

Social media - PR's new BFF

PR & SOCIAL MEDIA: “Most PR agencies think social media will be incredibly important in PR; most think that they're already pretty hot at it; [and] probably a third or a half are actually really using it.” This is a condensed version of the major findings of the [recent study](#) into the use of social media and other online technology tools by local PR agencies, conducted by Sentient Communication in partnership with Bizcommunity.com.



The [major findings, including graphs](#), are now up in the [Bizcommunity.com Reference section](#), and the results summary has been mailed to everyone who took part. The spot-prize winner of the Apple iPod Nano 8GB for completing the survey was Loyiso Sibali from Vuma Reputation Management. For those wanting just the bottom line, read on:

Discrepancy

The conclusion reached is based upon the discrepancy between enthusiasm for social media (reflecting a broader adoration of it as the Next Big Thing), how agencies say they use it in campaigns, and how many see actual real-life campaign or financial success in it.

- Responses collected from 76 mid-to-senior people at SA PR agencies
- Almost 80% of agencies already use social media for business, and half rate themselves 7/10 or 8/10, a third more 9/10 or 10/10
- But only 41% see social media bringing financial success
- 30% never, or hardly ever, use social media tools to develop their clients' business profiles online; 44% regularly, or always, do
- Personal profiling of key execs: 50% never or hardly ever use social networking sites
- 80% think it will become an increasingly valuable tool for PR strategists

This is a group of people that think online and social media are the future. Everyone already uses email extensively; everyone's on the web; almost 80% already use social media for business. Around half the respondents rate their agencies as being a 7 or 8 on a scale of 1-10 in usage of social media, and a third as 9 or 10.

At the same time, however, almost a third never, or hardly ever, use social media tools to develop their clients' business profiles online, while 44% regularly, or always, do. When it comes to building the personal profiles of clients' key execs, half never or hardly ever use social networking sites.

Agencies' self-perception

This is interesting, because agencies' self-perception is one of an enthusiastic “social media w00t!” However, looking at specific tactical questions tells another story - that the personal enthusiasm does not play out into client campaigns to nearly the same extent.

The most revealing question of all: No-one... not one... thinks social media has reached its limitations. Just two people think it will not grow any more. Eighty percent think it will definitely grow and become an increasingly valuable tool for PR strategists.

Compare this to the question, "Have you seen a direct correlation between increase in Social Media use and business success?" where 66% say yes. When asked if this correlation resulted in financial success, it drops to 41%. This, in every sense of the word, means we are in a hype cycle. Almost everyone thinks it's wonderful; a lot less have had direct, real-life success with it.

Conclusions

Conclusions that can be drawn? Almost everyone sees social media as a Big Big Thing for PR. Less are clear about how exactly it translates into actual tactical work.

There is, however, already plenty of online campaign activity going on - whether just for appearances, or because the client seemed to want it, or because the agency actually has confidence in it. Agencies in general seem to see themselves as leading the adoption with clients, rather than being pressed to do it, but everyone wants a piece of this new pie.

As the use of social media increases, the discrepancy between the more than 80% who think it's awesome, versus the 66% that have seen actual business success, will have to close.

Note: this is a condensed version of the [findings](#), to be found in the [Bizcommunity.com Reference section](#), along with the results itemised for each question.

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