

how do small business owners use social media

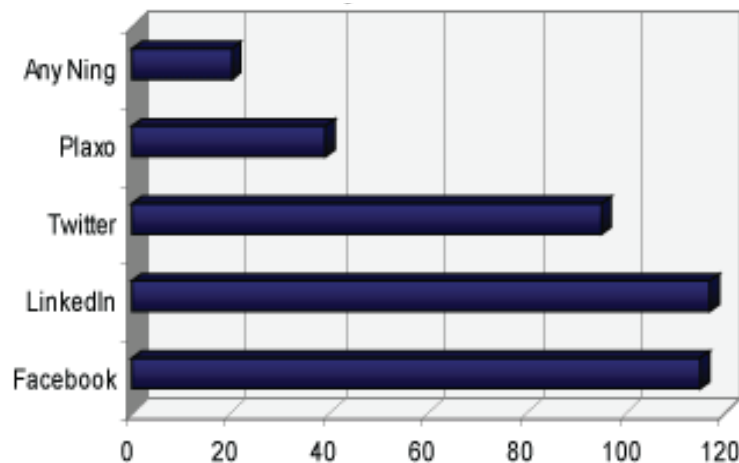
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How are small business owners using social media?

While many surveys have looked into how consumers and large companies use social media, not many have examined the use of social media by small companies. In this survey, small businesses are defined as companies with 1-50 employees. It is important to note this survey did not attempt to measure how many small businesses use social media, but rather to gauge which social networks are most commonly used by small businesses, how they are used and what type of results they are achieving.

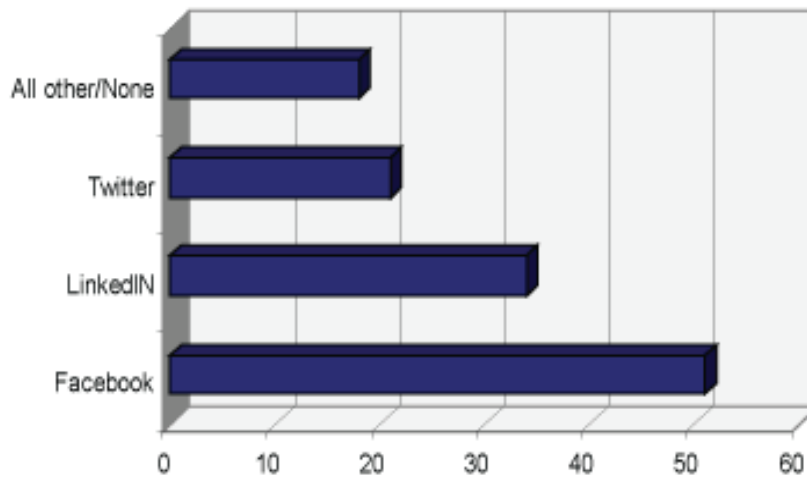
This survey was conducted entirely online. Links to the survey were sent via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and email invitation, and 132 responses were received. We note this does bias the survey towards Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook users. While the sample size is not projectionable, it nonetheless provides valuable insight into current social media usage.

Where Do You Have a profile?



LinkedIn barely edged out Facebook as the most popular network, but Twitter is not far behind. Plaxo and Ning-based social communities both trailed by a wide margin. Three-quarters of respondents said they used Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Now that we know which social networks small businesses use, it's time to narrow the field further and find out where they are spending their online time. After all: simply having a profile doesn't mean a person is actively engaged in the community.



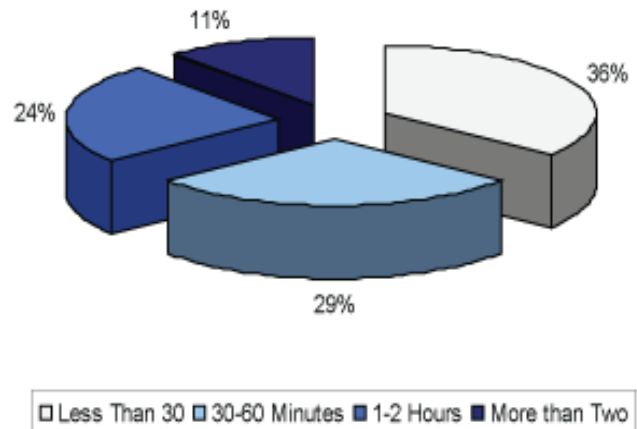
The majority of respondents indicated Facebook was their primary network. This is not surprising, since the simple user interface makes it easy to transition from business to personal.

In contrast, LinkedIn, and to a lesser extent Twitter, are more business focused.

How Much time do you Spend on social media?

Small businesses seem to be putting time and effort into their social media presence. 64% of respondents use social media for more than 30 minutes a day. This bodes well for a sustained and successful social media strategy.

As we work with clients, we typically recommend business owners spend 30 – 60 minutes daily to make connections, update content and create a consistent, visible presence.



Few Gender Differences

Next, the survey examined the gender divide in social media usage. A recent survey by ComScore indicated women spend 30% more time using social media than men. Our survey endeavored to learn if this holds true in the business realm.

How Often Do You Use Social Media To:

	Male	Female
Connect with Friends	4.0	3.6
Find Information	3.8	3.8
Discover Latest News	3.6	3.6
Find Resources	3.3	3.1
Demonstrate Expertise	3.1	3.3
Find Clients	3.1	2.9
Conduct Research	3.0	3.1
Share Special Promotions	2.9	2.8
Find Employees	1.8	1.9
Find a Job	1.8	1.7

5-Daily, 4-Frequently, 3-Occasionally, 2-Rarely, 1-Never

We found among small business owners, male and female social media usage is nearly identical. Women were found to be slightly more social in using networking tools to connect with friends, while men predominately used it to find information. However, the differences are largely insignificant.

How Often Do You Use Social Media To:

	Under 25	Age 26-35	36-50	Over 50
Connect with Friends	4.8	3.9	3.9	3.4
Find Information	4.0	4.3	3.6	3.9
Discover Latest News	4.0	4.3	3.5	3.1
Find Resources	3.6	3.5	3.0	3.5
Demonstrate Expertise	3.2	3.7	3.0	2.7
Find Clients	2.8	3.6	3.2	3.1
Conduct Research	2.8	3.5	2.7	3.0
Share Special Promotions	2.6	2.1	1.8	1.5
Find Employees	2.4	3.7	2.9	2.5
Find a Job	1.8	2.5	1.6	1.4

Generation Gap

Not surprisingly, age seems to impact how each small business owners use social media. Business owners under 25 (a relatively small group in this study) were by far the most likely to use social media to connect with friends. The 25 – 35 age group is the most active overall. Judging by their responses, social media appears to be an integral part of their business. This was the only group which seems to rely heavily on social media to find clients. All age groups turn to social media for news and information, but the 26 – 35 year old age group also sees benefit in using it as a research and recruiting tool.

Have You Generated Business Leads?

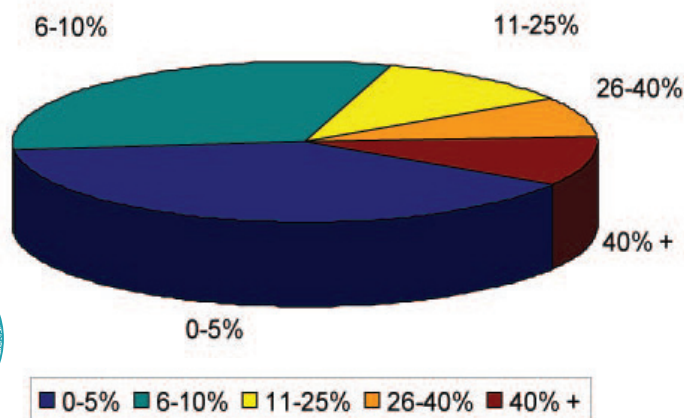


■ No ■ Yes

A common question among small business owners who are considering the leap to social media is whether the time spent will actually translate into sales. The study examined the return on investment for small business owners using social media.

As previously discussed, most small business owners spend at least 30 minutes a day on social media, but is it productive? Our results indicate it is. 75% of all the respondents reported social media has generated leads for their business.

What Percent of Your Leads Come From Social Media?



While most small businesses had seen some lead generation from social media, it remains a relatively small part of their lead generation process.

More than 70% of the business owners surveyed said social media generates 10% or less of their total business. Future surveys will be used to understand what types of strategies they are employing, and which community is most beneficial for lead generation.

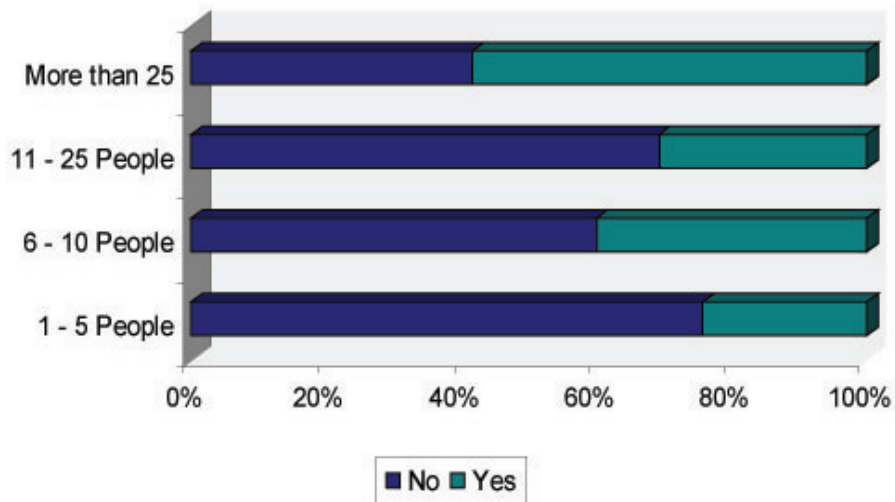
Need for Guidelines

Clearly, the results indicate there are opportunities for companies making the leap into social media. However, there are concerns from business leaders in companies of all sizes on how their employees will represent the company on line.

While some larger firms are trying to enforce “social media lock downs” banning access to social media sites, others are developing social media policies. But does this trend carry over into the small business world?

According to our survey, the overwhelming majority of small businesses (less than 25 employees) do not have formalized policies. And, even among businesses with 25 or more employees, almost half are still without formalized social media policies.

Do You Have a Company Social Media Policy?



While this survey is by no means an exhaustive examination of social media in small businesses, it does give us a better of idea of how social media is being used in the small business community. Future surveys will examine more closely exactly what tactics and strategies small business owners are employing.