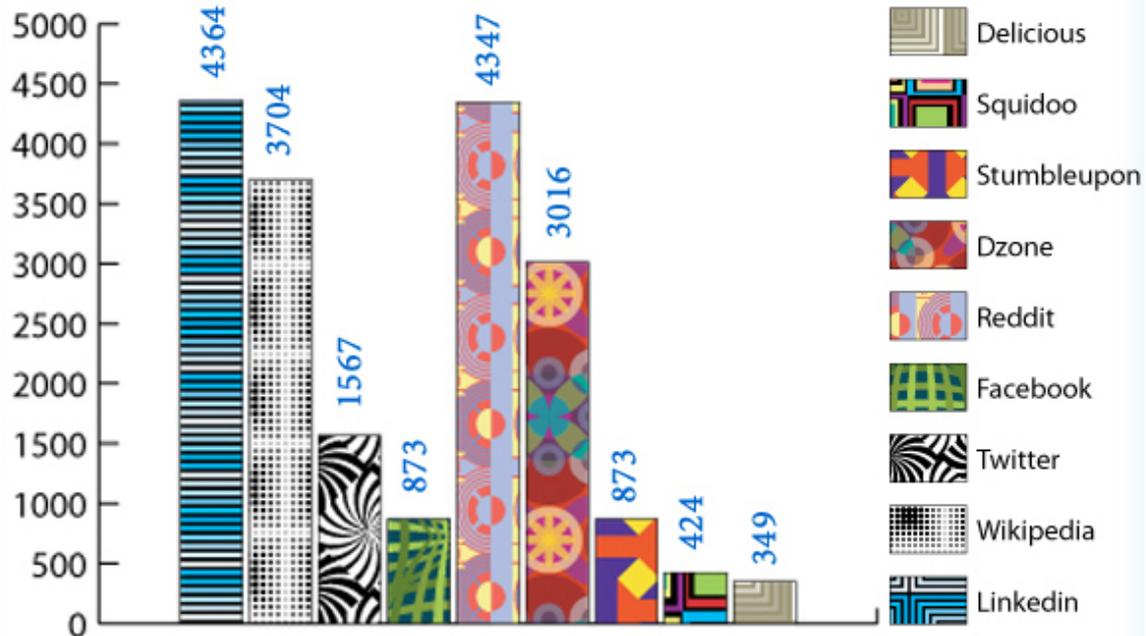
(Base One report p. 25 – NB these ratings are only taken from those who use these forms of social media during the buying process. These respondents form only a small segment of the total sample).

Level of influence varies significantly according to platform

The following chart, produced by LeadFormix in the report *How Effective is Social Media for B2B Lead Generation?*,⁴⁶ illustrates the relative success of various social media sites in generating business visitors to a company website, on the basis of a study of the websites of 218 companies with a social media presence. It should be noted that LeadFormix is used mainly by technology companies, which may put a degree of bias on these results.

⁴⁶<https://www.leadformix.com/social-media-for-b2b-lead-generation/sm-b2b-report.html#Data>

Enterprise Visitors from Social Media Sites



Despite the apparently high impact of LinkedIn on lead generation, LeadFormix found that far more visitors to LinkedIn look at contact information, management team details, and careers pages than at products pages.⁴⁷ As suggested previously, therefore, LinkedIn appears to be primarily used as a career and recruitment site, rather than a means through which decision-makers research potential suppliers and partners.

However, the functionality of LinkedIn makes it an extremely useful tool through which businesses can demonstrate their expertise and dependability. Also, it far outranks the other platforms covered here in terms of the capacity to target communications at business decision-makers in particular sectors. We may therefore see patterns of use changing in future as more users take advantage of these benefits.

The LeadFormix report also suggests that while Twitter and Facebook may be useful corporate PR tools, they don't lead directly to B2B sales. Visitors arriving from these platforms tend to look only at one page of a business's website, 'mostly the page for which a link has been provided on these social networking sites'.

At first sight this finding seems to contradict the relatively high importance attached to Facebook and Twitter among professionals surveyed in the Base One study cited above. However, two factors help explain this apparent contradiction.

Firstly, as noted by LeadFormix, while Facebook and Twitter may not lead immediately to sales, they do contribute more broadly to brand awareness and corporate reputation, factors which ultimately play an important role in business decision-making.

⁴⁷ <https://www.leadformix.com/social-media-for-b2b-lead-generation/sm-b2b-report.html#Data>

As the head of LeadFormix has noted:

“B2B companies and marketers should understand that social media should not be used solely as a lead generation tool and if done, the rate of success may not be that impressive. However, social media will work more effectively for B2B companies if it is used as a lead nurturing tool, as a platform to engage, communicate and understand their target customers and prospective buyers.”⁴⁸

Secondly, given the high reach of these platforms, business decision-makers are likely to be using them to seek out independent third-party information from trusted acquaintances or commentators, even if they are not looking at content produced by the businesses that are trying to sell to them. The same principle explains the high influence of blogs and online communities. This tells us that...

Business audiences primarily use social media to seek out third-party opinion

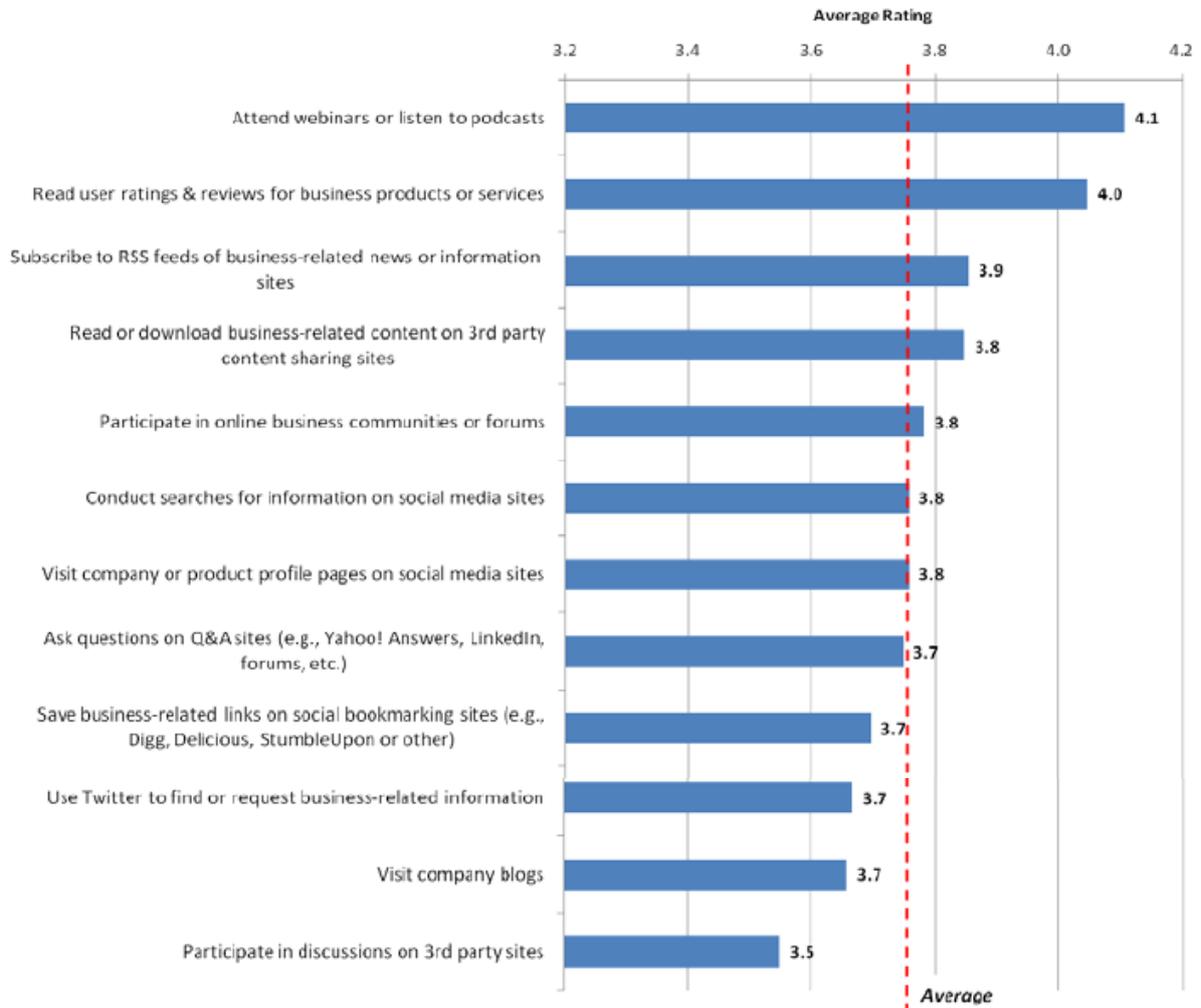
The results of the Base One study indicate that decision-makers are mainly using social media to obtain third party opinions concerning potential suppliers. The most commonly cited benefit of social media, identified by 17% of all respondents, was ‘access to other people’s experiences’ (p. 7). This finding is supported by the LeadFormix study, which noted that out of all social media platforms, business visitors originating from Wikipedia appeared the most intent upon purchasing, as these visitors were the most likely to look at products pages. This, according to LeadFormix, is because B2B customers are looking for neutral sources of information when they make decisions about potential partners or suppliers, and the use of Wikipedia for overt promotion is banned.⁴⁹

Such findings are also supported by a Business.com survey, which shows that third-party content is rated as more useful than a company’s own blog or social media profile page:

⁴⁸Harish Reddy, head, APAC, LeadFormix, quoted by AlooTechie, <http://www.alootechie.com/?q=content/linkedin-sends-more-visitors-any-other-social-media-site-b2b-websites-study>

⁴⁹<https://www.leadformix.com/social-media-for-b2b-lead-generation/sm-b2b-report.html#Data>

Usefulness of Different Social Media for Business Information



Q: How useful do you find each of the following as a resource that helps you do your job more easily and effectively? (1=Not at all Useful, 5=Very Useful)
 Source: 2009 Business.com Business Social Media Benchmarking Study (n=2,320)
 ©2009 Business.com, Inc.

(Business.com, *Business Social Media Benchmarking Study*, p. 11).⁵⁰

Few decision-makers surveyed in the Base One study (p. 7-8) see social media as a route to obtain product and pricing information, or to obtain savings, with only 2% citing these factors as benefits. Furthermore, 12% felt that information obtained through social media platforms ‘may not be reliable / trustworthy’. These results suggest that using social media as a standard marketing tool to talk about products or services is unlikely to yield significant results, because decision-makers don’t want to receive these types of messages through social media.

⁵⁰<http://www.business.com/info/business-social-media-benchmark-study>

The most effective use of social media, therefore, is to encourage independent commentators to discuss the business in a positive way through social media platforms. Of course, ultimately this can only be achieved through ensuring good customer service and a healthy relationship with audiences – especially influential bloggers. Businesses can then encourage positive discussion of their achievements by ensuring that all content posted on a business’s website and social media platforms is of high value to readers (see Section 4 for guidance on how this can be achieved).

Decision-makers want information, not interaction

Although commentators often argue that businesses must use social media in a responsive and conversational manner, only 6% of the respondents in the Base One study said ‘ability to interact’ was a benefit of social media (p. 7). Decision-makers are predominantly using social media to independently seek out information, rather than to interact with a business or with other users.

Although interaction may not directly win a sale, however, it’s important to note that a business which is successfully interacting through social media **will** improve its online corporate image. This will then serve to influence a passive audience (for example a reader who is ‘lurking’ on their blog without leaving comments, or who reads a Twitter feed without responding to Tweets).

Variation in engagement by sector

An Engagementdb study⁵¹ of the top 100 global brands found the following variation in social media engagement levels by business sector:

Figure 2: Engagement Varies by Industry



This variation highlights the need for businesses to consider the extent to which their particular audiences use social media before making decisions about whether and how to invest in this form of communication.

A sector's level of engagement is likely to be shaped by the extent to which their own customers are using social media. The section below provides a comparison of three sectors with very different attitudes towards social media use, and the implications of this for businesses who want to target these sectors with their communications.

Public sector (low but growing use, high motivation)

For many of the industries considered in this report, public sector clients form a significant part of their customer base. A major constraint to targeting public sector business decision-makers in the UK via social media is the fact that many public sector offices block social media sites. A survey of 57 public sector IT managers found that '90% of organisations restrict staff access to social media and about 67% have a total ban'.⁵²

⁵¹ http://www.engagementdb.com/downloads/ENGAGEMENTdb_Report_2009.pdf

⁵² <http://www.kable.co.uk/councils-twitter-social-media-socitm-insight-18jan10>

However, there are signs that the public sector has begun moving in the direction of wider adoption of social media for outbound communication.⁵³ There are currently 133 UK local councils on LGEO Research's list of Twitter users.⁵⁴ The public sector has a strong need to engage with social media given its cost-effectiveness, and because it can be used to gather information and opinions quickly.⁵⁵ In a 2008 survey of 61 UK local authorities, Simon Wakeman noted the following intentions with regard to future social media use:

- Podcasts – 38.2% of councils plan to use in next six months
- Video sharing websites (e.g. YouTube) – 36.8% plan to use in next six months
- Blogs – 32.9% plan to use in next six months
- Social networking (e.g. Facebook, Myspace, Bebo) – 30.3% plan to use in next six months⁵⁶

We have no updated figures to show whether this actually took place, but if the public sector has made or begins to make more use of social media to engage with constituents, it may also become more receptive to using social media as a business information tool.

Hospitality (high use, high motivation)

The hospitality industry, with its strong B2C focus, has a high motivation to engage with social media. Customers frequently discuss hotels, restaurants etc. online using social media platforms, and the industry participates in this conversation;⁵⁷ Jennifer Van Grove notes that 'the hospitality industry as a whole has embraced social media in a huge way'.⁵⁸ Sites of relevance to the hospitality industry include Facebook, Twitter, and content sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr.⁵⁹

This high level of engagement means that for industries targeting the hospitality sector, social media is likely to be a useful form of communication. Management teams in this sector are more likely to recognise the value of social media and make greater use of it than decision-makers in less engaged sectors.

Manufacturing (low use, low motivation)

Several commentators suggest that the manufacturing industry is lagging behind other sectors in its adoption of social media.⁶⁰ Unlike the public and hospitality sectors, the manufacturing industry is primarily a B2B communicator – the customers of manufacturing companies are relatively unlikely to be using social media for their business decision-making.⁶¹

⁵³ <http://www.simonwakeman.com/2009/02/25/why-local-government-shouldnt-be-on-facebook/>

⁵⁴ <http://lgeoresearch.pbworks.com/UK-Local-Councils-Twitter-List>

⁵⁵ <http://www.publictechnology.net/sector/2010-year-public-sector-adopts-social-media-conversation>

⁵⁶ <http://www.simonwakeman.com/2008/10/07/local-authorities-and-social-media-the-current-picture/>

⁵⁷ http://ehotelier.com/hospitality-news/item.php?id=A17166_0_11_0_M

⁵⁸ <http://mashable.com/2010/05/24/hospitality-social-media/>

⁵⁹ http://ehotelier.com/hospitality-news/item.php?id=A17166_0_11_0_M

⁶⁰ <http://www.frankthinking.com/manufacturing-cos-dont-need-social-media-and-the-internet/>

<http://totallyincorrect.com/2009/07/social-media-in-the-manufacturing-world/>

⁶¹ <http://totallyincorrect.com/2009/07/social-media-in-the-manufacturing-world/>

Another factor explaining the low engagement of the manufacturing industry may be the inappropriateness of social media use in a manufacturing context. As one commentator has noted (discussing Twitter):

“You'll find that it's very intrusive – not something that you want on 100% of the time. For me, it makes sense when I'm catching up on notes for the day, clearing e-mails, scheduling meetings, or other lighter work that doesn't suffer greatly from periodic chirps from my [Tweetdeck](#). It's running on the second monitor; every once in while I will glance over to scan the latest potentially valuable conversations to jump into. This scenario would never work on the manufacturing floor. There's no way the Environmental Health & Safety folks will allow anything to distract folks from completing the tasks at their workstation.”⁶²

This low level of engagement hinted at here means that business serving this sector may well need to target manufacturers using other forms of communication. However, as noted above, social media doesn't merely work as a B2B marketing tool in its own right, but also as a route to improved corporate reputation and positive discussion, and so shouldn't be abandoned altogether as a means through which to influence manufacturers.

⁶²<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/SMC/89467>

4 – The Power of Social Media in a Crisis

As most corporate communicators know, there are two parts to crisis management – the crisis and then the response. Social media is used in both – certainly by eyewitnesses to disasters as they unfold and increasingly by organisations responsible for managing the crises. The immediacy of online communication makes it a vital channel for keeping people informed of breaking news, allowing two-way interaction that can help save lives and counter incorrect speculation with accurate information. Where websites and traditional channels often fail during catastrophes, social media sites show their real power.

Positive uses of social media in crises

When a tornado ripped through Missouri in May 2011, at least 116 people were reportedly killed and the St John’s Medical Centre (SJMC) took a direct hit. The hospital’s website collapsed, so it turned to Facebook – through which hospital staff were able to respond to pleas from family members trying to locate patients by directing them to special hotline numbers. They also used it to communicate with the media and to coordinate those wishing to donate or volunteer, greatly reducing any strain on the hospital’s phone system.⁶³

Similarly, during the 2011 Brisbane Floods in Australia, Brisbane City Council’s crisis planning and familiarity with social media (it had a Social Media Officer in place) meant it was able to use Twitter and Facebook to share and manage information, and organise volunteers and residents⁶⁴ at a time when many of the city’s websites were down.

What appeared to be a heavy-handed approach by Ford in dealing with the use of the Ford logo on a fan’s website was satisfactorily resolved through use of social media.⁶⁵ Firstly, Ford’s existing engagement on various platforms meant it became aware quickly that there had been a backlash. It then corralled all information relating to the subject by creating a hashtag. Finally, it entered into proactive conversation with its detractors, updating regularly on how the issue was developing with the fan in question.

Words of warning

The BP oil leak disaster in 2010 is frequently cited as an example of how dangerous it can be not to engage with social media at the outset, or before a problem occurs. BP did not begin its social media campaign in earnest until one month after the spill was announced,⁶⁶ in spite of thousands of angry consumers venting their feelings on Twitter – writing to an account (@BP_America) BP barely used and through which it did not respond.⁶⁷

⁶³ <http://www.smich.ca/?p=297>.

⁶⁴ <http://tracywhitelaw.com/blog-tracy-whitelaw-social-media-gold-coast/social-media-in-crisis-communications-brisbane-floods>

⁶⁵ p.16 <http://www.slideshare.net/elishatan/social-media-crisis-management-three-case-studies>

⁶⁶ <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2010/06/bps-social-media-campaign-going-about-as-well-as-capping-that-well/>

⁶⁷ <http://www.kullin.net/2010/05/bp-oil-spill-and-social-media/>

In contrast, the US Coastguard posted images to its Flickr account and the US Environmental Protection Agency communicated developments through Twitter and Facebook pages. By delaying its responses through social media, BP allowed boycott groups to dominate the space and then received a backlash when it attempted heavy-handed approaches to shut down dissenting social media sites.

Social media also played a central role in the Chevron explosion at Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire in June 2011.⁶⁸ In this instance, the speed of Twitter and Facebook updates from eyewitnesses viewing the black plumes of smoke rising from the refinery meant it was a race to disseminate accurate information. The public's quick reaction allowed the local print and radio media to keep up to date, however the flip side was that unverified stories about the cause of the explosion were picked up and broadcast by TV media. This created a backlash amongst some tweeters keen to know the facts and goes to show how instant communication can spread gossip as well as truths. Practical tips for issues management using social media are contained in the Appendix.

Conclusions

We recommend that all organisations incorporate social media into their crisis PR strategy, as at least some of their stakeholders – whether direct customers, local community or consumers further down the supply chain – will be using it to form opinion. Social media is incredibly powerful and can turn a bad situation into a real opportunity to demonstrate goodwill, empathy and accountability...but it does take courage. Equally, its popularity and speed makes it risky not to engage. But be aware that relationships can't be conjured out of nothing.

When an organisation is responsible for a crisis occurring, launching a strategy cold when you're already backed into a corner is always going to have limited impact; the real benefit of engagement can be found where conversations and relationships have already been developed.

In the case of natural disasters or where there is little attributable blame for the issue, it is usually easier to set up channels quickly for the purposes of disseminating information and co-ordination of relief efforts, as many users will join in spreading the message. In times such as these, using social media platforms can not only help authorities and emergency services do their jobs better, but it can win support and respect for effective communication.

68

http://www.westerntelegraph.co.uk/news/9071492.Chevron_explosion_How_social_media_played_its_role_as_drama_unfolded/

5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

We've found that while PR and marketing specialists in our sectors of interest are highly motivated to use social media, generally they currently lack a strategic approach to this form of communication. This section aims to provide guidance in developing a good social media strategy.

The three key findings of this report with regard to best practice are:

- The key goal for communicators using social media should be to influence what **other people** are saying about their business. These independent third parties are the conduit to potential business customers. Trying to use social media to directly influence potential prospects is less likely to succeed.
- Achieving a profitable social media presence is therefore a **two stage process** – firstly you produce engaging content and interact effectively with readers and viewers. Then you reap the reputation and revenue benefits of the resultant positive third-party commentary produced by these readers and viewers – these third parties are the conduit to your business customers.
- An important outcome of this argument is that social media is a tool for **in-bound**, not out-bound marketing. Businesses using social media to spam contacts with unresponsive marketing messages will lose them as advocates.

Which platform to use, and how?

As noted in Section 2, our survey indicates that using social media platforms could help businesses in our sectors of interest achieve their communications goals in ways that traditional media cannot. Furthermore, all the platforms considered in this report are extremely straightforward and easy to use.

People have always talked to each other about businesses. The development of the communications tools considered in this report simply makes it easier for people to talk to each other, and easier for businesses to join in the discussion. Each platform may or may not prove useful to a business depending on the relevance of the particular functions to a business's communications strategy, and the patterns of use among their audiences.

If you are wondering which of these platforms might be useful to you, a quick and simple experiment may help your decision. Make a list of the last 10 key business contacts that you have developed a relationship with and search for them on the platforms below. Look at whether and how they are using the platform. If they are using it for business purposes, it is likely to be a sensible place for you to communicate.

Benefits of the Platforms

Using **LinkedIn** is like attending a conference. Participating in an in-depth group discussion on LinkedIn may not lead directly to a sale, and it won't immediately spread a message to a large number of people, but it can be a way of impressing people to the point that they will make a note of a contact for future reference, or recommend them to a friend. Users should create a profile which demonstrates dependability and value, join relevant groups, participate intelligently in discussion, and ask and answer questions.

More recently, the function added to LinkedIn that allows questions to be answered could add another dimension of 'usefulness' to business communities. This is the same for **Quora** – positioning your business or your experts as helpful, open, dispensing free advice in areas of specialism is a wonderful way to build reputation.

In contrast to LinkedIn, using **Twitter** is like holding a press conference. Users won't achieve the same depth of interaction with their audience as they do through LinkedIn, but it is possible to reach far more people. Audiences will judge a business according to how well they participate in the public conversations they have through the platform.

Businesses should ensure that they have a clear Twitter strategy to avoid proliferation of uncoordinated accounts, which can prove frustrating for potential followers⁶⁹ (see 'tips' section below for an example of how to design social media guidelines). They should also ensure that Tweets are as 'personal' as possible, and that they are tailored and timed effectively. For example, Adam Holden-Bache recommends that Twitter users 'note the time of day and day of the week where the most activity is taking place for [a particular] keyword/phrase' and then 'write tweets with those keywords/phrases in the copy and schedule them to be delivered at the most popular times'.⁷⁰ Some websites like [TwitCleaner](#) recommend a healthy balance of original content with and without links, conversations and retweets to keep followers engaged.

Facebook could be a waste of time and energy for businesses whose audiences do not use the platform, or only use it to communicate with family and friends. Furthermore, this overlap means businesses risk PR crises when personal and business interaction is not kept sufficiently separate among their own staff.

Facebook can, however, be a useful internal communications tool, and having a Facebook page may also contribute to search engine optimisation (as with the other social media tools considered here). It will also be helpful for companies selling something popular or topical, such as green energy technologies or services.

⁶⁹ http://www.burson-marsteller.com/Innovation_and_insights/blogs_and_podcasts/BM_Blog/Documents/Burson-Marsteller%202010%20Global%20Social%20Media%20Check-up%20white%20paper.pdf p. 10.

⁷⁰ <http://socialmediab2b.com/2010/05/b2b-twitter-audience/#ixzz0y683sFO0>

If a business does choose to use Facebook, it is essential to have a clear set of usage guidelines. Business pages should be regularly updated with interesting content. If your Facebook page attracts few 'likes' or you cannot keep it regularly updated with relevant content the best option is to delete it to avoid giving a negative impression of your organisation.

Using **SlideShare** is an easy way of adding value to effort already expended on writing conference presentations etc. Uploading valuable content is a relatively easy way to demonstrate expertise. Content should be publicised through other platforms such as a business website and social media pages, as users may not find it independently.

YouTube can also be a useful platform for businesses which can convey their message visually – certainly the case for many construction and environmental services. Using video and other multi-media will also promote discussion and referencing by third parties. Having your own channel – easy to set up on the site – will lead viewers to more of your content, and films are easy to embed on your website.

Blogs are a good way to attract more visitors to a business website and demonstrate thought leadership. They are also a way to create content and news, which can then be promoted through other social media routes like Twitter. Like all platforms, they require commitment – without regular updates of valuable content, readers will lose interest. One route to openness and associated credibility is to open up company blogs to external contributors, as practiced by SAP⁷¹ and Kniaxis⁷² in their online communities.

Wikipedia is a 'must' – provided you have an ability to back up what you are saying about your business with third party references and can add other non-commercial dimensions that create value for the reader.

Finally, we recommend that organisations incorporate social media into their crisis PR strategy. Social media is incredibly powerful and can turn a bad situation into a real opportunity to demonstrate goodwill, empathy and accountability. But do note that social media conversations are better established in advance of a crisis occurring, especially with a fault-based crisis where relationships are paramount; this is opposed to, for example, a natural disaster, where mechanisms can be set up quickly and easily for the purposes of disseminating information and co-ordination.

Overall, successful use of all social media depends on authentic and useful content. Its transparency and speed of action make it an incredibly powerful double-edged sword, and any campaign using social media platforms cynically or in a devious way usually end up backfiring...⁷³

⁷¹http://www.engagementdb.com/downloads/ENGAGEMENTdb_Report_2009.pdf

⁷²<http://www.fastcompany.com/1665075/the-definitive-case-for-b2b-social-media-marketing>

⁷³<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/8512730/Facebook-sparks-open-warfare-in-dotcom-land.html>

Appendix: Tried and tested tips

Guidelines

For businesses developing their first social media strategy, looking at guidelines such as those published by IBM may be a useful starting point:

'IBM Social Computing Guidelines: Executive Summary

1. Know and follow IBM's [Business Conduct Guidelines](#).
2. IBMers are personally responsible for the content they publish on blogs, wikis or any other form of user-generated media. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time—protect your privacy.
3. Identify yourself—name and, when relevant, role at IBM—when you discuss IBM or IBM-related matters. And write in the first person. You must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of IBM.
4. If you publish content to any website outside of IBM and it has something to do with work you do or subjects associated with IBM, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent IBM's positions, strategies or opinions."
5. Respect copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws.
6. Don't provide IBM's or another's confidential or other proprietary information. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to IBM.
7. Don't cite or reference clients, partners or suppliers without their approval. When you do make a reference, where possible link back to the source.
8. Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in IBM's workplace. You should also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory—such as politics and religion.
9. Find out who else is blogging or publishing on the topic, and cite them.
10. Be aware of your association with IBM in online social networks. If you identify yourself as an IBMer, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and clients.
11. Don't pick fights, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so.
12. Try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. IBM's brand is best represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on IBM's brand.'⁷⁴

⁷⁴<http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>

Measurement

It is important to establish clear and measurable objectives for social media use. Dell (often acknowledged as a highly successful business social media user)⁷⁵ provides the following advice on measurement:⁷⁶

GETTING STARTED

When implementing a social media campaign, measurement should not be an afterthought; it should be considered in the initial strategy. Here are some tips for getting started:

- **Establish measurable objectives for your company's social media initiative.** For example, an objective might be to increase positive brand mentions online by 25 percent, to drive a 10 percent increase in traffic to the company Web site in a given timeframe or to get people to share their e-mail addresses.
- **Utilize an analytics program to measure on-site activity.** With a free program such as [Google Analytics](#), for example, you can track the following information on an easy-to-read measurement "dashboard":
 - Number of Web site visits
 - Number of pageviews
 - Length of time on the Web site
 - Top traffic sources
 - Top performing keywords
 - Top performing content
 - Conversions, or specific on-site actions that you specify as "goals." For example, a conversion might be a customer completing an online form to receive more information from your company.
- **Measure engagement with your company blog.** You can measure the average number of comments left on each blog post. At Dell, we call this the "conversation index." If you use [Wordpress](#) or [Blogger](#) publishing software, you will find this number on the administrative dashboard.
- **Track off-site activity as well.** Your Web site is only one part of the digital ecosystem, and there is a lot more that you can measure, including:
 - Number of mentions about your company online. You can find this using [Technorati](#) or [Google Blog Search](#).
 - Tonality of mentions about your company online. The free monitoring tools do not indicate tonality of mentions (i.e., positive, negative or neutral). You can measure this through the manual process of reviewing and scoring each post, or you can utilize a subscription-based tool such as Visible Technologies' [TruCast](#).
 - Placement of your content (e.g., videos, photos, etc.) on other Web sites. Tracking photos and videos is not always easy - especially if you don't know where to look for them. Some paid analytics solutions, such as those provided by [Orniture](#), are starting to do this well.
 - Ranking of your Web site in search engines for commonly searched keywords. Search Engine Optimization is a science in and of itself. For more on SEO strategies for small businesses, visit <http://www.searchengineguide.com>. [Mack Collier](#) is one of the most influential small business bloggers and shares valuable insights on both SEO and social media.
 - Ranking of your blog by [Technorati.com](#). Technorati is a leading authority on social media influence, so it's a good idea to track how your blog moves up or down in its ranking.

⁷⁵ http://www.engagementdb.com/downloads/ENGAGEMENTdb_Report_2009.pdf

⁷⁶ http://www.slideshare.net/kara_atDELL/measure-your-online-success-social-media-guide

Practical tips to using social media in crisis communications

- **Assemble a team to manage your social media platform** – it’s imperative that you and your colleagues know each others’ skills in advance of a crisis, so you can react quickly and with confidence.⁷⁷ Consider nominating a ‘face’ for the crisis, typically the CEO in major disasters.
- **Make use of free listening tools** like [SocialMention](#), [SiteMention](#), or employ a paid service like [Radian6](#). This means you can keep abreast of the sentiments being posted about your company and engage with them to give the correct information.⁷⁸
- **Build relationships via social media before a crisis hits** – it is easier to forgive a friend than a stranger when mistakes happen.⁷⁹
- **Use Facebook Notes** when 420 characters aren’t enough – you can then link directly to the note from your Twitter account.⁸⁰
- **Set up Twitter lists** containing credible and authoritative sources discussing the topic as it unfolds (see Brisbane City Council’s set-up of QLD Floods List during the Brisbane floods of 2011⁸¹).
- **Create Hashtags** – these are vital in collating information on a subject and for keeping an eye on discussions about your company. Brisbane City Council created the #bncleanup hashtag that coordinated volunteers to clean up after the floods – it reached over 1.5 million people.⁸²
- **Encourage your followers/fans to retweet/repost** to spread your messages virally as fast and wide as possible.
- **Respond quickly to comments** – social media is all about engagement and people, and keeping quiet can signal a half-hearted commitment to listen, which in turn can create a backlash. Silence also allows misinformation to spread.

⁷⁷ p.10 <http://www.slideshare.net/elishatan/social-media-crisis-management-three-case-studies>

⁷⁸ P.17 *as above*

⁷⁹ p. 9 *as above*

⁸⁰ <http://tracywhitelaw.com/blog-tracy-whitelaw-social-media-gold-coast/social-media-in-crisis-communications-brisbane-floods>

⁸¹ *as above*

⁸² *as above*



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