



How Companies Are Using Social Media Tools to Build Connections

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media is quickly changing how organizations operate and communicate. Businesses of all kinds are looking for ways to seize advantage in this emerging era marked by greater immediacy, interactivity and transparency. As this change unfolds, there is a great deal of information available on how companies are using social media externally to build their brands and forge relationships with customers. However, little insight exists on how organizations are using social media internally to communicate with and engage employees to drive business results. Bridge Consulting, in partnership with Melcrum, a leading professional organization for communicators, conducted a study to shed much-needed light on this subject.

METHODOLOGY

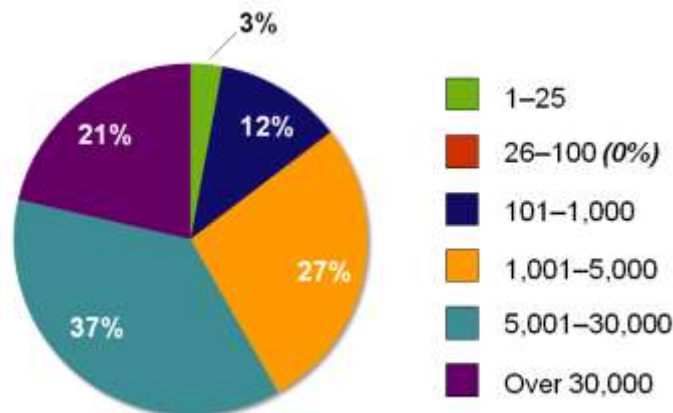
Bridge Consulting conducted a survey in August, 2009 to explore how organizations are using social media tools internally to communicate with and engage employees. The objectives of the survey were to:

- Assess the degree to which organizations are currently using social media tools internally
- Identify the primary challenges related to implementing social media tools internally, and how those challenges are being address
- Understand what tools are being used, and their primary purpose

The survey was administered to communication professionals via email, with 128 North America-based organizations across a variety of industries responding. There were also 16 follow-up interviews with respondents to probe their responses more deeply and to gather stories regarding how they are using social media in their organizations.

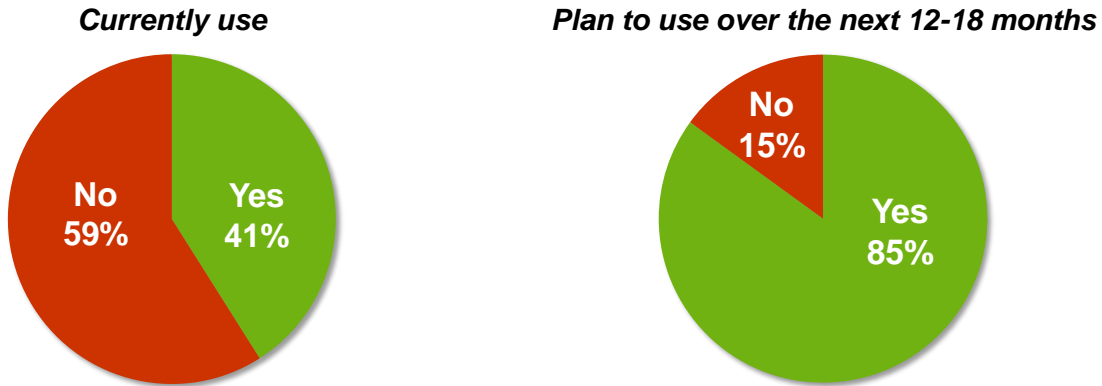
ORGANIZATION SIZE

The size of the responding organizations ranged from less than 25 employees to over 30,000 employees, with 85% of organizations with over 1,000 employees and 21% of respondents with organizations over 30,000 employees.



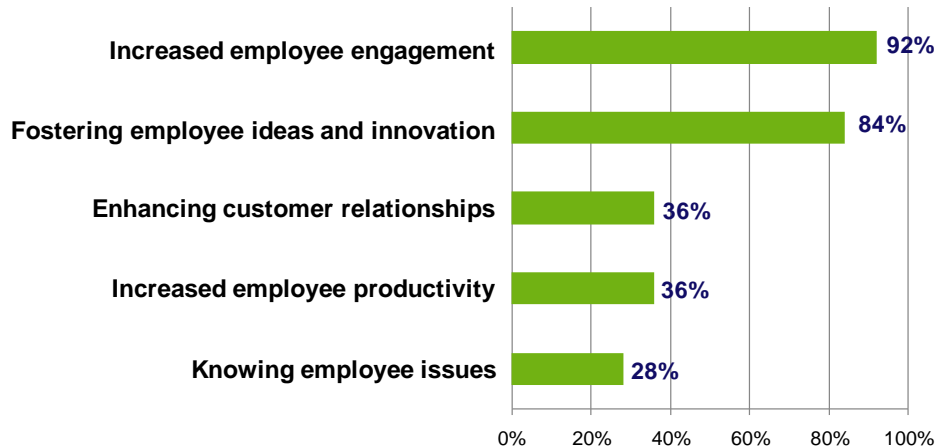
CURRENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

Social media tools are not currently being used internally by the majority of organizations, but it appears that this is about to change. While less than half (41%) of respondents are using social media tools internally now, 85% of them plan to begin using them over the next 12–18 months.



BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE

About half (47%) of organizations currently using social media internally created a business case to get buy-in from key stakeholders in their organizations. The most common elements used to make the case were *increasing employee engagement* and *fostering employee ideas and innovation*. The chart below lists the top five elements cited as part of the business case, showing the percentage of respondents who identified each one.



Some participants who didn't make a formal business case say that they were able to introduce tools into their organizations as a pilot with a small group of employees to test the tools, address any challenges that arose, and generate organizational buy-in to expand the usage of social media to the rest of the employee population. This was especially effective in companies where there was some initial hesitation to use the tools because of perceived

challenges related to Legal or HR concerns or the availability of bandwidth or technology to support the usage of the tools.

TOP CHALLENGES TO ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

Legal/HR concerns, getting employees to participate, and corporate culture are among the top challenges to adopting social media. The chart below shows these and other challenges expressed by survey respondents.

Not Using Social Media	% indicating challenge	Using Social Media	% indicating challenge
Legal/HR Concerns	61%	Getting employee participation	53%
Corporate Culture	58%	Legal/HR Concerns	43%
Lack of IT Support	48%	Corporate Culture	51%
Leadership Team Does Not Support	38%	Difficult to Establish Return on Investment	33%
Difficult to Establish Return on Investment	34%	Lack of IT Support	33%

Let's examine some of these top challenges in more detail:

Legal/HR Concerns

One of the key concerns in this area was about the security of confidential company information in terms of the sharing of sensitive documents and the nature of employee discussions using social media tools. This was a particular concern for companies in highly-regulated industries, such as financial services, where there are specific rules about what can and cannot be shared externally.

A survey participant in the aerospace industry addressed this challenge by creating a group of stakeholders, (including representatives from legal, global commerce, HR, supply chain, etc.). This group spent three days together at an offsite with the goal of creating a social media policy for the organization. The group conducted a risk and benefits analysis for each new media tool, discussed countermeasures to balance the risk based on employee education, and achieved the objective of the meeting.

For organizations that operate in multiple countries, there is another layer of legal complexity that needs to be addressed with regard to ensuring that country-specific workplace regulations are being adhered to with the use of social media.

Employee Adoption

Even in organizations that enjoyed higher employee adoption rates with regard to social media, participants spoke of the generation gap of users, with younger employees embracing and even expecting social media tools, while older employees (including leadership) were less comfortable with social media tools and less likely to perceive their value.

To address this issue, one communicator in a Financial Services organization with an older employee population said that as part of her education campaign around social media, she avoided words like “blogs,” “wikis,” or “social media,” and instead focused the discussion on these tools as resources for collaboration and two-way communication. She believed that keeping the discussion focused on benefits rather than the buzzwords made employees more receptive to using the new tools.

Another barrier to employee adoption in many organizations is the initial reluctance of employees to actively participate in discussions using social media tools, because of fear of repercussions or embarrassment.

Interviewees who have been using social media tools the longest said that they saw participation build over time, and encouraged others to be patient and demonstrate that there will be no negative effects for employees who ask tough questions. Participants also believe that the more effort leaders make to tackle difficult issues in straightforward, authentic way without spin, the more trust is generated between leadership and employees, which in turns helps facilitate more two-way discussion.

Corporate Culture

One of the primary challenges related to company culture is that leaders in many organizations have yet to be convinced of the value of social media, and they question whether the use of social media tools will adversely impact employee productivity. In addition, organizations that rely heavily on top-down communication find it more challenging to implement social media tools, which rely heavily on employee participation and interaction.

Organizations that have successfully overcome these issues say that it is critical to connect the use of social media to measurable business objectives and needs.

For example, a utility company was able to introduce Executive and Manager videocasts by connecting them to the need for employees to better understand the

business strategy. This organization was also able to show a significant cost savings by using streaming video of taped broadcasts as opposed to live satellite broadcasts.

In addition, many companies who take the time to educate leaders about the value of social media have been successful with creating buy-in to the concept. One financial services organization we spoke with introduced Executive blogging as a response to the results of their employee survey, which showed a low level of trust due partially to a lack of leadership visibility. Before launching the blogs, all 11 members of the executive team went through a workshop about effective blogging. These leaders rotate accountabilities for writing the blog, with each executive emphasizing a different aspect of their business strategy.

Lack of IT Support

The lack of an IT infrastructure and staff support to effectively introduce social media tools is a real barrier for organizations.

Under “Building the Business Case” on page 3, we addressed how organizations are using small pilot groups to test social media tools and generate organizational buy-in. Piloting social media tools is also a way that survey participants who faced IT infrastructure and staff support challenges have tested the technologies to better understand the resources needed to sustain the tools. Subsequently, the piloted tools were often expanded more broadly to employees.

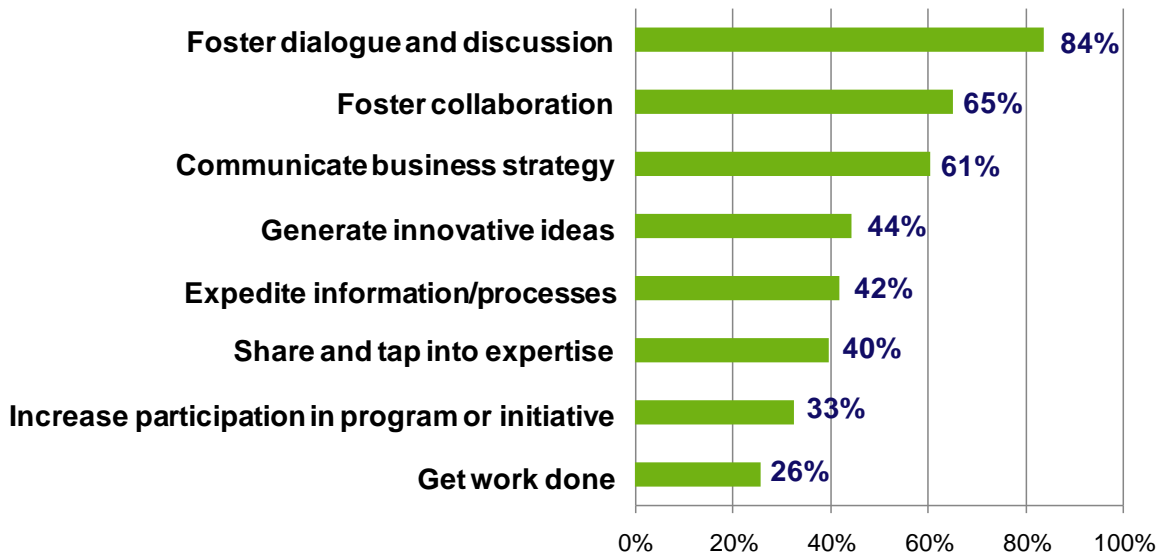
MOST COMMONLY USED TOOLS AND USES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Although participants reported a wide variety of social media tools currently used in their organizations, blogs and videocasts are the most commonly used tools, while instant messaging, videocasts and internal social networks are the tools attracting the most users.

Top Social Media Tools Used
1. Senior leader blogs
2. Videocasts
3. Blogs by and for employees
4. Discussion boards/instant messaging/wikis

Social Media Tools Attracting the Most Users
1. Instant messaging
2. Videocasts
3. Internal social networks
4. Text messaging
5. Discussion boards

Fostering employee dialogue and collaboration and communicating the business strategy are the primary objectives for those using social media. These and a variety of additional objectives are shown below.



Let's examine some specific examples of how organizations are using social media to achieve some of these objectives:

Companies are fostering dialogue and collaboration through the use of discussion boards, wikis, and comments on articles and videocasts. In some cases, these discussions are helping to spawn micro-communities within the organization. One organization that employs a great deal of scientists and engineers has a number of discussion boards that revolve around specific scientific topics. The response to these boards has been so great that many of the participants have formed their own communities to continue to discuss topics of interest to them.

Using social media to generate conversations and collaboration related to business objectives has also been tremendously successful in many organizations. For example, a utility company launched a new values program that connected the values with business objectives. To facilitate the launch, a website was created that asked employees to offer ideas and questions about the values, and it became the most popular site in the organization with over 20,000 subscribers. In addition, the organization was able to use the employee stories and questions in their communication about the program throughout the year.

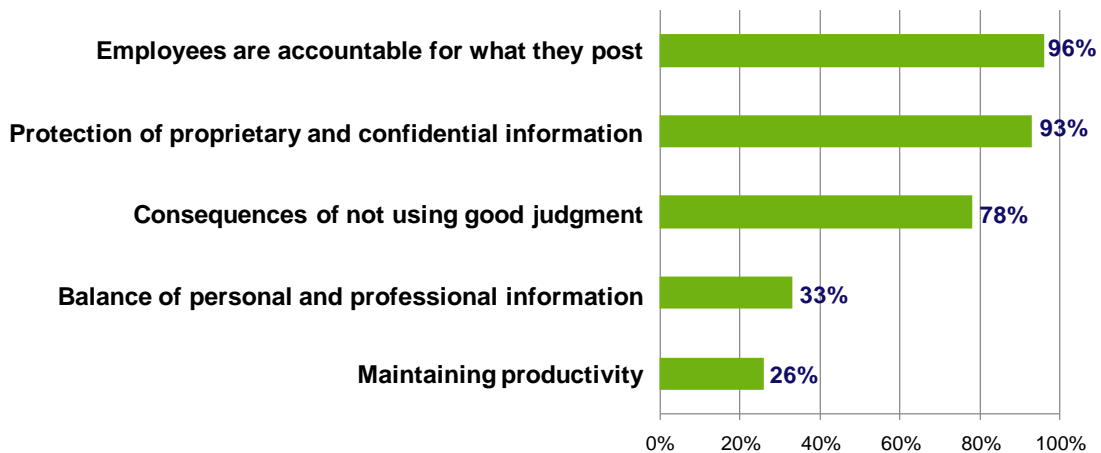
Another senior communicator in a Financial Services/Real Estate organization uses video to facilitate dialogue between employees and leaders. Employees submit questions to their CEO using video in creative and fun ways. For example, a couple of

employees asked about the organization's green initiative from the roof of a building, and another asked about the company's global business strategy while spinning a globe. The CEO then creates a video responding to the questions and then employees are invited to comment on the issues using the discussion board. The communicator who shared this story believes that the casual, YouTube-type approach also helps make employees more comfortable with asking questions and participating in conversations with executives.

One large holding company used social media in a creative way to generate participation in the company wellness program. A website was set up that discussed healthy food choices and the value of fitness and included an eight-week "Wellness Challenge" that encourages employees to "walk across the country" virtually. Employees enter their food choices and workouts, and the program converts the information into "steps" across the country. This has generated a great deal of healthy competition and employees have formed teams to complete the walk. Throughout the campaign, one of the business leaders in the company adopted the name "Willie Wellness" and posted videos on YouTube talking about the campaign and employee progress, with one of the clips even featuring him running up the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum to the tune of Rocky.

GOVERNANCE

63% of organizations have developed social media policies. The most common issues addressed are *holding employees accountable for what they post*, the *protection of proprietary and confidential information*, and the *consequences of not using good judgment*. These and additional issues identified are shown below, with the percentage of survey respondents who selected each one.

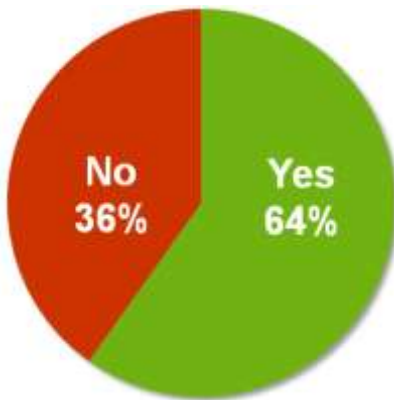


Although Corporate Communications were the most common “owners” of the social media policy in their organizations, it was often developed in collaboration with other representatives from Legal, IT and HR. Companies also spoke of the need to be flexible in the development and execution of their policies, and in the need to change the policies as needs arise. For example, when an employee posted a pro-union comment in on organization, the policy was revised to state that the discussion boards were not to be used to express opinions about politics or group affiliations.

MONITORING EXTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

64% of respondents monitor social media sites, but only about a quarter of them respond to comments about the organization.

Monitor social media sites



Respond to comments about the organization



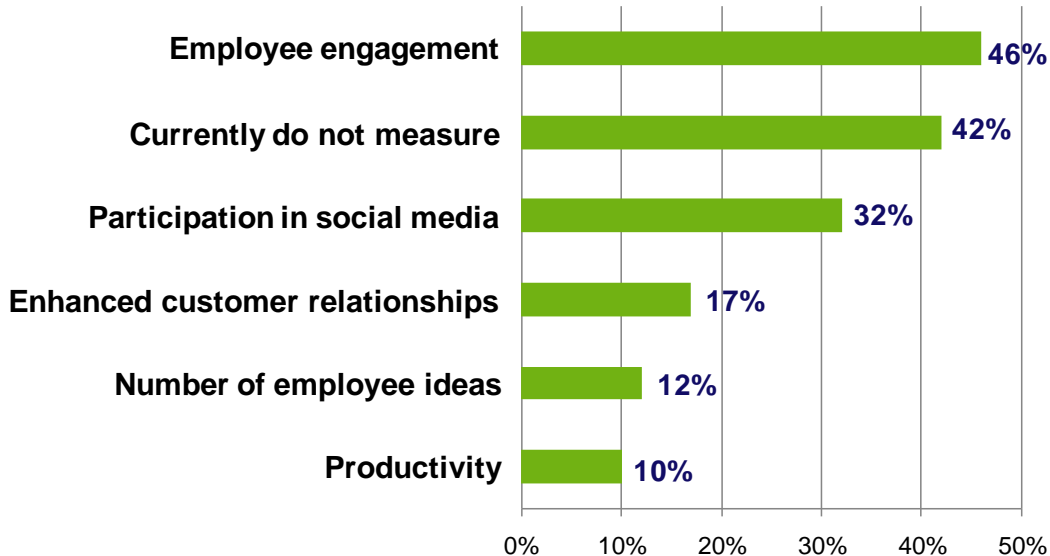
Even organizations that are not currently using social media tools internally are finding that employees are forming communities through tools such as Facebook and Twitter outside the organization.

A large retail organization, for example, found about 500 employee groups on Facebook that were not sponsored by the company. One group was even dedicated to employees’ cutest kids. The challenge for this organization is to determine whether they want to create a company-sanctioned group for employees to join, and whether employees would join. Another global mail company has a significant employee population that does not have access to computers during work hours, and they have found that Facebook is a good tool for reaching these employees.

The question for companies now is to what extent they want to become part of the conversation that their employees are already having about the organization.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

58% of respondents currently measure the effectiveness of social media, and *employee engagement* and *participation in social media* are the primary metrics used. These and other methods cited are shown below.



Many participants acknowledged that it is somewhat difficult to make the direct correlation between engagement and social media tools. They believe, however, that the use of these tools has a positive impact on organizational trust, two-way communication, and effective collaboration, all of which are drivers of engagement. Some participants also believe that productivity is positively impacted through the use of social media tools, pointing to examples such as organizational wikis for document policy changes collaboratively and team sites where people discuss issues and address challenges as ways to save time.

LESSONS LEARNED

In the survey and interviews, we asked respondents who were successfully using social media internally to share stories and lessons learned based on their experience. The following are some of the key learnings they shared:

- Be patient—It takes time to gain momentum
- Start small and pilot first to address issues early and capitalize on early successes
- Be honest, transparent, and willing to address the tough issues to build trust
- Trust your employees
- Make it business-focused
- Find a way to work together across the organization to make the implementation of social media happen
- Speed up response time—two days is too long in the world of social media



SOCIAL MEDIA WORKSHOP

Bridge Consulting offers a workshop on **Harnessing the Power of Social Media**.

The use of social media within organizations can help employees collaborate, innovate and communicate more effectively. The key is to incorporate social media tools and tactics into a broader employee communication and engagement strategy focused on achieving business results.

In this highly interactive four-hour workshop, participants will learn, through exercises, research and real-world examples, how to harness the power of social media and connect it to business objectives. Specifically, participants will learn about:

- ▶ **The current state of social media** – Get the latest research and hear stories about how organizations are successfully using social media internally
- ▶ **Organizational readiness** – Assess the degree to which social media should be used within your organization and how it fits with other communication methods
- ▶ **The basics** – Explore the most widely used tools, understand their common uses, and weigh the pros and cons of using each of them
- ▶ **The strategic fit** – Ensure that your social media approach is part of a holistic communication and engagement strategy and aligns with organizational goals

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