

## **Scaling the Wall: New Marketing Opportunities in Social Media**

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Call it the Facebook paradox. Despite ongoing concerns about personal privacy, an increasing number of consumers are finding that screen time is now their face time – at work and at home.

More than 90 percent of American respondents to a survey ICOM conducted in July said they are extremely or very concerned about their privacy when it comes to using social media sites (that number is slightly lower in Canada at just over 85 percent). Indeed, this may explain why 32 percent of consumers have not established a social media account with any outlet.

Yet those who are online seem to be stepping up their activity.

Let's consider Facebook, the fastest-growing social-networking site. Twenty-three percent of our respondents who hold Facebook accounts said they expanded their use of the site this year. Meanwhile, 18 percent said they began using Facebook for the first time in that same period. This, despite those high apprehension figures around privacy.

Recent reports about Facebook's ability to protect personal information might contribute to this anxiety, and we as marketers certainly should be mindful and respectful of these worries. But our survey results provide insights that also enable us to better target those who **are** socially engaged.

For instance, our research reveals which outlets are gaining popularity, the times of day consumers most frequent social media, and – interestingly – how many consumers say they log in during work hours – a mere 14 percent.

Let's just stop here for a moment. Perhaps like me you find this figure unrealistic. After all, we've all read the recent reports of organizations banning certain social media sites for use at work. So my question is: Are the organizations blowing this out of proportion or are individuals severely under-reporting their social media participation during work hours?

### **Poking into the Data**

Key to making the most of social media marketing is knowing where your potential consumers are networking and when, and then targeting them in a non-invasive way. In fact, we should aim to do all we can to connect with and engage our customer base on a level that is personal, transparent and authentic.

Not surprisingly, Facebook is far-and-away the most popular social networking site in terms of gaining new members, and likely at the expense of MySpace, which is losing the most. Jockeying for second place in terms of new membership is YouTube, followed by several niche players, including Kaboodle, Digg, StumbleUpon and del.icio.us. Their showings in the survey were minimal – 1 percent or fewer of respondents for each site – but they are worth examining in terms of potential opportunities for your brand.

More revealing is how the social media day breaks down, according to our respondents. Almost 30 percent said they most frequently visit social media sites in the early evening, from 5 to 9 p.m. About 20 percent are night owls, socializing from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. Only 18 percent said they engage with their social networks from noon to 5 p.m. – times when many are at work, school or school activities.

This last figure is fairly consistent with where respondents said they log in: Almost 64 percent said they use social media primarily from home, while a mere 14.3 percent say it is at work.

Again we might, as marketers, want to give these numbers the hairy eye, because just as people tend to say they weigh less than the scales reveal, respondents could be reluctant to admit they log on at the office. Think about it: Where were you the last time you were on Facebook? And have we not all taken a “few moments” to check what’s happening on Twitter – despite being 10am?

### **Connect with Users**

For marketers, these findings should help guide social media strategies and activities. This includes understanding the best times to post new or timely content, or the opportune times to participate in social media discussions as a way to connect with key customer segments.

For instance, I have a hunch that some of our respondents who use social networks from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. are college students. If so, then pizza delivery chains and perhaps even online books stores might want to dial up their promotions and/or communications during these hours.

As for whether consumers log in at work – marketers should consider this possibility an opportunity. If we are correct in assuming that more people use social media from work, then it might be beneficial for supermarkets to post specials on prepared meals around 4 p.m. – just as people are thinking about dinner and preparing to leave the office. Agree?

The main takeaway is that while social media is still a small player in the online marketing pool, it is expanding fast. As indoctrinated users become more active, the percentage of those who struggle with privacy concerns will likely decline – if Facebook is any indication. At the same time, consumers are becoming increasingly savvy about protecting their information.

These insights are a tool rather than a barrier to targeted messaging. By understanding social media use at home, at work, and around the clock, we can get around these walls and post new opportunities.

**How are you scaling the social media wall? I’d love to hear your thoughts.**