

:: Survey: B2B marketers' engagement in social media



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The explosion of social media and user-generated content is dramatically changing how B2B marketers connect with their buyers, generate awareness, and ultimately drive sales for their companies. This new social landscape is changing how our buyers engage with our brand and how they make buying decisions. Understanding how buyers engage with social media is key to the success of B2B marketers.

To help marketers begin to understand what behaviors their buyers engage in, Forrester analyzed the “social computing” behaviors of online adults. From that data, they created the Social Technographics® ladder which outlines six levels of participation in social media activities for online adults:

- » **Inactives – 44%:** The lowest level, these individuals do not participate in social media activities.
- » **Spectators – 48%:** These individuals read blogs, watch videos, or listen to podcasts at least once a month.
- » **Joiners – 19%:** These individuals participate in social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn monthly.
- » **Collectors – 12%:** These individuals use RSS feeds and social bookmarking sites such as del.icio.us monthly.
- » **Critics – 25%:** These individuals write reviews and rate content monthly.
- » **Creators – 19%:** At the top of Forrester's ladder, these individuals create and publish content by writing blogs or uploading new video, at least once a month.

Purpose of this study

Forrester's results were calculated based on the activities of all “online adults”. While their results may be applicable to businesses selling to consumers (B2C), we were curious as to whether these results would be appropriate for businesses selling to other businesses (B2B).

We conducted this study to answer two questions:

1. How do B2B marketers' social media activities compare to the overall population of adults used in Forrester's study?
2. Do B2B marketers engage in different social media activities for business versus personal use?

Survey methodology

We created a survey that asked respondents to indicate which social media activities they participated in and whether they engaged in these activities for business use, personal use, or neither. Survey questions corresponded to the levels defined by Forrester's Social Technographics ladder.

The online survey was sent to our in-house list of B2B marketers (clients and prospects), and also made available to readers of MarketingProfs, a online community focused on B2B marketers.

1. Data from Forrester Research Technographics® surveys, 2007. For further details on the Social Technographics profile, see groundswell.forrester.com. Technographics is a registered trademark of Forrester Research Inc.

To answer our first question, we analyzed results from our survey and compared them to Forrester's data for the online adult population. To answer our second question, we broke down responses to determine if individuals were more or less likely to engage in specific activities for personal or business use.

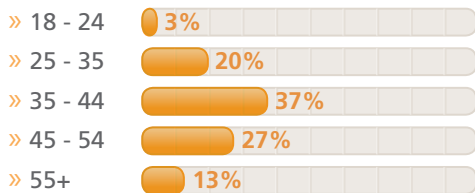
Results

Respondents:

A total of 70 responses were submitted. Slightly more men (38) than women (32) responded to the survey.

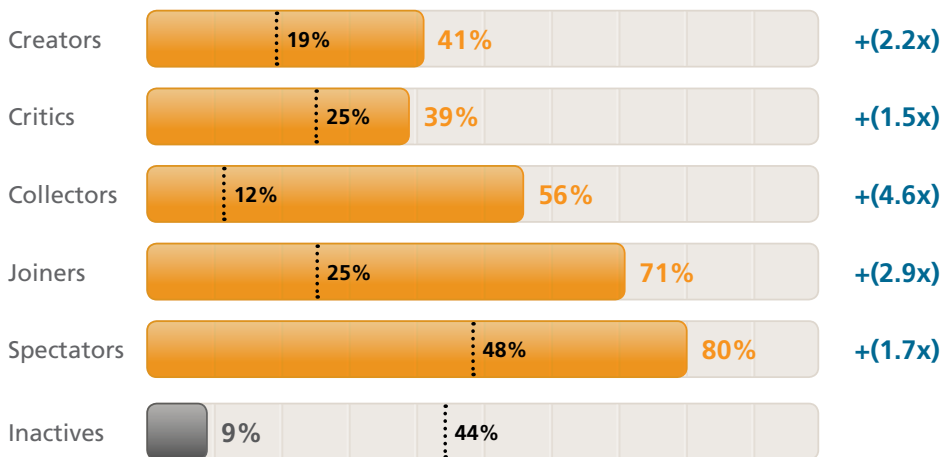


The majority of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 44, but a wide range of ages were represented.



B2B marketers compared to averages for online adults²

The chart below compares the percent of B2B marketers who engage in each type of activity (orange) to the percent of all online adults as reported by Forrester (dotted line). Numbers to the right of each bar indicate the likelihood of the B2B marketer respondents to engage in this activity over that of the average adult.



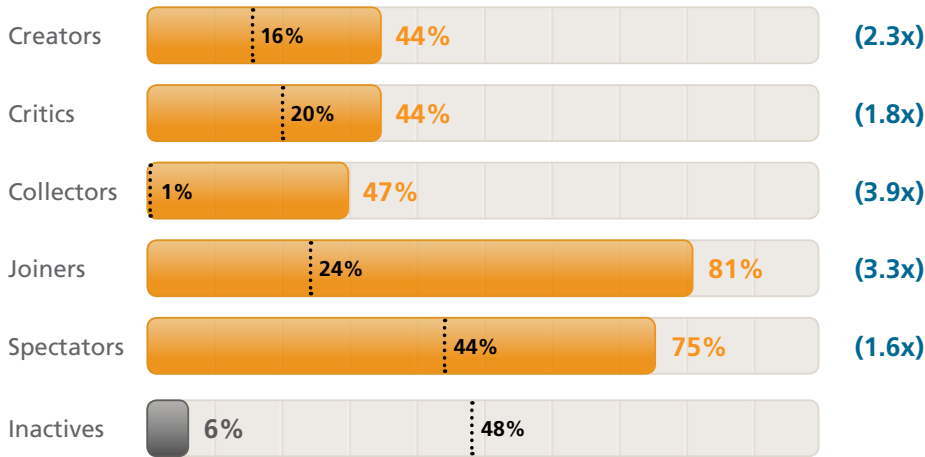
Number of respondents: 70

⋮ Indicates number of adults who engage in these activities as determined by Forrester.

+(x) Indicates the likelihood of the B2B marketer respondents to engage in this activity over that of the average adult.

2. Based on Forrester's North American Social Technographics Online Survey, Q2 2007

Female respondents compared to averages for female²

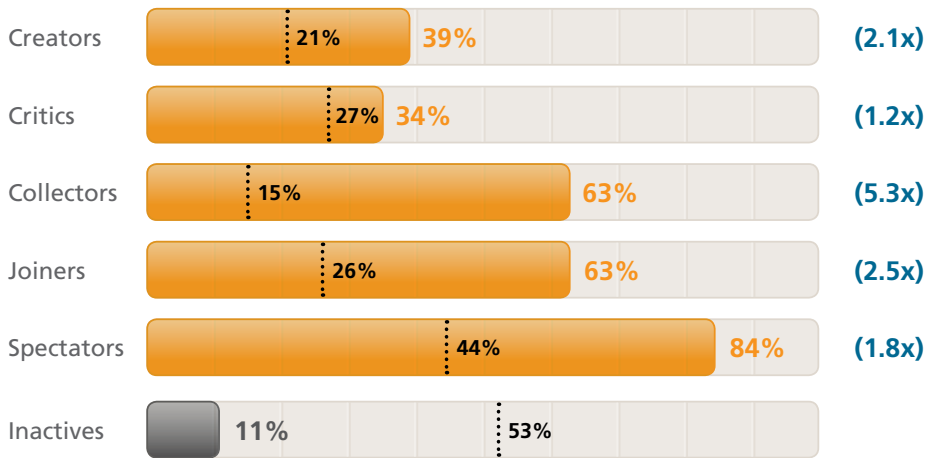


Number of respondents: 32

⋮ Indicates number of adults who engage in these activities as determined by Forrester.

+(x) Indicates the likelihood of the B2B marketer respondents to engage in this activity over that of the average adult.

Male respondents compared to averages for males²



Number of respondents: 38

⋮ Indicates number of adults who engage in these activities as determined by Forrester.

+(x) Indicates the likelihood of the B2B marketer respondents to engage in this activity over that of the average adult.

2. Based on Forrester Research Technographics surveys, 2007

Activities by business and personal use³

The data below shows the percentage of respondents who engage in each social media activity for business and personal use.

SPECTATORS

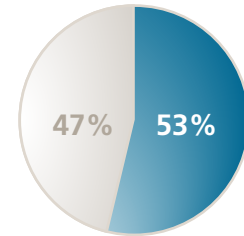
Activity:

I read blogs, view online videos, or listen to podcasts once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 47 ■ Personal - 42

Respondents appear to engage in this type of activity for both business and personal use.



JOINERS

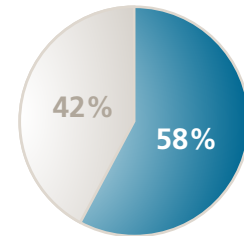
Activity:

I visit social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 42 ■ Personal - 30

Respondents engage in this type of activity slightly more for business use.



COLLECTORS

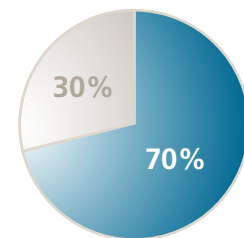
Activity:

I use RSS feeds or other content aggregators once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 32 ■ Personal - 14

Respondents are more than two times more likely to engage in this type of activity for business use.



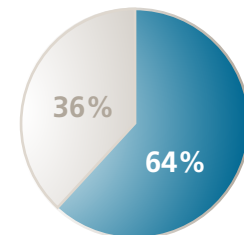
Activity:

I use social bookmarking sites such as del.ici.ous or StumbleUpon to tag and organize content once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 9 ■ Personal - 5

Respondents are almost two times more likely to engage in this type of activity for business use.



3. Note: results do not indicate the level of activity, only that individuals participate in this activity at least once a month.

CRITICS

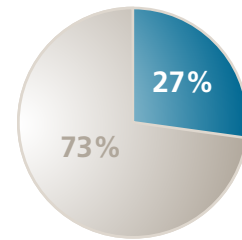
Activity:

I post reviews or rate content on blogs or sites like Amazon or Digg once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 3 ■ Personal - 8

Respondents are almost three times more likely to engage in this type of activity for personal use.



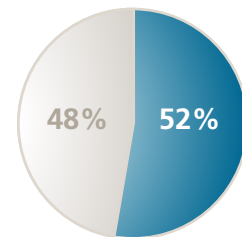
Activity:

I post comments on blogs or contribute to online forums once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 17 ■ Personal - 16

Respondents are just as likely to engage in this type of activity for business and personal use.



CREATORS

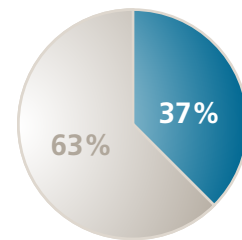
Activity:

I upload video, audio, or music to sites such as YouTube once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 7 ■ Personal - 12

Respondents are almost two times more likely to engage in this type of activity for personal use.



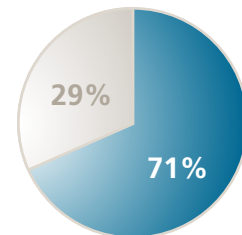
Activity:

I publish or write for a blog once a month or more.

Responses³:

■ Business - 12 ■ Personal - 5

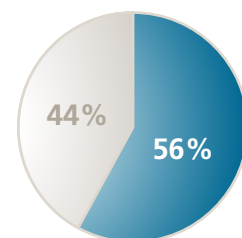
Respondents are more than two times as likely to engage in this type of activity for business use.



SUMMARY

■ Business - 169 ■ Personal - 132

This group collectively is 1.3 times more likely to engage in social media activities for business use than for personal use.



3. Note: results do not indicate the level of activity, only that individuals participate in this activity at least once a month.

Conclusions

B2B marketers compared to average adult population.

In answer to our first question, "How do B2B marketers' social media activities compare to the overall population of adults used in Forrester's study?" we found this group of respondents (a sampling of B2B marketing professionals) to be far more likely to engage in social media activities than the average online adult population (based on Forrester data).

- » While 44% of adults, according to Forrester, have no participation in social media, only 9% of the B2B marketers who responded were inactive.
- » B2B marketers were 4.6 times more likely than the average adult to engage in "Collector" activities such as tagging content and subscribing to RSS feed and three times more likely to be a "Joiner" (that is, belong to a social network).
- » Forrester found that there tend to be fewer "Creators" than "Critics" in the average adult population, but we found just the opposite. Our data for B2B marketers showed that there were more "Creators" than "Critics" overall.

Business versus personal use for B2B marketers.

In answer to our second question, "Do B2B marketers engage in different social media activities for business versus personal use?", we found this group to be 1.3 times more likely to engage in social media activities for business purposes than for personal.

Other interesting differences were found when we looked at specific activities. (Note that due to the small sample size, additional research is needed to draw statistically significant findings.)

- » Respondents are slightly (1.3x) more likely to engage in "Joiner" activities (social networks) for business use than personal.
- » As "Collectors", respondents were twice as likely to engage in these activities for business than personal use. Specifically, they were 2.3 times more likely to use RSS feeds and 1.8 times more likely to tag content for business purposes.
- » As "Critics", respondents were just as likely to comment on blogs or forums for business and personal use, but were 2.7 times more likely to post reviews or rate content for personal use.
- » As "Creators", respondents were split in terms of specific activities. They were 2.4 times more likely to publish content on a blog for business purposes, but 1.7 times more likely to upload video or audio for personal use.

What does it all mean?

This survey revealed some trends directly related to the B2B marketer buyer and their engagement with social media. Although it is unclear whether this audience is spending time on sites related to marketing or related to their specific industries, other social media tendencies did appear.

Overall this buyer is much more likely to engage in social media activities across the board than the average adult. This would suggest a high level of interest in these types of activities. Because of this high level of interest and engagement, companies targeting this buyer should begin to add social media tactics to their marketing strategy.

Specifically:

- » This buyer is a heavy "spectator". This would indicate an interest in reading, listening to, and viewing content online. Companies targeting this buyer should build up their repository of helpful, educational content that can be downloaded from their sites as well as pushed out to other sites this group visits.
- » Because this buyer likes to collect information, companies targeting this group should include tools that allow visitors to bookmark content (widgets such as AddThis), as well as to subscribe to new content using RSS feeds.
- » As a "Joiner", this buyer has a strong tendency to seek out affinity groups and belong to communities. Companies creating sites aimed at this buyer should include the ability for individuals to create profiles and join groups with similar interests. Beta test communities or product innovation communities may be good places to start. Consider inviting specific individuals in the industry to join the forums or communities.
- » Because this group is likely to be writing or contributing to blogs specifically related to business issues, identifying influencers in this group and joining in their conversations as well as creating relationships with them would be time well spent in generating awareness.

About Erickson Barnett.

Erickson Barnett is a full-service marketing agency that drives awareness, builds credibility and accelerates sales for B2B technology firms. We generate meaningful results by building your brand, optimizing your web presence and connecting you with buyers.

Our clients include emerging and transformational technology companies. Some of the better known firms include VeriSign, Ariba, and webMethods. We also work with the leading funders of technology firms including NEA, Oak Investment Partners, Columbia Capital, and RedShift Ventures.

You'll find Erickson Barnett in Reston, Virginia at the heart of Northern Virginia's technology corridor.

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