



# Cymfony

## Harnessing Influence – How Savvy Brands are Unleashing the New Power of Blogs and other Social Media

Research Report  
February 2008

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## Summary

Today, individual consumers have become the primary creators of content. But has the business world figured out smart ways to use blogs, discussion boards, social network sites (such as MySpace) and video sites (such as YouTube)? Does 'social media' have a role in marketing anyway? Or is social media a passing fad, something marketers can safely ignore and file under 'bubble 2.0'? In four countries, we spoke to people on the leading edge of social media's role in marketing who work in different marketing and communication disciplines and asked them for the current state and future direction of this emerging area.





The time is right to survey marketers from a business perspective on the question “where is social media taking us?”

*Andrew Bernstein, President,  
TNS Media Intelligence / Cymfony*

TNS acquired Cymfony in 2007. The acquisition was prompted by the rapidly accelerating demand for solutions that could help corporations monitor, measure and strategically respond to a new type of communications: social media. We felt the time was right to run a small qualitative survey and ask people in marketing where, from a business perspective rather than from a technology or consumer perspective, social media is taking us.

We asked how marketers should respond to the new opportunities. In launching a new product or service, for example, will social media one day push advertising aside? If an organization is not yet using social media tools effectively, is the roadblock coming from management, staff or from a simple lack of expertise? And are ad agencies, PR agencies, online specialists and designers doing a good job in helping their clients navigate the new opportunities?



Marketers have grasped social media's significance as a source of real-time consumer insight, yet they cling to the mass-marketing model of social media as another media channel.

*Jim Nail, Chief Strategy & Marketing Officer,  
TNS Media Intelligence / Cymfony*

In many ways, the results of this study are encouraging. The idea of social media's role as a listening tool and feedback mechanism is prominent and recurs throughout the answers. On the other hand, marketers' nascent understanding of this area is revealed in their eagerness to treat social media as another channel for ads and viral marketing campaigns, and lesser interest in true participation through tools like blogs. There are signs, though, that this is just a matter of the early stage of maturity of this market so that as more time passes and marketers gain experience, they will more fully realize the important difference of social media vs. mass media.

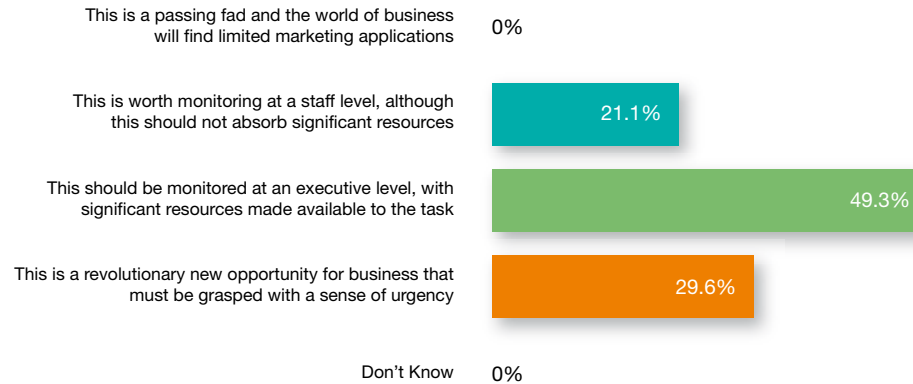
*This report is based on 71 phone interviews with marketing professionals in four countries – United States, Canada, United Kingdom and France. The interviews were conducted by TNS in late 2007.*

# Q1

## Social media is not just another passing fad.

Which of the following statements most closely matches your personal point of view on the potential impact social media will have on business?

### Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



The most interesting finding of our research was that nobody saw social media as a passing fad. Quite the opposite. There was a strong sense that social media should be monitored at an executive level, with significant resources made available to the task. Nearly 50% of the marketers we spoke to thought this.

### What the numbers say

- Some 30% agreed social media represented a revolutionary new opportunity for business that must be grasped with a sense of urgency. In the United States, the figure was closer to 45%.
- Only around 21% took the conservative view – that social media was something to monitor at the staff level, and without putting significant resources behind the task.

### What the marketers say

**Dominic Johnson, Consort Partners**  
*"There are already huge audiences, thanks to the immediacy of the message."*

**David Frederick, Coty Beauty**  
*"Social media is the real trend in marketing. It's giving consumers control of the marketing experience."*

**Scott Wilder, Intuit**  
*"The younger generation is already using social media as a way to communicate with each other, a way to evaluate companies, a way to learn about companies. It's increasingly accepted for users to express their opinions about a product. A Pandora's box has been opened."*

### What TNS says

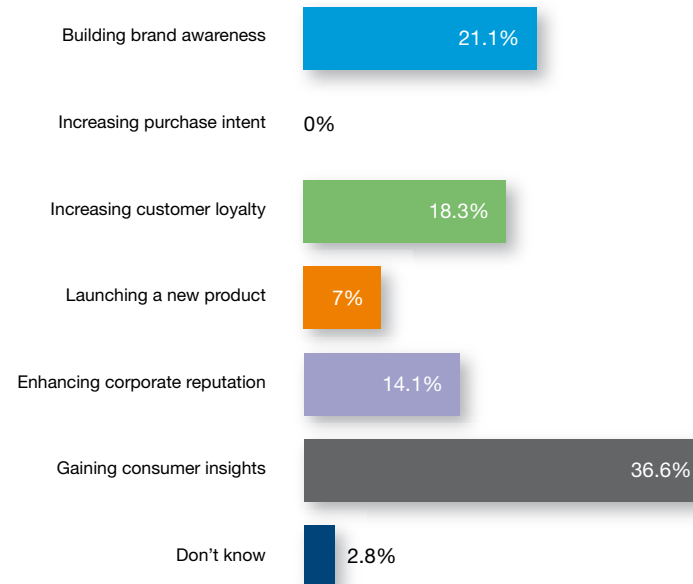
2007 was a watershed year where social media went from being the hot buzzword to being a topic of serious planning and evaluation. We used to have to explain what social media is and why it is important, but not any more. Not long ago, we sought out the internal champions of social media, now all marketing and communications staff are eager to learn. In addition, we've seen a significant increase in coordinated, corporate-level strategy development and rigorous vendor selection processes.

# Q2

## Social media is first and foremost about gaining consumer insights.

### For which one of the following objectives does social media offer the greatest potential?

Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



Is the social media opportunity strategic or tactical? Given a list of 6 objectives that social media might be used for, one stood out: gaining consumer insights. But social media is more than a new research tool as building brand awareness and customer loyalty were cited by a strong group of respondents.

#### What the numbers say

- Asked to name one objective in using social media, close to 37% said it could aid the process of gaining insights into consumers, making this the top answer.

- Just over 21% accepted social media had a role in building brand awareness, while over 18% felt it could be used in increasing customer loyalty.
- Just 14% saw potential for social media in enhancing corporate reputation, although this was due to a strong bias to this among our French respondents (46%). In the United States and Canada, nobody felt inclined to tick this particular box.

- Only 7% of respondents chose launching a product as a top application for social media and none chose increasing purchase intent.

#### What the marketers say

**David Harris, Suzuki**

*"You have to listen to your customers and social media is no more than a bulletin board for the voice of the customer. If you don't listen to your customer, you don't win."*

**Tina Sharkey, Baby Center**

*"A brand is not what a company says about its product. It's what a friend tells a friend."*

#### What TNS says

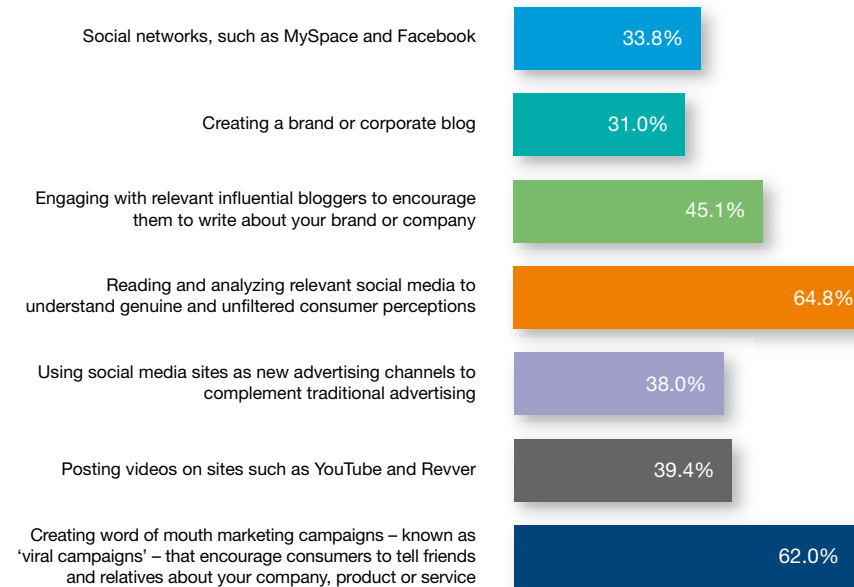
This is a very heartening finding. The headlines in the trade press focus on the breakthrough viral marketing campaign, from Burger Kings' Subservient Chicken to Smirnoff's Tea Party YouTube video, tempting brands to jump right in. But almost universally in the myriad of books and studies of the social media trend, the first piece of advice is to listen to the conversations and use the findings to guide your strategy for participating. This 'listen first' approach is the right way for brands to successfully engage their audiences.

# Q3

## Social media will continue to have a real impact on business.

### Please rate each of the following social media resources or opportunities on their future potential to impact your business?

Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



A strong majority felt that all 7 social media options we presented would have at least some impact on their business. Focusing on those options that would have 'A lot of impact', marketers split between listening and delivering messages through social media channels; respondents cited media placement options more frequently than creating blogs and social network pages. The US was the most optimistic about all social media channels, with the curious exception of social networks.

#### What the numbers say

- Consistent with the idea of using social media to gain consumer insights, close to two thirds said reading and analysing social media would have a lot of impact; a stunning 88% of US respondents agreed with this.

- A close second was the ability to use social media to encourage consumers to tell friends and relatives about their company, product or service. There was broad agreement in all countries, with the US again leading with three fourths agreeing that this will have a lot of impact.
- One third saw social networks such as MySpace or Facebook as offering a lot of impact on their business. In the United States, the figure was slightly lower at 28%. the UK and Canada were more bullish, with just under half of those respondents expecting these channels to have high impact.
- Is there value in creating blogs around brands or about companies? Sure. About 30% expect them to have a lot of impact but a higher percentage were optimistic about the impact of posting videos to sites like YouTube and placing ads on social media sites.
- And what if marketers were to encourage relevant influential bloggers to write about a brand or company? Here our respondents split: two-thirds of US respondents saw this as having a lot of impact while only about one-third of Europeans saw it this way though they did agree it would have some impact.

...cont.

# Q3

Social media will continue to have a real impact on business. *(continued)*

Please rate each of the following social media resources or opportunities on their future potential to impact your business?

## What the marketers say

### Michael Saso, Abbott Laboratories

*"I think it's the way to reach fragmented audiences. The model before was that you could take a shotgun approach through newspapers and traditional media like TV and it would be very effective. Now audiences are looking for communication resources that are specific to their interests so it's harder to reach them traditionally. But you can still connect with them through social media and viral marketing."*

### Eric Kintz, Hewlett-Packard

*"The media consumption of our customers is moving more and more towards social media and away from traditional media. So, if we want to interact with our customers, we will have to engage in that world deeply."*

## What TNS says

Marketers show a preference for buying ads and running campaigns on social media sites over truly participating, eg, by having a blog. This shows that they continue to rely on mass marketing approaches. Much remains to be learned about how best to use social networks but a research study called 'Never Ending Friending' in which TNS participated points toward a different approach. While placing ads and brand pages in social networks has some impact, the greater attitudinal impact comes from actively participating by giving brand assets to social network members to embed in their profile. However, this idea of giving control to consumers is one of the hardest aspects of social media for traditionally-trained marketers to understand and embrace.

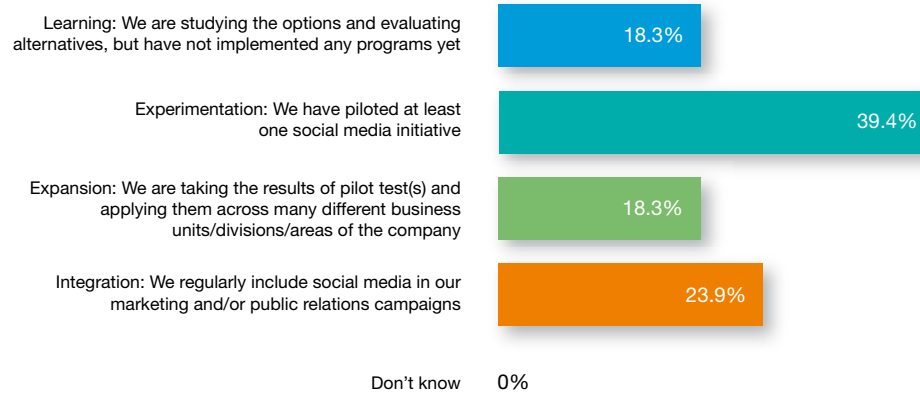




## Social media? Yes, we are definitely experimenting.

### Which of the following statements best describes the stage of development of social media at your company?

Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



Learning or experimenting? Expanding or integrating? When we asked which of these four words best describes the stage of development of social media at the respondent's own company, it was 'experimentation' that came out top, with 'integration' the next most frequent answer.

#### What the numbers say

- Across all respondents, close to 40% claimed their company had piloted at least one social media initiative. In Canada, this figure rose to more than 63% while there were no companies at the 'Integration' stage.
- Almost one-quarter are integrating their social media successes into their marketing mix, with 18% each in the 'Expansion' and 'Learning' groups.
- The most 'learners' – those studying but not yet testing any social media initiatives – were in the UK (nearly 32%).

#### What TNS says

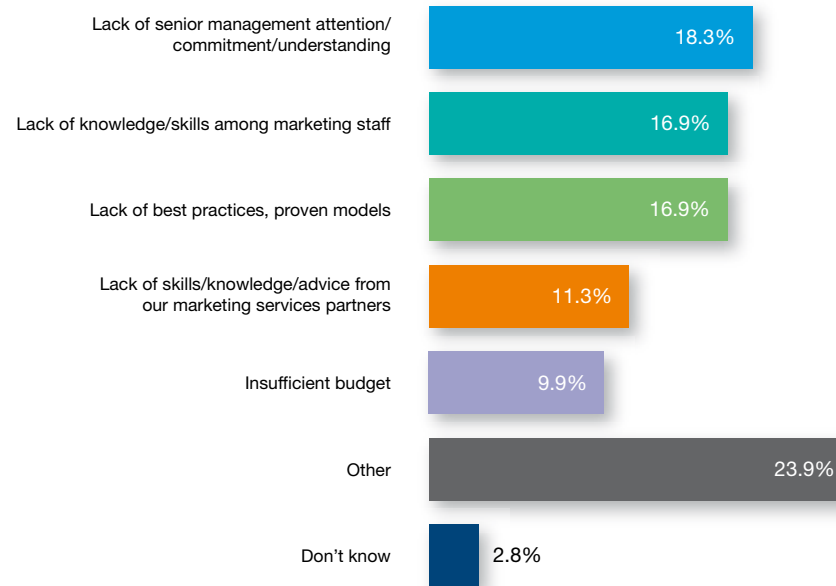
- These data show the split nature of this market: the early adopters have leapt ahead, incorporating their early successes into their mainstream marketing activities. Fast followers are relatively rare, but are now expanding on their early experiments. Mainstream companies held back and studied the trend, but have begun their experiments.

# Q5

## What's holding your company back from engaging in social media?

### What is the greatest barrier to acceptance/implementation of social media in your organization?

Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



All of the five barriers offered as potential answers received their share of agreement, but no one issue stood out. Underlining this state of the market is the fact that the most frequent answer, given by almost one-quarter of respondents, was 'Other'. The US showed a very different profile than the other countries surveyed.

#### What the numbers say

- More than 18% cited lack of senior management attention, commitment or understanding.

- Nearly as many, 17%, cited lack of knowledge or skills among marketing staff and the same percentage identified lack of best practices and proven models as the main inhibitor.
- Little blame was laid at the door of marketing services partners. Less than 12% felt there was any issue over suppliers lacking skills or knowledge, or not being unable to advise clients.

However, this does not jibe with the answers we got when we specifically asked about agencies' skills (see question 8, page 13)

- Budget didn't seem to be holding people back (9.9%).
- In the US, the most advanced and optimistic market, 32% cited the lack of best practices and proven models followed by 24% who pointed to a lack of senior management support.

#### What the marketers say

**Eric D'Ablaing, Hyundai**

*"I think we need to get the staff to go ahead and actually engage into this new avenue. There has to be an understanding of what to go ahead and act on. That just comes from experience."*

#### What TNS says

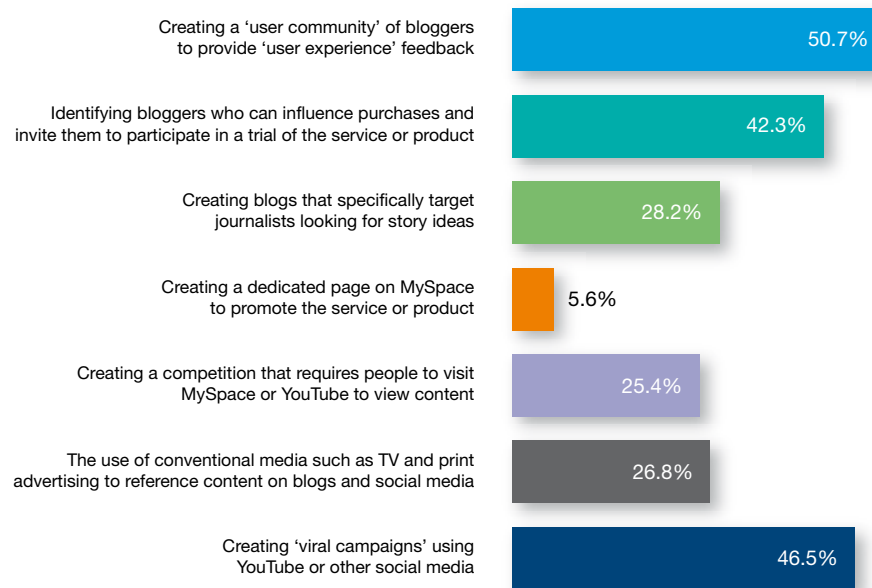
This appears to be a function of market maturity. The high percentage of 'other' responses outside of the US may have been driven by the barrier we had seen in the US prior to 2007: lesser confidence that social media would have a business impact. We expect that other countries will show similar evolution and so virtually all companies will be in expansion or integration phases in another 18 – 24 months.

# Q6

## Launching a service or product brand? Then bring in the bloggers.

How effective do you feel blogs and social media options can be if used as an integral part of the formal launch of a new service or product brand?

Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



In contrast to question 2 in which launching a product was not one of the top objectives for social media, respondents supported its role in an integrated product launch campaign.

### What the numbers say

- More than 50% said it would be 'very effective' to create a user community of bloggers to provide user experience feedback.

- More than 46% said it would be 'very effective' to create a viral campaign using YouTube or other social media.
- There was also support for the idea of identifying bloggers who'd be willing to participate in the trial of a service or product. More than 42% agreed this would be 'very effective'.
- More than their global colleagues, US respondents endorsed the idea of using traditional media to boost the effectiveness of their social media efforts.

### What TNS says

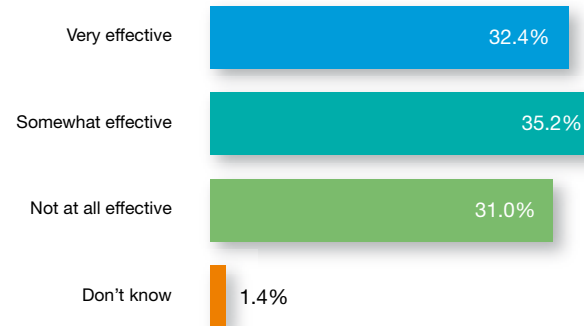
- People need a reason to talk about products, and the newness of a product can give consumers that reason. It is striking that, once again, the idea of using the two-way nature of social media to obtain direct consumer feedback tops the ways in which social media can contribute to success.

# Q7

## What do you do if your company picks up adverse feedback through social media?

When it comes to responding to, and better understanding, adverse feedback about services or products, how effective can blogs or other social media be?

Total average of USA, Canada, UK & France



Suppose that the social media channels are delivering unfavourable commentary about your service or product? Do you react? If so, how do you react? We provided seven options in this scenario and marketers demonstrated their willingness to listen and respond, soundly rejecting either ignoring or trying to spin the negatives.

### What the numbers say

- Posting a comment to rebut criticism was deemed to be 'very effective' or 'somewhat effective' by nearly 68%. There was also little sympathy for the idea of devising a metric that sets sales against the level of criticism, and only responding if there is an adverse effect on sales. Less than 13% saw this as being 'very effective'.
- In line with this, nearly 86% felt it would not be at all effective simply to ignore criticism.
- Neither would 'counter spin' work. Less than 3% said it would be 'very effective' to create a community of hired bloggers to focus solely on positive service or product attributes.

- Trying to regulate blogs and social networks to cut down criticism was not seen as an effective option either. More than 66% described this as a 'not at all effective' option.
- Fewer than 13% felt it would be 'very effective' to run print or TV advertising to counter negative perceptions.
- But there was a strong inclination to gather colleagues together to study adverse feedback with a view to learning from it. More than 97% described this as 'very effective' or 'somewhat effective'.

### What TNS says

Some of the earliest example of social media were crisis situations for products like the Kryptonite bicycle locks and Sony-Erickson mobile phone, retailer Wal-mart and people like US newscaster Dan Rather. Given these early, prominent examples, perhaps it isn't surprising that marketers seem in greater agreement about the proper course of action. Brands seem to be returning to the old adage 'the customer is always right' by listening to customer complaints and are increasingly willing to have serious dialogues with customers to learn how to correct these problems.

# Q8

## The marketing agencies don't get it.....not yet anyway.

How well are marketing services suppliers – including ad agencies, PR agencies, online marketing agencies, direct mail specialists, design houses and others – helping companies understand and exploit blogs and social networks? What do they need to improve?

We found a lot of skepticism concerning marketing services suppliers. Agencies are frequently criticized for trying to apply traditional tactics in these emerging media or having a theoretical knowledge but not the practical skills to implement a program. At the same time, the message seems to be that there's a big opportunity out there for any supplier that can prove they have practical experience, along with techniques that work.

### What the marketers say

**Marc Monseau, Johnson & Johnson**

*"They're not doing a very good job at all. At the moment most agencies still view social media tools as just another vehicle for driving their messages."*

**David Harris, Suzuki**

*"The existing marketing partners do not understand the ins and outs of the social media space. They can do more harm than good if they apply old models."*

**Bryan Simkins, Fedex**

*"I think traditional ad agencies have very little contribution to make. They are mostly driven by their compensation models which are made for closed media. Those models don't apply to open media."*

**Michael Saso, Abbott Laboratories**

*"There's a disconnect between the overall approach and the tactics. The vendors we've been talking to are proposing some creative value they can bring to social media programs. However, they are not engaged in the tactical side of it. They understand the theory but are not grasping the application side."*

**Carolyn Holliday, Fila USA, Inc.**

*"I really think that agencies need to focus heavily on how they can build excitement within the live space on the internet. Outside of just placing ads they need to start dialogues with existing and potential customers."*

**Eric Kintz, Hewlett-Packard**

*"I think they are somewhat helping. But they need to show how social media has helped them further their own agenda. So if an ad agency comes to me, I'd ask if they have their own page on a social network site? Are they posting videos on YouTube? Do they have their own blog? And how has it helped them in their own business?"*

### What TNS says

Marketing services suppliers are in a tough spot. Clients are being overly optimistic expecting best practices in an area which is, at most, three years old. And the rapid growth has spawned rapid turnover in new technologies and vendors are making it difficult to be competent in executing every new idea a client asks them about. On the other hand, agencies are slow to change the mass marketing model, not investing in the training their staff need and are not walking their talk in using the tools they recommend to their clients. Over the past twenty years we've seen similar disconnects as clients embraced direct marketing, interactive marketing and integrated marketing. As the models mature, agencies will either acquire or organically build the skills they need to respond to their clients' budget priorities.

# Q9

## Will we see a senior position responsible for social media?

### If a company specifically created a senior position to manage the long-term business opportunities afforded by social media, what would be the title of the new position?

Our respondents struggled to come up with an appropriate name for a senior role in social media. Some of the suggestions were a throw-back to the 1990s, when the internet came to the fore. Others were more forward-looking and creative, and tried to wrestle with the much more interactive nature of today's media. We saw interesting permutations of a number of key concepts – networking, content, media, customers and contact. Nobody actually suggested Chief Blog Officer. But we had plenty of imaginative approaches. We liked 'Director of Living Media'. Our favourite was 'User Created Content Guru'.

#### What the marketers say

##### **Kym Spell, NYC and Company**

*"The title should have something that speaks to the interactivity, the social networking component, and the content of the editorial pieces. The thing that is important here is that this new media is not one dimensional like a television ad."*

##### **David Harris, Suzuki**

*"Because of the personal nature of blogs and the long tail, social media is a hybrid between customer relations, marketing and PR."*

#### Here are some of the titles our respondents suggested:

Head of Social Media  
Director of Consumer Generated Media  
Head of Online Brand Equity  
Consumer Insights Manager  
Director of Social Media  
Director of Social Media Analysis  
Voice of the Customer  
Director of Social Networking  
Head of Interactive Content  
Director of Online Customer Relations  
Chief Networking Officer  
Director of Social Marketing  
Chief Relationship Officer  
Marketing Director Emerging Media  
Chief Media Officer  
Social Media Officer  
Manager of Online Contact  
User Created Content Guru

#### What TNS says

There is an interesting split here between director level and more senior 'chief' or 'officer' titles. The open question is whether social media is a new discipline that requires a specialized group (the way interactive marketing has evolved) or whether it should be staffed at a higher level so that the senior social media executive can coordinate activities not just in communications, but also in customer service and product management.

# Q10

## We've only just begun...

### How significant will social media be for companies five years from now? Please explain the reasons for your opinion.

We asked our respondents to look at the future and predict how important social media will be for companies five years from now. More than 56% said social media would be 'very significant' and another 39% said it would be of 'some significance'. The bulls were in the United States, where no less than 80% predicted social media would be 'very significant'. Perhaps the most interesting finding was that nobody ventured an opinion that social media would ever have 'little significance'.

#### What the marketers say

**Marc Monseau, Johnson & Johnson**

*"Social media is just the beginning of a much more significant shift in how people gather and use information. I don't think this fundamental shift has been fully appreciated."*

**Eric Kintz, Hewlett-Packard**

*"Social media allows customers to express their opinions and publish them to the world, and we cannot afford not to participate in the conversation. I think in five years, you won't specifically talk about social media. It will just be an integral part of how you go to market, and how you get your marketing mix. Just like search engine optimization is today."*

**Anne-Marie Kroisi, Hasbro, Inc.**

*"I think it will just be a natural way for the next generation of purchasers to share with their peers, share product reviews, share ideas, talk to people."*

**Steve Gordon, Loews Hotels**

*"Social media will eventually become the first choice for people looking to find information on a product, service or hotel."*

**Eric D'Ablaing, Hyundai**

*"We need to think about giving the users the ability to connect with one another, which is the real interactivity of using the Web. This will allow brands to be the connection point between two or more parties and not just a connection point to the brand."*

**Kym Spell, NYC & Company**

*"It could become the entire way that we communicate or if it's manipulated to such an extent that people no longer trust the content of the site, it could just go away."*

**Carolyn Holliday, Fila USA, Inc.**

*"The internet provides a place where consumers have a voice and can speak among each other to discern the realities behind the brand and the products. That is not something I see consumers giving up or losing interest in any time soon"*

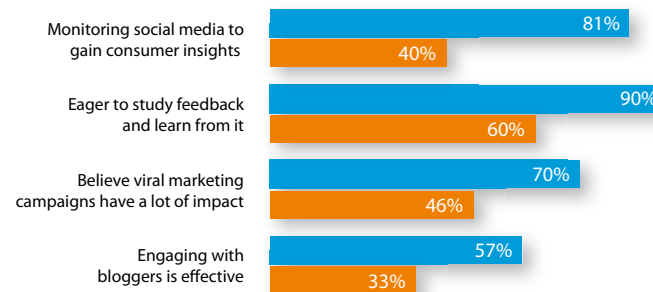
**Peter Justason, Johnson & Johnson**

*"The genie is out of the bottle. We used to be able to control the message because you had to have a certain amount of money to broadcast on television. Now it doesn't cost anything for a million people to get online and talk to each other. People are trusting people like themselves more and more, as opposed to some sort of third party authoritative figure."*

#### What TNS says

We agree that the growth of social media is unequivocal, inexorable and irreversible. And as consumer media and communication habits change, marketers must adapt not only to reach consumers but also to be relevant to them in the context of these new channels. But rarely does a medium die as a result of an emerging new medium; instead the roles each medium plays in the consumer's life evolves and adapts. As the mix of channels evolves, marketers must become more knowledgeable in the roles of each medium, more creative in building a mix best suited to their target and business goals, and more flexible in responding to the dialog that will increasingly become integral to the brand's relationship to its consumers.

## Comparing the Revolutionaries to the Wait-and-Sees.



### What separates early adopters from marketers who are more cautious about embracing social media?

This is an interesting question that can shed a lot of light on why some companies are so successful with social media tools and which practices have the greatest impact on business.

To answer this question, we zeroed in on two segments of respondents: the 'Wait-and-See' group who agreed with the statement 'worth monitoring, but should not absorb significant resources', and 'Revolutionaries' who believe it is a 'revolutionary opportunity that must be grasped with a sense of urgency'.

As expected, the Revolutionaries are far more optimistic about social media across the board and are farther along in incorporating it into their marketing plans. One unexpected finding is that the 'Wait-and-See' group places more emphasis on using social media to deliver brand messages; with this mindset the relatively small audiences for individual blogs or discussion boards likely contributes to this group's more cautious approach.

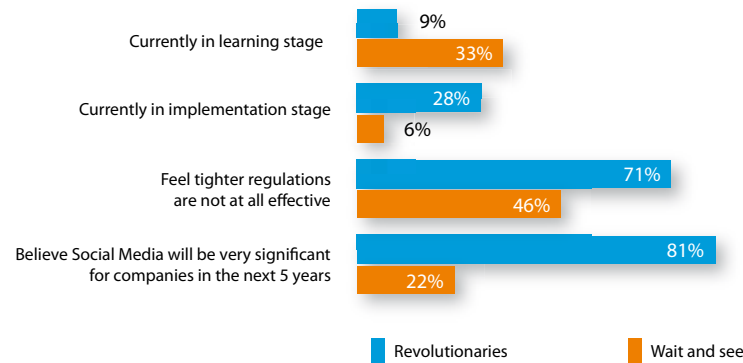
Here are some of the distinct differences that separate the two groups.

- Far more Revolutionaries believe the greatest value of social media is for **gathering insights** (42% compared to 33%)

- Revolutionaries were twice as likely to see a lot of impact from monitoring social media **to gain consumer insights** (81% of Revolutionaries compared to 40% of Wait-and-See companies.)
- Revolutionaries are eager to connect with other colleagues to study feedback and learn from it. 90% of Revolutionaries see that as very effective, compared to 60% of the Wait-and-See segment.
- Revolutionaries believe not only in listening, but engaging in social media. Over 70% believe **viral marketing** campaigns have a lot of impact (compared to 46% of the Wait-and-See segment) and 57% believe engaging with bloggers is effective (compared to 33% of Wait-and-See).
- Wait-and-See companies put more emphasis on viral marketing campaigns and videos than listening. Engaging bloggers or having a corporate blog take a back seat to using the channel to distribute the company's or brand's message.
- The largest percentage of both groups see themselves in **the experimentation** phase within their organization, but there are some distinct differences.



## Revolutionaries vs Wait-and-Sees. (continued)



- Three times (33% vs 9%) as many **Wait-and-See companies** are in the **learning** stage, while 4.5 times (28% vs 6%) as many Revolutionaries are in the implementation phase
- The **Wait-and-See respondents** see lack of **senior management commitment** as the greatest barrier. A large number of Revolutionaries have the same issue, but the largest group cites the lack of **best practices**.

- When it came to responding to adverse feedback about their company, both groups shared many of the same opinions. But they began to differ when it came to ethics and regulations, with the Revolutionaries more willing to push the envelope on questionable tactics.
  - 53% of Wait-and-See respondents felt that creating a community of hired bloggers was not at all effective, but Revolutionaries were less adamant. The largest group, 52%, felt it was somewhat effective.
  - It is no surprise that Revolutionaries are much more likely to oppose tighter regulation of blogs and social media. 71% of Revolutionaries felt tighter regulations are not at all effective, compared to 46% of Wait-and-Sees.

- Looking ahead, the optimism of the Revolutionaries becomes very clear.
  - 81% of Revolutionaries believe that social media will be very significant for companies in the next five years.
  - The Wait-and-See is more tempered as 33% believe it will be very significant.

### What TNS says

The Revolutionaries have come to understand that social media changes the nature of the relationship between a brand and its audience: listening is a higher priority than pushing more messages to that audience. But having built their listening strategy, they engage more actively.

The Wait-and-See respondents still seem to be stuck in mass marketing thinking, viewing social media as a new channel for marketing campaigns and video messages, but not one where they need to be present themselves with a blog or engaged with bloggers.

Best practices are crucial to the continuing integration of social media, and likely the Revolutionaries will provide them. The one area of concern is this group's willingness to use tactics in the ethical gray zone. These tactics risk undermining the trust that makes social media effective today.



**Remy Pothet**  
Global Automotive Sector Head, TNS

*Marketers should urgently consider all the business implications of the fast growing development of blogs and social networks, and in general, the impact of the digital environment on marketing practices. This is particularly true for the automotive sector as consumers love talking, sharing and interacting about their cars: the car they own or they have owned, about their future car purchases or their dream car, about the latest innovative cars launched in the market place or new concept cars. Consumers love giving their opinion and sharing their experiences, as well as learning from others. These forums represent true market power and have the ability to influence a company's marketing actions and offering. It is time for automotive marketers to completely redesign and reinvent their marketing strategy by putting social networks in the heart of their marketing practices.*



**Stephen Factor**  
Managing Director, Global Consumer Sector

*The growth of social media represents one of the key drivers of New Consumerism. Consumers who value authenticity and originality in all that they buy and experience. Consumers who are well informed and hugely involved in the products, services and brands that they buy. They are Individualistic – they do things “my way” – and increasingly demand companies do too. These are consumers who are socially responsible – and exercise their ethical awareness via their product and brand choices. Social networks are the platform through which they can engage with like minded consumers, express their views confidently and evaluate the authenticity of the brands they buy.*

*For the brand manager, social media can be the ‘extreme sports’ of marketing. Get it right, engage with authenticity and originality, and brand equity can fly. Get it wrong and it is easy to crash and burn. Unilever have been masters of using social media to develop the Dove ‘real women’ platform. But can a company that also promotes the brand Axe, that some women may find misogynistic, be all things to all consumers? This is the type of challenge that such engagement provides.*



**David Soulsby**  
Global Head of Product Development and Innovation, TNS

*A mainstream marketing approach is often inappropriate for breakthrough innovation because the average consumer ‘doesn’t get the idea’ yet. The relevance of the new concept is only identified by the more future-thinking consumers, and this will have to be seeded into the marketplace to maximise success. In this case an advocacy based marketing model is usually the most efficient and carefully targeted on-line communities can be harnessed as part of the programme to create the buzz.*



**Elaine Riddell**  
CEO TNS Healthcare Sector

*The rise of social networks completely changes the relationship between brands and their customers. As customers increasingly rely on word of mouth, marketers must become part of the conversation – to move from monologue to dialogue – or risk being left out of the decision process. Pharma companies need to do pilot tests with social networks now, so they are prepared to use them effectively in marketing and research programs.*

*Social networks hold great opportunity across a wide range of pharma communications programs, including disease education and relationship marketing. To be successful, however, marketers must recognize that social media demand openness and responsiveness to customer feedback. They must incorporate these new approaches into the marketing mix in a way that complements, not competes with, mass marketing.*

*Strategies must allow companies to shift their marketing mix to incorporate customer participation. This includes sharing customer feedback with marketing, PR, product development – everyone who needs to know how customers think about a brand. With these insights, companies can align with rather than lag behind stakeholders.*



**Gaurav Bhalla**  
Global Innovation Director, TNS

*We live in an interconnected world, characterized by interactions, interdependencies, and communities. Interactions between community members are fertile ground for exchanging ideas, sharing consumption patterns, disseminating influence, and expressing preferences. Savvy companies are using this trend to create new customer-centric platforms for the co-creation of commercial value.*

*Value creation now is not just from company's products to consumer needs. Consumers also create value in relationships with other consumers and in their relationships with companies, thereby fundamentally altering the way marketing strategy, ranging from idea generation to product/service delivery, is thought of and practiced within the company.*



**Arno Hummerston**  
Managing Director, TNS Global Interactive

*The importance and concerns around this new space are clear. Clients need a partner that understands the details. Getting the most from communities and any research leveraging them requires a tailor made approach that acknowledges the diversity of the medium and the groups engaged with it. What to do and when to do it can only really be driven by experience in such a fluid world. Truly understanding the environment, the context, the ethics and the quality around the insights is what TNS offers as such a partner.*

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