

Social Media in the Workplace

ERC Survey Briefing - September 2009

Overview

With the advent of social media applications, organizations are increasingly taking advantage of these tools in the workplace to enhance marketing, networking, relationship building, recruiting or even other HR practices. In September of 2009, ERC conducted a survey on organizations in Northeast Ohio to determine how local employers are using social media in the workplace. The survey sought to explore issues such as types of social media applications used, purposes of their use, and the individuals charged with social media responsibilities.

Key findings in the survey:

- Many organizations are using or considering using social media for a variety of workplace initiatives, most commonly including networking and relationship building.
- LinkedIn is the most commonly used social media application.
- The most prevalent obstacle preventing organizations from using social media is lack of knowledge or expertise in using such tools, implying a need for training or education related to using these tools.
- Several organizations are discussing how to use social media with external customers.
- Most organizations spend fewer than five hours a week on social media tasks.

Use of Social Media

Many employers are currently using or considering using social media for a variety of purposes, mainly networking and relationship building, branding or marketing, external communication, reaching new customers, recruiting, and sales. Recruiting appears to be the primary HR function for which social media is being used. Fewer organizations are currently using social media for other functions such as employee internal communication, engaging employees, and employee training and knowledge sharing.

Figure 1 | Does your organization currently use or considering using social media for any of the following purposes?

	Currently using	Considering using	Not considering using
Networking and relationship building	49%	28%	24%
Branding or marketing	35%	35%	31%
External communication	35%	25%	40%
Reaching new customers	31%	33%	35%
Recruiting	27%	40%	33%
Sales	22%	20%	57%
Employee internal communication	12%	31%	57%
Engaging employees	8%	39%	53%
Employee training and knowledge sharing	6%	24%	71%
Fundraising or soliciting donations	4%	14%	82%

An important industry difference should be noted. Non-profits and non-manufacturers appear to be using social media to a much greater degree than manufacturers. Non-profit respondents tended to use social media for a variety of purposes and more than other industries.

LinkedIn is by far the most popular social media tool used by organizations. Forty-three percent of organizations are using LinkedIn for at least networking and relationship building and 35% of organizations are using it to recruit. Facebook is being used for similar purposes. Over a quarter of organizations are using blogs/wikis for branding or marketing, external communication, reaching new customers, and networking and relationship building. Twitter is used for these purposes as well. Though fewer employers are using blogs/wikis for internal communication and training and knowledge sharing, of all the social media forms, blogs/wikis appears to be one of the more common methods of social media being used for internal communication and training and knowledge sharing.

Figure 2 | Please select what social media tools your organization uses for the following purposes in its workplace.

Most commonly used social media tools

	LinkedIn	Blogs/Wikis	Twitter	Facebook
Networking and relationship building	43%	18%	12%	22%
Recruiting	35%	2%	2%	16%
External communication	26%	26%	24%	18%
Reaching new customers	18%	26%	22%	16%
Branding or marketing	17%	27%	25%	25%
Sales	14%	14%	6%	8%
Engaging employees	10%	14%	4%	8%
Employee internal communication	10%	8%	2%	6%
Fundraising or soliciting donations	4%	2%	4%	4%
Employee training and knowledge sharing	2%	10%	0%	0%

Less commonly used social media tools

	Flickr	MySpace	You Tube	None
Networking and relationship building	2%	2%	2%	45%
Recruiting	0%	0%	0%	61%
External communication	0%	0%	8%	57%
Reaching new customers	0%	2%	4%	59%
Branding or marketing	2%	2%	4%	56%
Sales	0%	2%	0%	74%
Engaging employees	2%	0%	2%	83%
Employee internal communication	0%	0%	0%	81%
Fundraising or soliciting donations	0%	0%	2%	92%
Employee training and knowledge sharing	0%	0%	0%	90%

Obstacles in Using Social Media

Many organizations report that they are not using social media tools mainly because they lack knowledge or expertise in using them, suggesting a possible need for training or education. In addition, several organizations have concern regarding social media's impact on employee productivity and having no policies or guidelines in place for using social media. Lack of support from leaders and managers in these organizations does not appear to be the main obstacle preventing organizations from using social media.

Figure 3 | If your organization is not using these tools, what obstacles are preventing your organization from using social media?

	Percent
Lack of knowledge or expertise in using tools	69%
Concern regarding their impact on employee productivity	63%
No policies or guidelines in place	63%
Lack of support from top executives or leadership	22%
Not effective in producing results for the organization	22%
Lack of support from front-line supervisors or managers	16%

While many organizations (nearly 60%) are discussing ways to use social media to enhance external operations with customers, fewer (33%) are discussing ways of using social media to enhance internal operations with employees.

Figure 4 | Does your organization discuss ways it can use social media to enhance internal operations with employees and external operations with customers?

	Percent
Internal operations with employees	33%
External operations with customers	57%

Forty-six percent of organizations informally monitor the use of social networking tools by employees and 44% have at least one policy regarding employee use of social media in the workplace.

Figure 5 | Does your organization do any of the following?

	Percent
Informally monitor the use of social networking tools by employees	46%
Have at least one policy regarding employee use of social media in the workplace	44%
No formal policy, but does set guidelines regarding employee use of social media	29%

Individual Use of Social Media

Most organizations (65%) allow certain employees depending on their job type, to access and use social media during work hours. This suggests that organizations are open to at least some of their employees using social media for job-related purposes.

Figure 6 | Does your organization allows certain employees, depending on their job, to access social media during work hours?

	Percent
Yes	65%
No	35%

The most common departments or job types that access or handle social media in organizations include human resources, recruiting, marketing, sales, and customer service. Executives are less likely to handle social media at responding organizations. Other job types cited by respondents as handling social media activities include public relations and information technology.

Figure 7 | What departments or job types access or handle social media in your organization?

	Percent
Human Resources	25%
Recruiting	22%
Marketing	18%
Sales	16%
Customer Service	16%
Development	8%
Executives	8%
Other	6%

The overwhelming majority of organizations spend between 0-5 hours a week on social media tasks. Very few organizations spend over 10 hours a week using social media.

Figure 8 | Approximately how many hours per week are spent on social media tasks in your organization?

	Percent
0-5	78%
6-10	12%
11-15	8%
16-29	0%
Over 30	2%

Respondent Demographics

Figure 9 | Respondent demographics by industry and organizational size

Number of organizations	52
Industry	
Manufacturing	31%
Non-Manufacturing	51%
Non-Profit	18%
Organizational size	
1-50	22%
51-200	43%
201-500	16%
501+	20%