



Social Media Use in the Industrial Sector



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Executive Summary

Social media is an increasingly important business asset that can help your organization deliver content as well as be discovered by and engage with your target audiences online. Research shows that industrial professionals continue to adopt social media tools for work-related purposes such as staying updated on industry and product news and connecting with their peers and suppliers.

When integrated into overall marketing efforts, social media offers another opportunity for businesses to engage in conversations with their audiences: customers, prospects, industry followers and others. Companies can take advantage of social media to discover what people are saying about their company—both good and bad—and use those discoveries to improve their company image, positioning, products and policies, and to generate more momentum and brand awareness for their company.

As a marketing professional working in the industrial sector, you face a number of challenges in finding out how social media fits into your overall marketing strategy. You must answer questions such as: How is our target audience using social media? When should we get involved in social media, and to what extent? How can social media support or complement our existing marketing efforts?

GlobalSpec recently conducted its third annual Social Media Usage Survey of engineering, technical, manufacturing, and industrial professionals. Although the survey shows that use of social media for work-related purposes among this audience is focused on a few select platforms, adoption is steadily increasing.

For example,

- Participation on LinkedIn grew from 37 percent in 2010 to 55 percent in 2011.
- On Facebook, the most widely adopted social media platform among industrial professionals, users continue to mix work-related and personal activities. 60 percent “like” businesses within their industry, 39 percent participate in work-focused discussions and 37 percent read job-related activities.
- 29 percent of industrial professionals have already created accounts on Google+, a social media platform that debuted only last year.

The research also shows that industrial professionals are still largely passive users of social media, preferring to read and watch content, versus creating and sharing content. In fact, staying up to date with company and product news is now the top reason industrial professionals use social media, surpassing networking with contacts.

While restrictions may be in place at some businesses to prevent accessing social media sites, the widespread use of Internet-enabled smartphones is one way industrial professionals could circumvent these constraints. 54 percent of respondents have smartphones and 60 percent of this group use their phones for work-related tasks such as checking e-mail. This is important to consider when crafting your social media strategy. Despite limits on social media access through



workplace computers, industrial professionals can use their smartphones to potentially get around these restrictions.

The steady growth of social media within the industrial sector means it's time for marketers to explore social media tools. Focus on deploying marketing resources to social media as appropriate; for example, in content marketing efforts where you can deliver information to your audience using social media channels. You also must develop a vision and define goals for social media before investing in it. Finally, understand that social media is not "instead of" other marketing; it's always "in addition to" other marketing efforts—and tightly integrated with your overall marketing strategy. Remain focused on continuing to invest in the online media channels your audience relies on most for work-related information, such as general search engines (Google, Yahoo!, etc.), GlobalSpec.com, online catalogs, industry-specific e-newsletters, online events and your Web sites.

An Introduction to Social Media

Social media consists of a group of online technologies that allow users to create, share, and discuss information, and to connect with each other over common interests. At the core of social media is the idea that people learn from each other by engaging in online conversations and sharing information. Through social media conversations, users express and listen to opinions, teach and learn from one another, and energize each other.

For businesses, social media offers an opportunity to converse with their audiences: customers, prospects, industry followers and others. Companies can use social media to discover what people are saying about their company—both good and bad—and use those discoveries to improve their company image, positioning, products and policies, and to generate more momentum and brand awareness for their company.

According to Forrester Research, "these inexpensive [social media] tools can quickly get marketing messages out through interactive discussion and rapid word of mouth and, properly managed, can deliver measurable results."¹

Because social media content is often user-generated by those who participate, companies cannot maintain control over the conversation or the message being delivered. However, through its own intelligent and judicious participation, through careful listening and response, and by providing useful information to its audience as part of its content marketing strategy, a company can guide the narrative to the benefit of the organization.

One of the business benefits of social media is something called "likeability." Using social media, your business can produce content that showcases its personality and people, in addition to its products or services. And in any business, people prefer to buy from people they like. If you use social media and relevant content to help foster positive relationships, and your fans and followers begin to "like" you, they will be more inclined to do business with you and recommend that others do the same.

¹ "Social Media Playtime is Over," Jeremiah K. Owyang, Forrester Research, Inc., March 16, 2009.



Social Media in the Industrial Sector

As a marketing professional working in the industrial sector, you should find out where social media fits into your specific marketing strategy. You must gain a greater understanding of how your target audience is using social media and if it can be helpful in your company's marketing efforts.

Here are some examples of social media use in the industrial sector:

- A blog about interesting applications for your product line or about industry news, trends, and technologies in the semiconductor industry.
- A product expert at your company creating a LinkedIn group and networking with users of those products.
- A company Facebook page that informs fans about your company's involvement in community projects or organizations.
- A YouTube video that explains how to use or repair a product, or offers an interview with a top executive.
- A customer-only online discussion forum where your customers can interact with each other and internal product managers.
- A Twitter account you use to send your followers links that will be of interest to them: articles, events, industry news, and more.

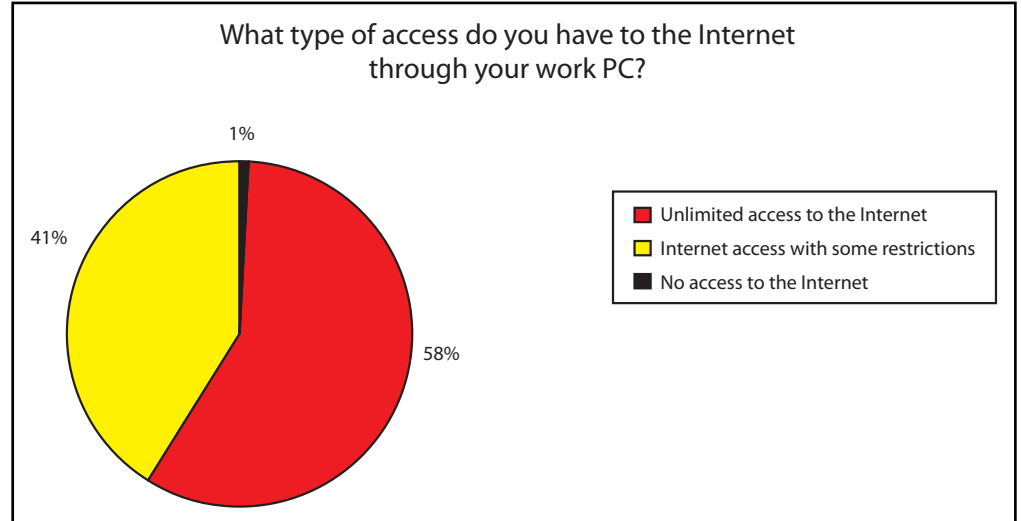
To dig deeper into social media usage in the industrial sector, GlobalSpec conducted a survey of its registered user base of engineering, technical, manufacturing and industrial professionals. 49 percent of the survey respondents hold engineering positions, including design, consulting and process/production; 10 percent work in technical support/services; 6 percent work in research/development. 87 percent of survey respondents are involved in the purchase of components and services.

The survey results provide details on current social media usage for work-related purposes and future plans for using social media. GlobalSpec analyzed the results and developed recommendations for industrial marketers to help use social media resources effectively across integrated marketing efforts.

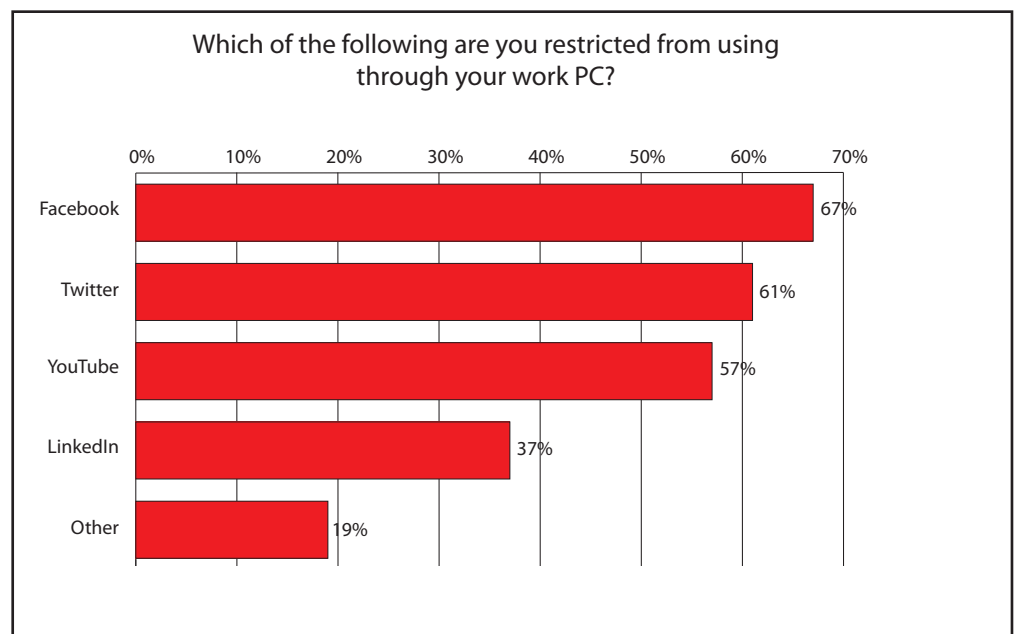


Internet Access

The survey asked industrial professionals about the type of access they have to the Internet on their work computers. While nearly all respondents (99 percent) indicated they have access to the Internet at work, 41 percent are restricted from visiting certain sites and accessing different types of content.



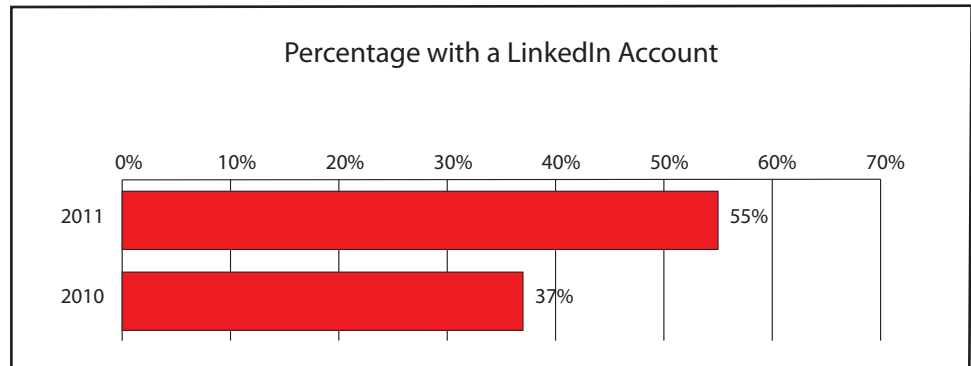
Many professionals faced with Internet restrictions are finding themselves unable to access social media Web sites from work. 67 percent of respondents are restricted from using Facebook, 61 percent are unable to visit Twitter, and 57 percent can't access YouTube. Least restrictive is access to LinkedIn, which is largely considered a professional social media site. If you are thinking of incorporating these channels into your marketing mix, keep in mind that your presence may not be visible to your target audience, although some industrial professionals may use their smart phones to get around corporate restrictions on Internet access.



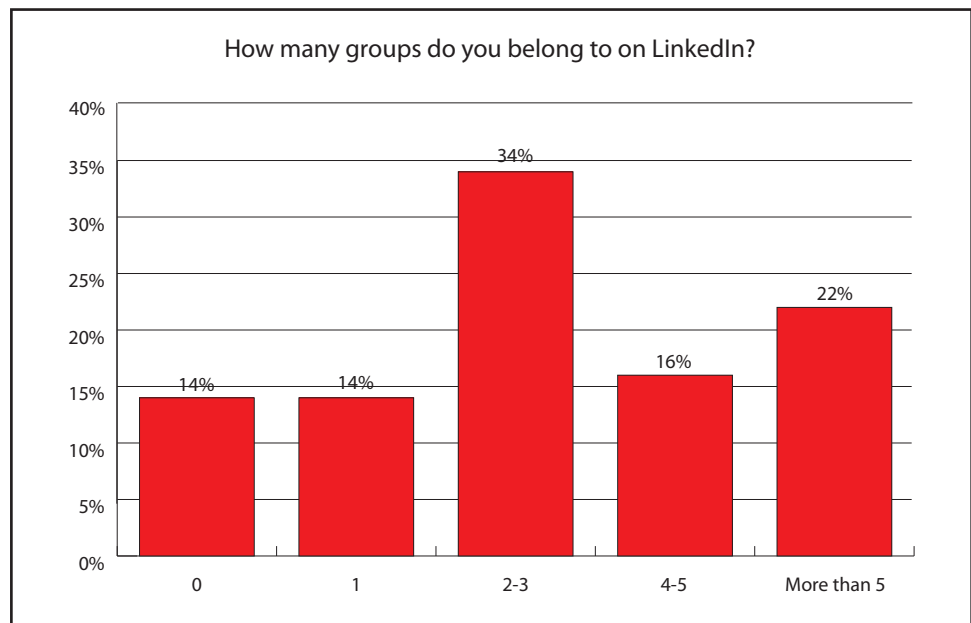


LinkedIn Usage

The percentage of survey respondents who have an account on the professional networking site LinkedIn has grown to 55 percent in 2011 from 37 percent in 2010.

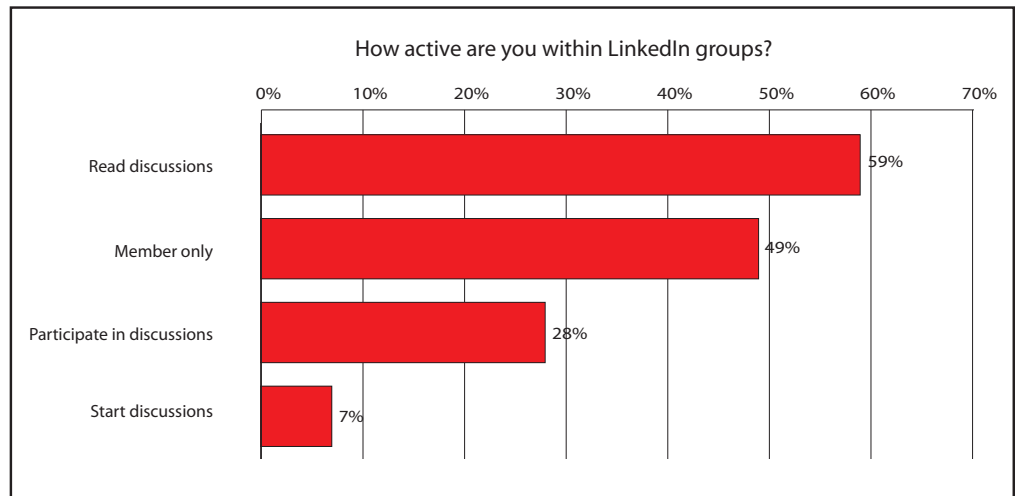


LinkedIn allows you to create a professional profile and connect with other members. In addition, anyone can form or join a LinkedIn group. Groups are comprised of members who share common interests, such as industrial design, or automation control & engineering. They provide a forum for discussions, asking and answering questions, providing relevant content, networking, and more. 86 percent of industrial professionals on LinkedIn belong to at least one group, with 38 percent belonging to four or more groups.





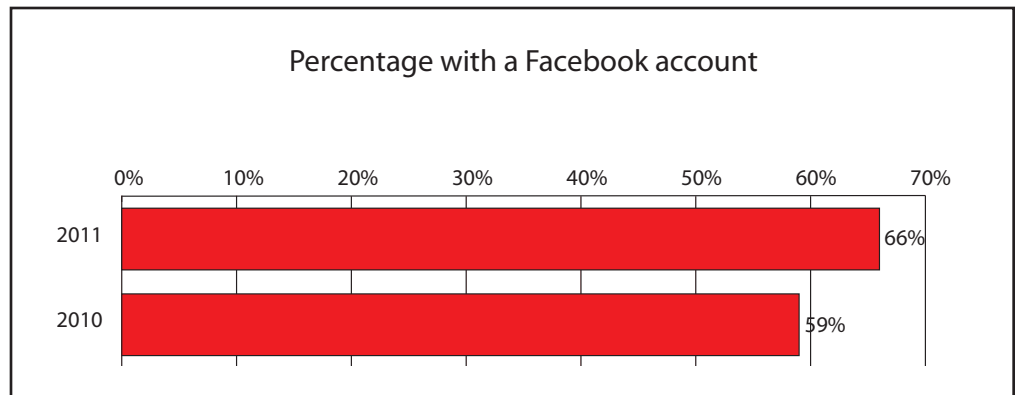
Note, however, that many professionals who belong to LinkedIn groups are passive members—they do not necessarily participate regularly, and when they do, it is more to read content versus contributing content. While 59 percent read discussions, only 28 percent participate in discussions, and even fewer (7 percent) start discussions. This supports the conclusion that social media users are more passive than engaged, and that social media is a good content marketing outlet for industrial suppliers due to the high percentage of users who consume but do not create content.



Facebook Usage

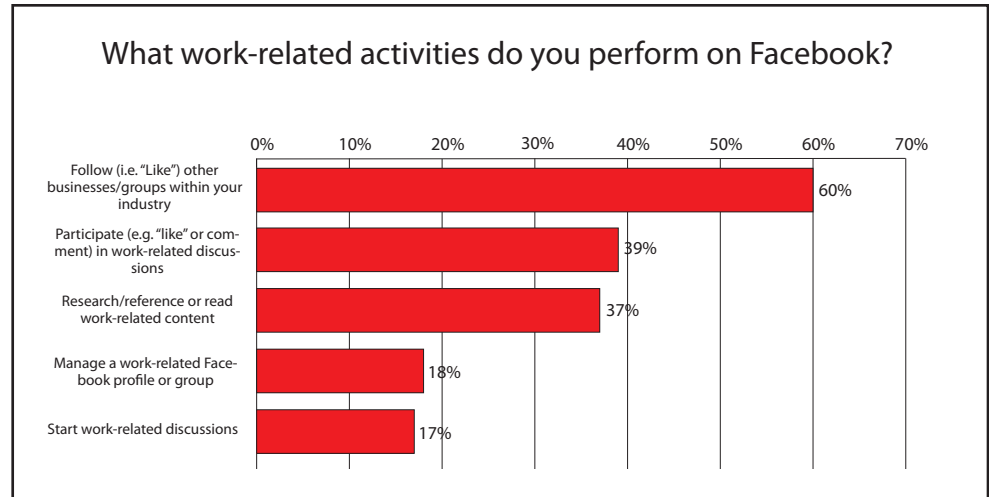
Facebook offers accounts for individuals and the ability to connect with “friends,” as well as “pages” associated with a company or brand. Facebook users can “like” the pages of their favorite companies and brands, giving them the ability to receive updates and comment on a company’s posts.

Facebook usage continues to rise, with 66 percent stating they have a Facebook account, compared to 59 percent in 2010. Although the rate of year-over-year growth is not high, Facebook has the highest penetration rate of social media tools among this audience.



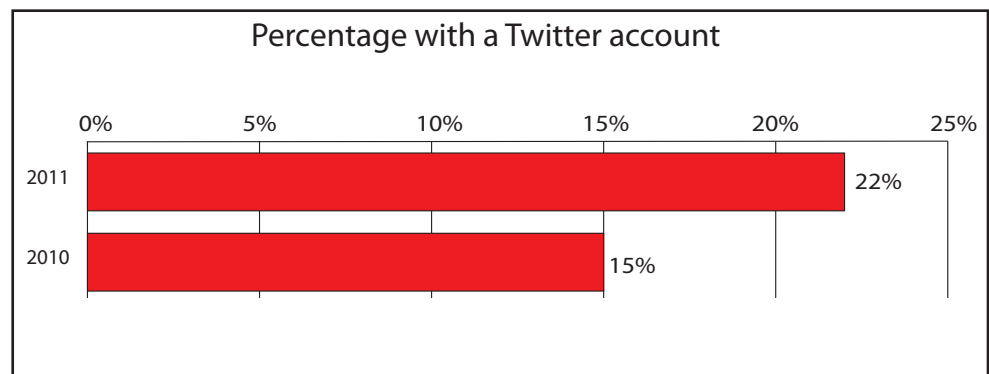


Users say that 19 percent of the content/friends on their Facebook page is work related with 60 percent “liking” a business within their industry and nearly 40 percent participating in work-related discussions and reading/researching content for their jobs. As users continue to blur professional and personal content on this platform, you shouldn’t ignore integrating Facebook as part of your company’s social media strategy.



Twitter Usage

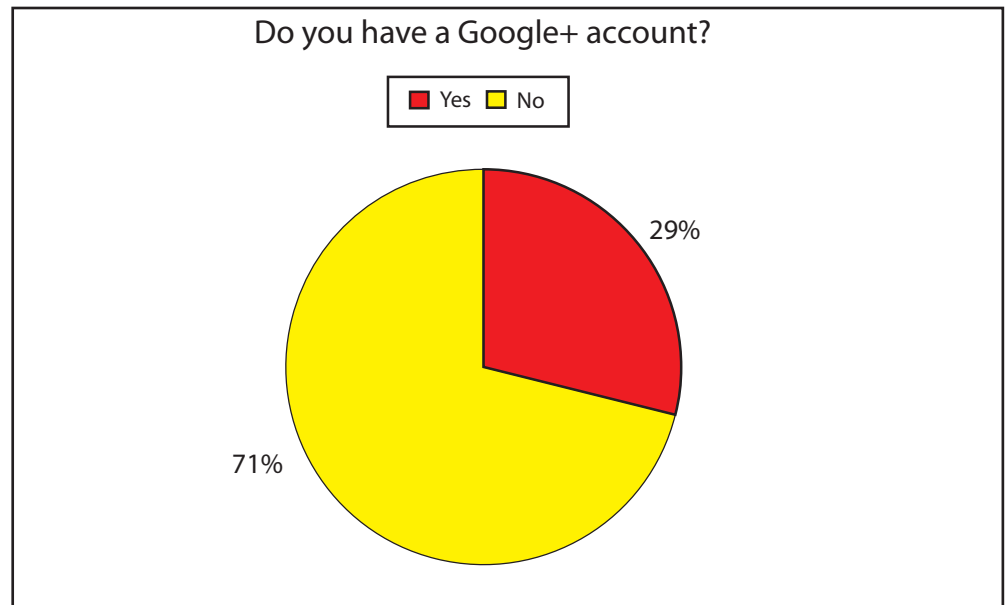
The percentage of industrial professionals with a Twitter account has grown from 15 percent in 2010 to 22 percent in 2011, yet the overall adoption of this social media platform in the industrial sector remains low. Growth in this outlet likely will be slow among industrial professionals, as 61 percent indicated that they are “not at all likely” to sign up for Twitter. Part of the reason for low adoption rates among this audience is the challenge in understanding how Twitter might be useful. Because it is a micro-blogging service that limits users to 140-character posts, Twitter can appear insignificant or irrelevant. However, it does offer the opportunity to engage in conversations, ask and answer questions, and—for marketers—to promote content and events.





Google+ Usage

In 2011, Google made its latest and most significant move into the social media space with Google+. Combining aspects of Facebook and Twitter and adding the ability to share content only with certain people in “circles” and create video “hang-outs,” Google+ caught on quickly. Already 29 percent of industrial professionals have signed up for a Google+ account. This is a fast start for a platform that is relatively new, although it is too early to determine its importance to industrial professionals. Still, given the early enthusiasm for Google+, industrial companies should investigate incorporating it into their social media strategy.

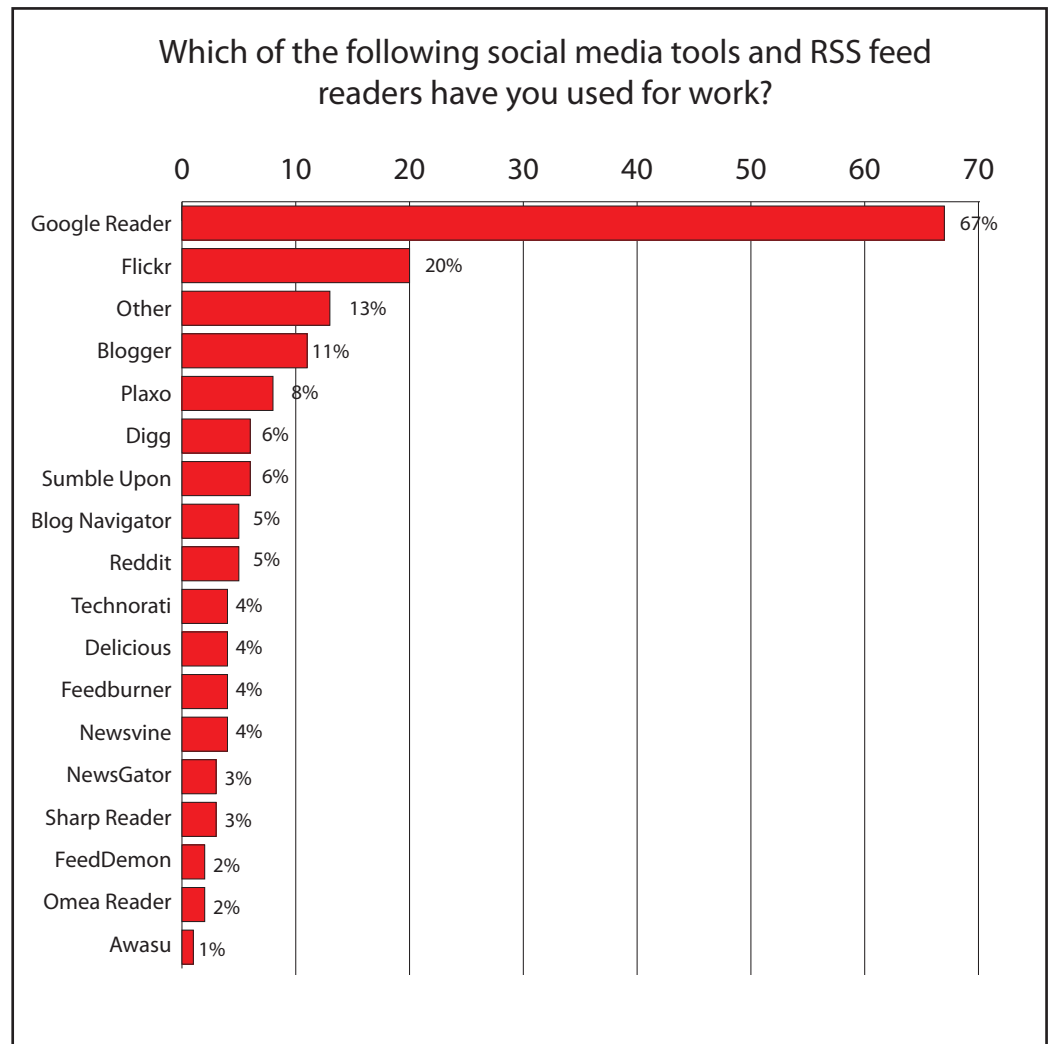




Social Media Tools and RSS Feeds

RSS stands for Real Simple Syndication. People use RSS to subscribe to Web content; RSS tools aggregate and deliver updated Web content to your computer or mobile device. This saves the time and hassle of having to visit Web sites individually. Many Web publishers syndicate their Web content as an RSS feed to anyone who wants it.

When asked which social media tools and RSS feeds they use for work, the majority of respondents (67 percent) stated they use Google Reader. No other tool or RSS reader was cited by more than 20 percent of users. Industrial companies should provide RSS feeds for their press releases, news stories, blog posts, Web pages, and other content, making it easier for your audience to consume your most recent content.

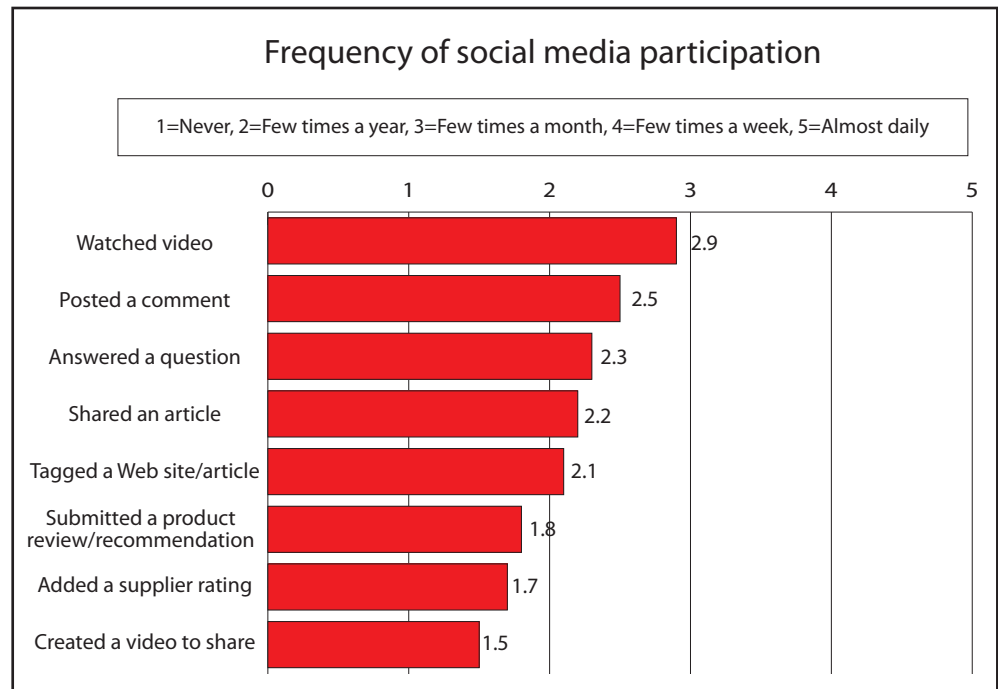




Frequency of Social Media Participation

The survey asked industrial professionals how often they participate in specific types of social media. For each type of social media, respondents were asked to choose from a scale offering the following frequency options: Never, Few times a year, Few times a month, Few times a week, or Almost daily.

The results are consistent with other findings that this audience is passive about social media—they read and watch content, versus commenting or creating content. Respondents stated that they use most of the represented social media a “few times a year.” For the third consecutive year, watching a video ranked the highest in terms of social media participation, while creating a video ranked the lowest.





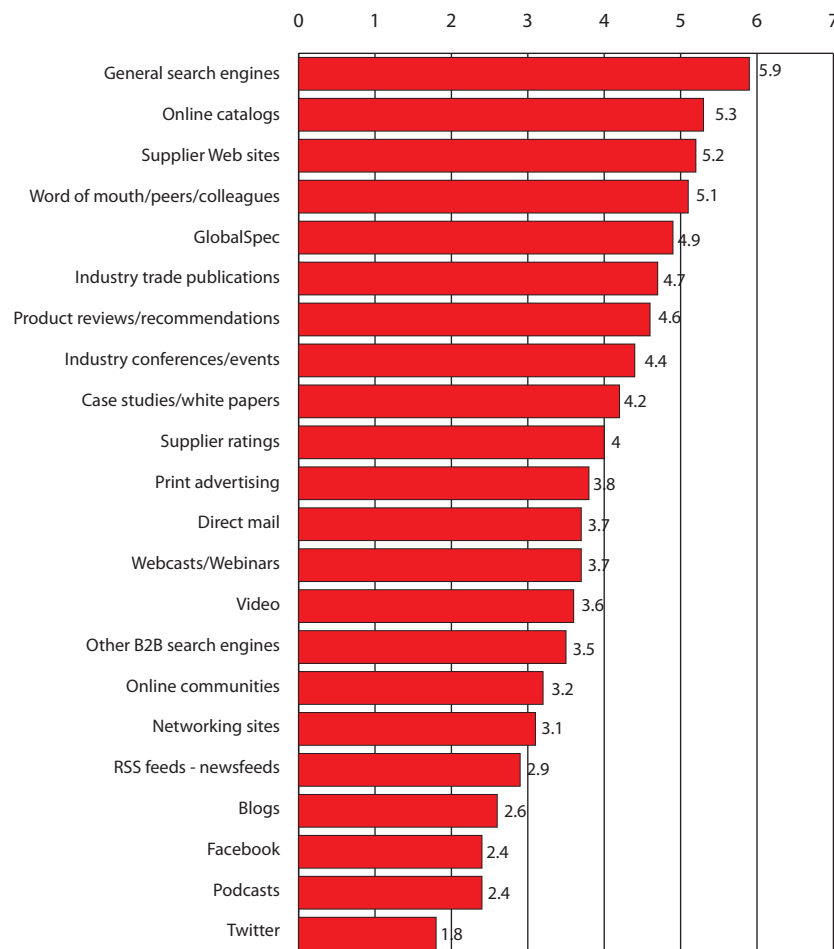
Top Resources for Researching Work-Related Purchases

The survey asked the following question: When researching a potential work-related purchase, how valuable do you find each of the following resources?

The results show that social media is not perceived as valuable as other established online platforms, such as general search engines (Google, Yahoo!, etc.), online catalogs, supplier Web sites, word of mouth, and GlobalSpec. Video and networking sites like LinkedIn and Twitter are among the resources that are seen as more valuable than they were last year.

Value of resources for researching work-related purchases

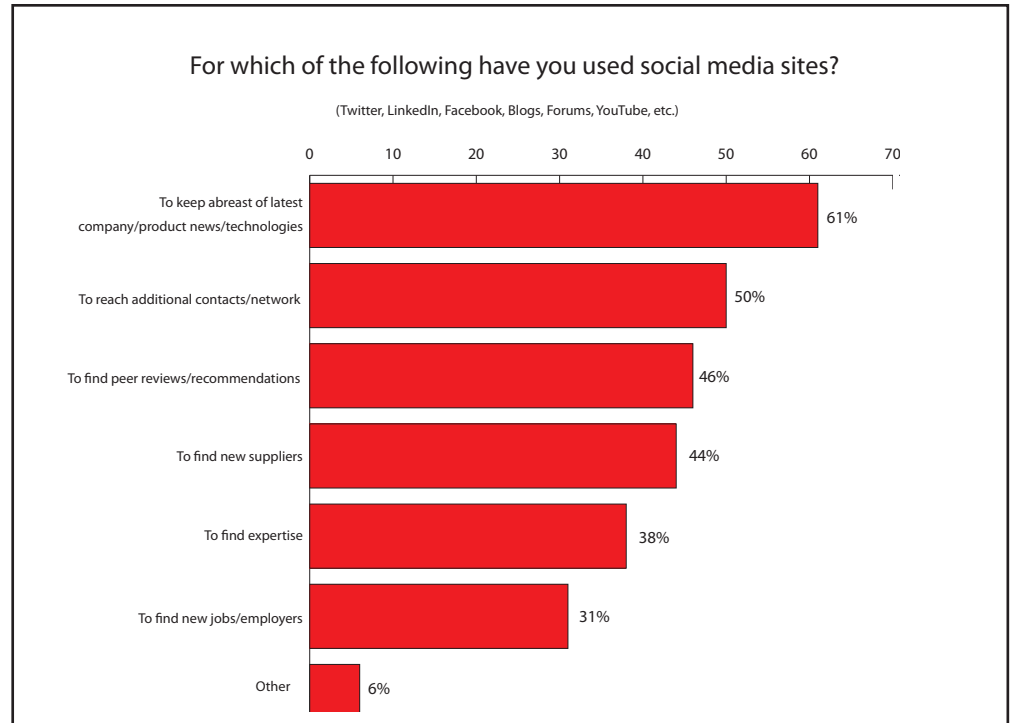
(Average value on scale of 1-7, with 1=not at all to 7=very valuable)





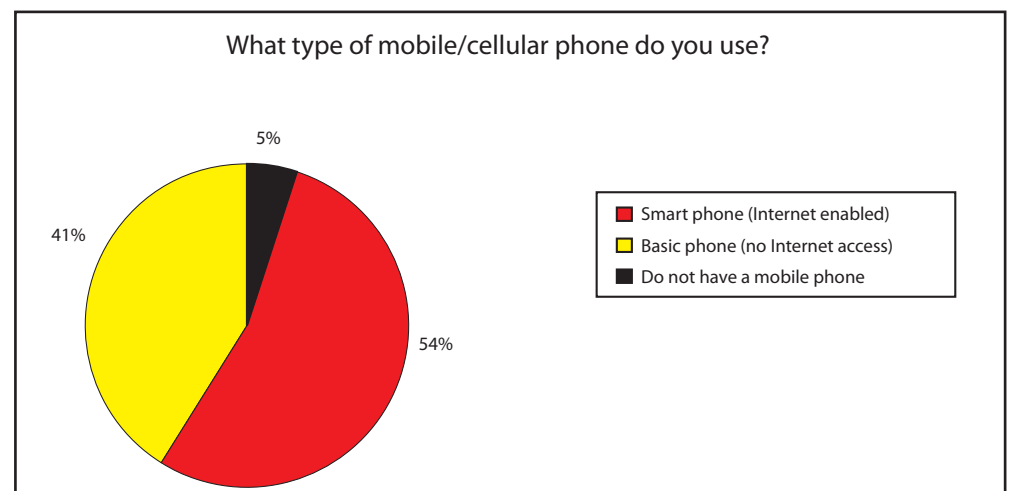
Reasons for Using Social Media Sites

The biggest reason to use social media sites is to stay up to date. 61 percent of respondents indicate that they use social media to keep abreast of the latest company, product, and technology news, which surpassed reaching additional contacts and networking (50 percent) as the main social media activity. Social media is also used to find peer reviews, new suppliers, and industry expertise.



Mobile/Cellular Phone Usage

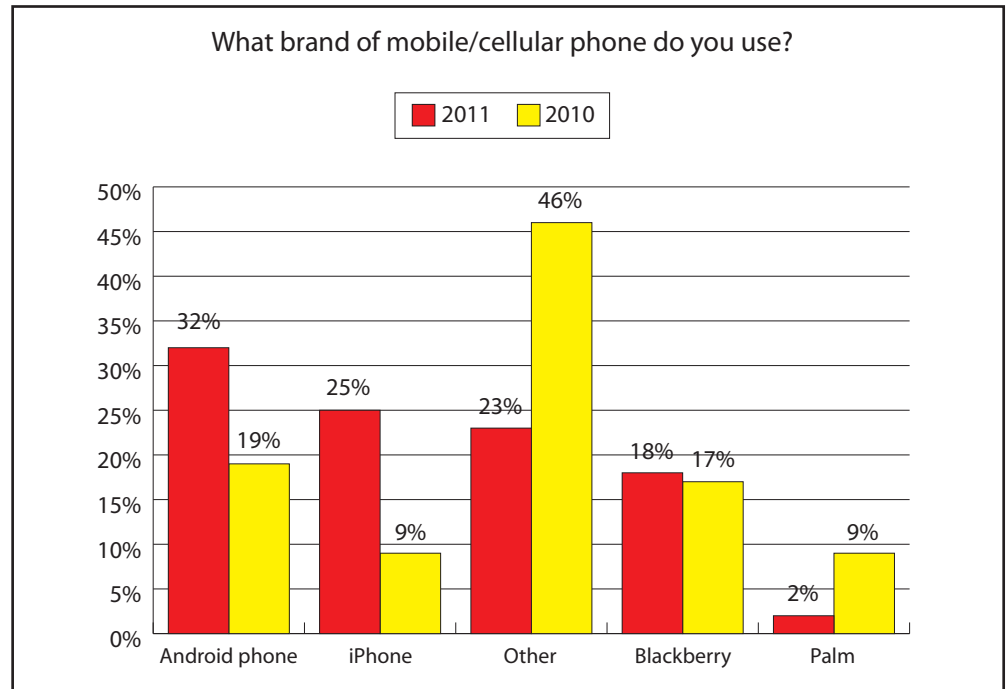
Engineers and other industrial professionals were asked what type and brand of cellular/mobile phone they use, and if they use their phone to access work e-mail. 54 percent of respondents use a smart phone that has Internet access. Only 5 percent don't use any type of mobile/cellular phone.



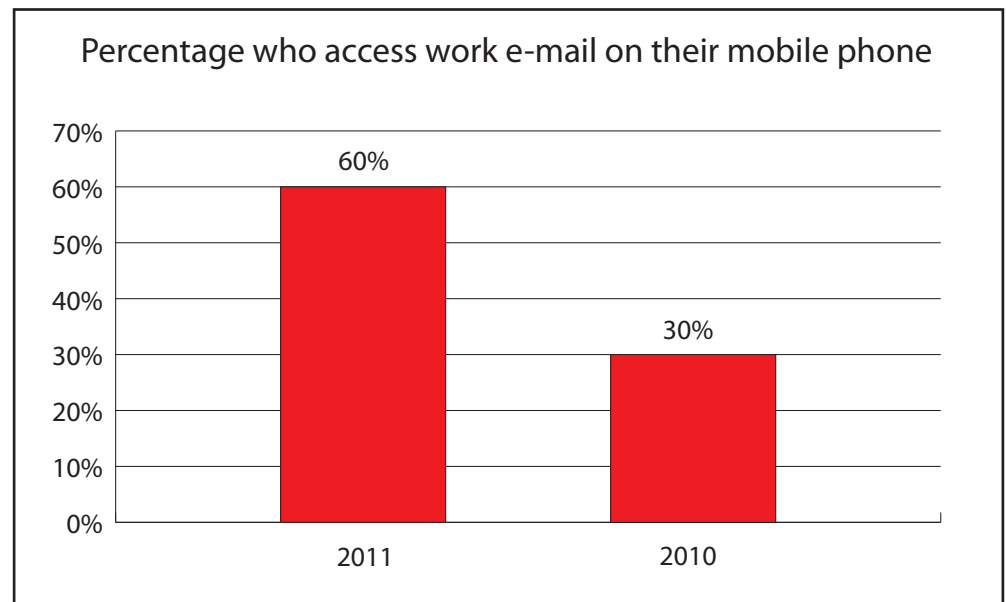


In terms of phone brands, 32 percent use an Android phone, a jump of 13 percentage points over last year. 25 percent use an iPhone, a jump of 16 percentage points over last year. Together these two brands comprise the majority of the market (57 percent) for industrial professionals. Palm has lost market share among this audience, and Blackberry has grown only marginally.

These findings are relevant because the use of smart phones to access the Internet and social media sites is one possible way for this audience to work around corporate restrictions on Internet access—and a way for you to reach a percentage of your audience that faces Internet restrictions while at the office.



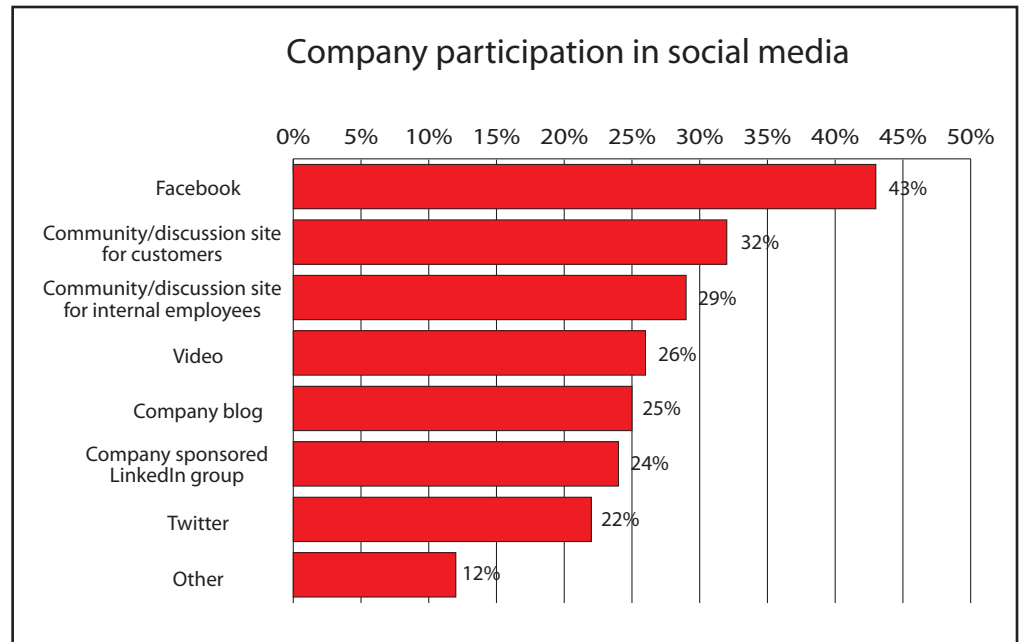
The percentage of industrial professionals who access work e-mail on their mobile phone has doubled between 2010 and 2011, from 30 percent to 60 percent.





How Industrial Companies Participate in Social Media

The primary way industrial companies participate in social media today is through Facebook. 43 percent of industrial professionals stated that their company uses Facebook. This is up ten percentage points from last year's 33 percent. The next most popular ways to use social media are to provide an online discussion community for customers (32 percent), and for internal employees (29 percent). Only 22 percent of industrial companies use Twitter, which reflects its low value among engineers as a social media resource.





Social Media Recommendations for Industrial Suppliers

The adoption rate of social media in the industrial sector is steady. Due to this growth, social media will play a role in your marketing strategy going forward. The noise and buzz around social media cannot be ignored. However, it's important to cut through the clutter and answer a number of challenging questions around social media and how it can be part of your overall marketing strategy:

- To what extent should my company get involved in social media?
- What social media tools should we use? Which are the most important?
- What resources are required to launch a social media program?
- How do I educate others in the company—in particular, executives—about the role social media should have in our marketing efforts?

To help you answer these questions, GlobalSpec has developed a list of social media recommendations for industrial suppliers.

Don't Replace Established Online Marketing with Social Media

GlobalSpec's survey shows a steady rate of adoption of social media in the industrial sector, and that social media has a role in business-to-business marketing today. Of course, any new technology or paradigm has an adoption curve: there are early adopters, mainstream adopters, and laggards. And every business has its own place on the adoption curve. That place is often determined by available resources, skills, and, most of all, your audience's behavior: if your customers and prospects are enthusiastically adopting social media for work-related purposes, then you will be motivated to move faster into that realm.

More established online resources—search engines (both general and specialized), online catalogs, and your Web site—are the key places an industrial audience looks for suppliers, products and other work-related information. Therefore, you should continue to invest in these online resources and determine how social media can be used to complement these existing marketing efforts.

And remember, social media is always “in addition to” other marketing channels, never “instead of” more established best practices. You will want to integrate your social media program into your overall marketing strategy, considering it another tool in your marketing toolkit.

Develop a Vision and Define Goals for Social Media

Trying to make use of all the available social media tools can be overwhelming. It will be easier if you approach social media with a vision and defined goals. For example, consider how you want to present your company via social media. What message and tone are right for your business? An established industry expert? An up and coming innovator? An advice provider?

Decide: What are your social media goals? Is it maintaining or growing your brand awareness? Building relationships with the community? Conducting product research and gaining feedback from your customers and prospects?

In the same vein, think about how you will communicate value to your audience. You must be prepared to provide useful, relevant contributions to the social media



conversation if you have hopes of building a loyal following. Where will these contributions come from? What is your content strategy? Who will be responsible for developing your company's social media content? One person devoted to social media is probably not enough. Try recruiting a team of people so you can share the responsibility and tap into a greater knowledge base.

As you work through these questions, your vision and reasons for engaging in social media will become clearer, which will help guide your choices of social media tools and how to best use them.

Begin to Explore Social Media Tools

With social media adoption showing growth in the industrial sector, now is the time to get involved in social media if you haven't done so already. Devote time to gaining an understanding of how social media tools work, and what they can contribute to and how they can complement your existing marketing efforts. This way, as participation in social media continues to grow in the industrial sector, you will be in a strong position to grow your social media presence.

If you've already begun using social media tools, make sure you balance the resources you put into social media with the return you are getting from your efforts. Make sure that you aren't taking resources away from channels that will give you a greater return and make a bigger impact on your efforts.

Here are some ideas to get you started on social media. Before determining what channels you should use, understand to what extent your target audience participates in social media and the platforms they use, and choose your channels accordingly. You also need to consider resource requirements—you don't want to invest significant people and time resources at the expense of more established programs. Instead of adopting them all at once, start with the ones that seem most applicable to your business and target audience.

- Create a LinkedIn account and set up a LinkedIn page for your company. Search for and join groups in your market space. Follow the conversations and begin participating when you have something useful to add to the dialogue.
- Consider creating a company Facebook page. 43 percent of companies have already done this. Find other businesses similar to yours or market leaders and see how they are using Facebook. If you have a personal Facebook account, you'll discover that Facebook for business is not that different. Instead of "friends" you have "likes." But it's still all about conversations and providing relevant information.
- Explore Google+ and investigate how businesses are setting up their company, brand and/or product pages and utilizing unique features such as Circles and Hangout. With Google+ content now impacting Google search results, having a corporate presence on this platform may also positively affect your search engine optimization efforts.
- Create your own Twitter account and search for relevant businesses, thought leaders, or competitors to follow within your market space. You



can also post your own “tweets.” Try commenting and linking to interesting articles, announcing an event or new white paper, or putting in a customer quote or interesting use of your products.

- With the widespread use of broadband Internet, video has become a major business communication tool, and more affordable. The widespread popularity of YouTube has also lowered the bar for production quality. It’s acceptable—almost chic—for business videos to have a homemade quality. Try posting videos of an interview with an executive, a customer testimonial or a product demonstration.
- Consider starting a blog. Just make sure you define an intended audience for the blog and line up resources to write blog posts on a regular basis. It could be a single writer, such as an executive, or a team of writers. Types of content you could post include applications for your products, customer case studies, industry news, frequently asked customer questions, white papers and Webinars, and other content relevant to your audience.
- You may consider developing an online community to interact with your customers and prospects. Keep in mind it requires a significant time commitment to stay regularly involved and technical resources to build, maintain and grow the functionality of the online system.
- With more and more industrial professionals utilizing Internet-enabled smartphones, you want to make sure your marketing campaigns – whether online, social or e-mail – are easily accessed through mobile devices.

Another way to ease into social media is to listen to and understand the conversations taking place among various channels. There are many no-cost tools out there that can help you monitor mentions on social media sites. Even if you aren’t using social media tools, you should monitor mentions of your company. Put a plan in place to determine who is responsible for monitoring—and even responding to comments and inquiries.

Integrate Social Media into Your Overall Marketing Strategy

Whatever steps you take in social media, you must take them hand-in-hand with your other marketing efforts. Your social media goals should support your overall marketing goals.

Social media and content marketing seem to go hand-in-hand. Because most industrial professionals are passive users of social media—preferring to consume content (reading, watching) rather than create content—you can promote your content such as white papers, press releases, articles, case studies, Webinars and other information through social media platforms. In addition, as you adopt social media tools, be sure to integrate them with your Web site. For example, add Twitter and/or Facebook feeds to your Web site; embed YouTube videos on your Web pages.

Another way to integrate social media into your overall marketing efforts is to promote your social media presence within your established marketing programs. For example, GlobalSpec offers suppliers the ability to include their social media links, such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook, within their company profile pages,



helping to build awareness and relevancy for their social media efforts. Suppliers can also add video content to their GlobalSpec product announcements and within their company profile. You should employ the same strategy on your company Web site and cross-promote your presence across the different social media platforms you are using.

In addition, just as you measure the performance of established marketing programs, you should understand the measurement aspects of social media. It's important to look at traditional benchmarks such as reach (total number of likes/followers) and activity (page views, discussion threads, etc.), and also to analyze how social media impacts brand awareness and positioning and helps increase traffic to your Web site and online catalog.

Conclusion

Suppliers should start to integrate social media tools into their overall marketing strategy.

Before beginning or expanding your company's social media efforts, answer these six questions to help ensure success with social media.

1. How often and for what purpose does your target audience participate in social media?
2. Which platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter, etc.) do they prefer?
3. What are your organization's goals in implementing a social media initiative?
4. What resources (people, time, budget) do you have available to invest in social media without taking resources away from other online marketing efforts?
5. How will you integrate social media into your overall marketing strategy?
6. How will you define success and measure ROI on your social media investments?

If you're seeking an easy way to be introduced to and become familiar with social media, GlobalSpec invites you to follow and join our own social media activities. You can find GlobalSpec in these social media outlets:

[GlobalSpec Industrial Marketing Mavens Group on LinkedIn](#)

[GlobalSpec on Twitter @GlobalSpecInc](#)

[Industrial Marketing Mavens on Twitter @MktgMavens](#)

[GlobalSpec on Facebook](#)

[Industrial Marketing Mavens on Facebook](#)

[GlobalSpec on Google+](#)



About GlobalSpec

GlobalSpec is the leading provider of online marketing programs for companies interested in reaching the engineering, industrial and manufacturing communities. More than 6.5 million professionals rely on GlobalSpec to search for and locate products and services, learn about suppliers and access comprehensive technical content at all phases of their search, research and purchasing cycles. For manufacturers, distributors and service providers, GlobalSpec offers a suite of marketing programs and services that provide measurable engagement and tangible results, including catalog and directory programs, more than 70 product-and industry-specific e-newsletters, banner ad networks and online events. For more information on how GlobalSpec can help you reach your target audience, please call 800.261.2052 or visit <http://www.globalspec.com/advertising>.



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