

THE SOCIAL NETWORKING REPORT

A study into what business men and women really think about social networking and some observations on the evolving conventions of social networking etiquette



Produced by: The Counsel House
and Pilotmax PR



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INTRODUCTION

Whenever you are invited to become someone's friend or contact on a social networking site like Facebook or LinkedIn does your heart sink?

If you've never been quite sure how to respond other than to say 'yes', then this report is for you. The Counsel House and Pilotmax PR thought we would stir up a debate and ask the question:

Is social networking just a flash in the pan indulged in by the under 30s or is it a serious communication platform which is here to stay?

We asked a number of colleagues and clients to participate in a pilot study on the subject run by the internet-based survey company Benchpoint. In total, 164 respondents took part in the study, the findings of which form the basis of this report. We also undertook some desk research and carried out a number of qualitative interviews with colleagues and clients, some of whom were clearly in the know about social networking, for some insights into what makes for good social networking etiquette.

We do not purport to be social networking experts, but we do know about communications and PR having been in the business for over twenty years. Social networking is a relatively new medium and, as such, one which communications professionals should be evaluating and assessing on a continuous basis.

This is our first report on the subject. We hope you find it an interesting and informative read.

Robin Swinbank
Managing Partner
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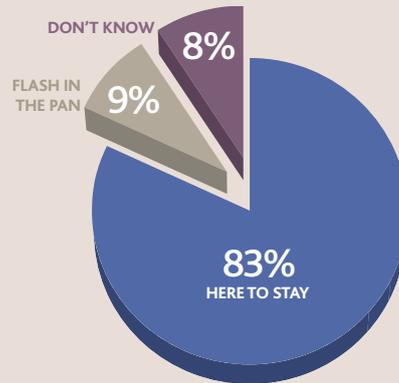
Jane Herbert
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Pilotmax

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

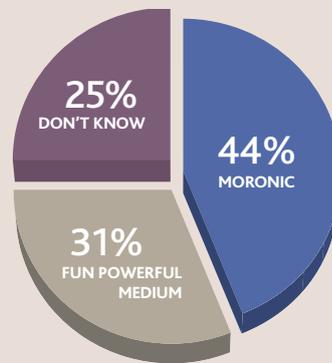
- **Social networking is here to stay:** This is the firm opinion of virtually all the respondents polled for this study. The vast majority (83%) said that they think that social networking is here to stay compared to only nine per cent who thought it a flash in the pan indulged in by the under 30s.
- **Business opinion is divided on the value of 'tweeting':** Nearly half of all respondents (44%) agreed with the statement that twittering can be a 'moronic' form of communication compared to 31 per cent who would describe it as a 'fun and powerful' communication medium. A quarter (25%) either didn't know or didn't have an opinion on this.
- **Blogging works:** Nearly three quarters of those polled (71%) say that blogging provides an effective new medium to communicate with a wider audience whilst less than one in five (16%) say that it is simply shouting into the ether.
- **Having a social network profile boosts business prospects:** Just over half the respondents polled (51%) think that publishing a profile on social networking sites can help develop new contacts and win new business whilst less than a quarter (23%) say that it is a waste of time in this respect.
- **Opinion is split on whether profiles boost or harm career prospects:** Attitudes are more divided with regards to social networking and career prospects. Just over a third (34%) say it can improve work and career prospects whilst 30 per cent think that it can actually put your career prospects at risk. Over a third (36%) said that they don't know.
- **Facebook is the most highly rated site:** Facebook was both the most widely used and highly rated of the six sites listed in the survey amongst our respondents who were asked which sites they used and to rate key social networking sites (marking between 1 and 5, with 1 = not very good and 5 = very good).
- **How the sites were ranked:** Facebook was used by 72 per cent of the respondents in the survey and was rated, on average, 2.86 as a favourite site on the 1-5 scale. The next most popular and highly rated was LinkedIn used by 59 per cent of respondents and rated 2.03 and then Twitter used by 46 per cent and rated 1.3 on the 1-5 scale.

THE SURVEY FINDINGS IN FULL:

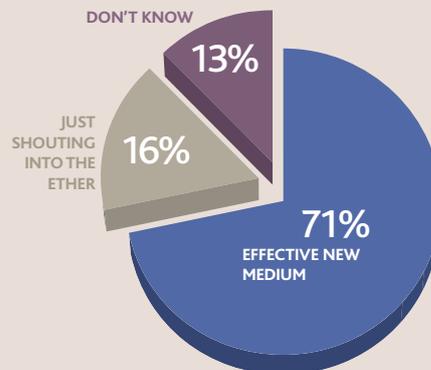
Is social networking just a flash in the pan indulged in by the under 30s or is it a serious communication platform which is here to stay?



Respondents were asked in their view if 'tweeting' is, as described by one commentator, 'a fun and powerful new medium' or if it can be, as described by another, a truly 'moronic' form of communication?



Does blogging provide an effective new medium to communicate to a wider audience or is it just a way of shouting into the ether?



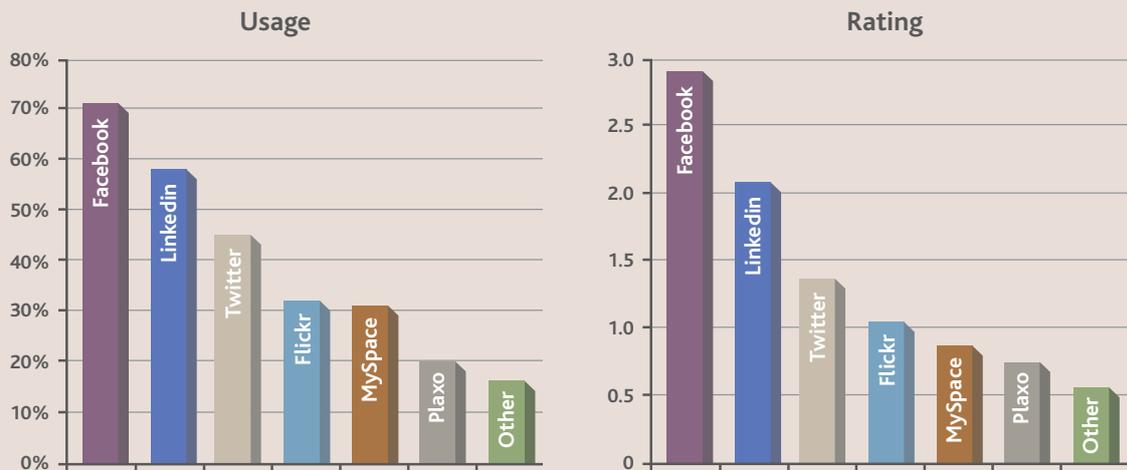
Does having a profile on social networking site help you to develop new contacts and win new business or is it just a waste of time?



Can having a profile on social networking sites actually improve your work and career prospects or is it likely to put this at risk?



Which social networking sites do you use and how well do you rate them?



THE BRIEF, BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

- Although social networking has its roots in sites like Friends Reunited, officially launched in July 2000, and services like MSN Messenger, the medium is still really only just a decade old.
- Early runners in the market, My Space and Bebo, launched in 2003 and 2005 respectively. By August 2006, My Space had 100 million users whilst in 2008 AOL purchased Bebo for \$850 million. Two years on, and AOL has just announced it plans to sell or shutdown Bebo.
- Market leader, Facebook, only celebrated its sixth birthday on 4th February this year. It already has some 400 millions users worldwide and has a market value recently estimated by BusinessWeek at between \$3.75 billion and \$5 billion.
- In October 2003, its founder, Mark Zuckerberg, then a university undergraduate at Harvard, was blogging about a girl who had dumped him on a campus site called Facemash. Zuckerman is now reputed to be the youngest ever self-made billionaire.
- Twitter, founded in 2006, already has some 50 million monthly visitors. In the first three months of 2010, over four billion 'tweets' were posted worldwide. To date, the firm is already said to have attracted over \$57 million from various investors.
- LinkedIn, launched in May 2003, has over 60 million registered users worldwide (11 million of these are based in Europe) and, following an acquisition of a five per cent shareholding by various investors in June 2008, it has an estimated market value of \$1 billion.



OBSERVATIONS ON SOME DEVELOPING TRENDS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING ETIQUETTE

There are no hard and fast rules as to how to behave on social media websites, but there are already some widely-accepted conventions that anyone new to social networking should be aware of which will help avoid gaffes and embarrassing mistakes.

The ten easy-to-make faux pas of social networking are:

- 1 Hovering** In social networking land, it is considered very bad form to hover above and try to look into the social networking activity of subordinates and juniors at work. Senior managers should be wary about asking junior colleagues if they can become their friends on sites like Twitter and Facebook. They might find that these sites are already being used as a forum for complaining about work and bosses. To avoid embarrassment, always wait to be invited to join social networks rather than insist on it.
- 2 Overfriending** The cardinal sin of social networking is inviting every Tom, Dick, Harry, Sally, et al who you have ever met in your life to become your friend just so that you can boast about the number of friends you have on your social networking sites. Likewise, confronting people who either don't want to become friends or who do not respond to requests to become friends is considered to be particularly poor form. Avoid, at all costs, the temptation to hassle people to be your friend as this may cause offence and lead to the reputation of being a social networking pest.
- 3 Career-risking** Be wary of putting anything up on a social networking site that, if seen by the wrong person, especially a prospective or existing employer, could harm your career prospects. There are numerous recent examples of this happening. For example, a primary head teacher was recently sacked when rather raunchy pictures of her social life appeared on Facebook. A number of cabin crew of a major airline also lost their jobs after posting inappropriate jokes about their employer on Facebook. Jokes made references to the airline passengers as 'chavs' and wrongly implied some of the airline's planes were infested with cockroaches.
- 4 Mixing business with pleasure** Use the right social networks for work and pleasure and try to avoid mixing the two together. Convention is to use LinkedIn for business and Facebook for socialising. Unless done extremely well, using Facebook as a platform to pitch your business to your friends may be considered very bad form, whereas on LinkedIn this practice may be considered the norm. Facebook can be a powerful business platform, but it requires extreme tact and may only be appropriate for certain kinds of business.

OBSERVATIONS ON SOME DEVELOPING TRENDS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING ETIQUETTE

5 Exposing too much of yourself Not setting the correct privacy options may undermine the user's right to privacy. This was the recent warning issued by computer scientist and philosopher Dr Kieron O'Hara of the University of Southampton who said: "Users of new media, in their self disclosure, are often as complicit in their assaults on our privacy as the authorities which orchestrate their surveillance." The sharing of intimate details and photos on websites could damage relationships.

6 Love life boasting Social networkers who put their relationship status online can find themselves very red-faced when their partners appear to dump them online. The best advice is to avoid posting any relationship status online.

7 Kidding Lying, dissembling or tricking the online community is possibly the greatest cardinal sin of all. Using fake names on social networking sites, sending out hoax messages and sending email chains are all deeply unpopular habits among the social networking community.

8 Over social networking if you are on all the social networking sites and not sleeping in case you think your social networking friends might think you are rude for not responding, then get a life. Likewise, if you are in perpetual contact and lengthy exchanges with people you will never meet, you might want to ask yourself 'are you speaking to the right people?'



9 Drinking and driving Don't drink and drive and likewise never social network when under the influence of alcohol. Many people have learned to their cost that irony is a very fickle mistress when it comes to social networking. What might seem funny in the small hours of the morning whilst drinking a glass or two of wine and posting messages online might appear badly out of place in the morning.

10 Twitnergriefing Trying to express sincere emotion in 140 characters or less, when expressing a sentiment which maybe better expressed in more traditional ways (sometimes called Twitnergrief), tests the appropriateness of the medium to the emotion. There is a growing trend for a huge outpouring of online grief whenever a young celebrity dies. However, when the American socialite and heiress Casey Johnson died, the online outpouring of love and friendship contrasted sharply with the fact that Johnson's body had lain undiscovered for three days, demonstrating, as the Evening Standard reported at the time, that 'virtual friendship is no substitute for the real thing'.

METHODOLOGY

- The survey was carried out online using for internet survey company Benchpoint between December 2009 and February 2010.
- A total of 164 respondents participated in the study, of which 61 per cent were female and 39 per cent male.
- The breakdown in age was: 40 per cent were aged over 45, 43 per cent were aged between 31 and 45 and 16 per cent were aged 18 – 30.
- In employment terms, 52 per cent were in full time employment, 31 per cent were self employed and the rest were either part time, a student, unemployed, a housewife/husband or retired.
- 74 per cent worked in the private sector, nine per cent in the voluntary sector, seven per cent in the public sector and the rest were either working in 'none of the above' or were in fulltime education.
- Geographically, 56 per cent lived in London and the South, 23 per cent outside the UK, 12 per cent in the South West, and the rest throughout the UK.

About The Counsel House:

The Counsel House is an independent network of freelance consultants which specialises in providing interim management services to corporate, public and voluntary sector clients.

About Pilotmax PR:

Pilotmax is an independently-owned public relations company focused on producing effective and measurable results that positively change and sustain its clients' reputations.

About Benchpoint:

Benchpoint is an advanced system for employee and online surveys which delivers fully analysed results in real time.

www.benchpoint.com

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