

Are Social Networks the new way to communicate in business?

- New Survey confirms over two thirds of UK businesses are using Web 2.0 as alternative to email and information sharing

A new survey looking at drivers and barriers for adoption of web 2.0 technologies in organisations confirms that nearly half (46%) of respondents believe there will be a steady increase in the use of Web 2.0 in their organisations over the next 12 months and over 81% are already using it as an alternative to conventional email and for sharing information in the business environment.

The survey was conducted among 315 respondents in June by Mesmo Consultancy, a leading email training and consultancy company in partnership with Inbox/Outbox, the UK's leading forum for e-marketing and collaborative communications. It investigated the adoption in business of social networking and collaborative tools -generally referred to as Web 2.0 technologies – among IT, marketing and business professionals. Over two thirds of respondents were at management level aged 36-55, over half were female, and both generation X and Y were represented with a quarter aged under 25-35.

The survey showed that within business over 40% of respondents use LinkedIn and also voted it the most useful site to them from a business perspective. Facebook was cited as being least useful for business but conversely on an individual basis Facebook was seen to be useful in raising the individual's profile. It came a close second to LinkedIn with Twitter and YouTube in almost joint equal third position. While, over two thirds of all respondents said they did not use social networks at work over three quarters (77.9%) said they used Facebook at home, two thirds YouTube (61%), 41% LinkedIn and 29% Twitter. My Space and others attracted only 11% or less of respondents.

According to Dr Seeley the survey results indicate that the main driver behind increasing Web 2.0 adoption is the need to reduce email volume and the time spent in sending them - as 71% of respondents cited how easy the Web 2.0 technologies are to use to share information and the need for an alternative to email for communications. "Whatever the medium, in my experience, the more volume generated the less useful it becomes. Many people have been turned off by the nonsensical drivel issued by many 'celebrity' 'Twitterers' but if you carefully select a few contacts in your field you receive interesting nuggets. Additionally we are seeing companies promptly dealing with customer gripes that have been 'tweeted' and maintaining Facebook and other network 'pages' to extend and enhance their brand reach. My personal favourites are Martha Lane-Fox, Graham Cluley of Sophos, Luke Williams of Social Tech and David Allen the time management guru. These plus a few others which links me direct to articles I want to read. I've now switched off a lot of newsletters I used to subscribe to and created for myself a 'pull' rather 'push' information feed. I go and look at the few sources I

really value when I have time rather than being deluged with information of which only 10-20% may be of use”.

Despite the increase in interest towards social networking websites, blogs and wikis with over a third of respondents reporting increased use over the past six months, there is still a great deal of concern and scepticism – and 40% say their organisations are not using Web 2.0 technologies. Top three reasons given were security, the lack of evidence supporting its effectiveness as a relevant business communications tool and the time it takes to use such media.

Commenting on the results, Dr Seeley said “Over 51% of the business professionals who took part in the survey highlighted security as a potential barrier to the evolution of Web 2.0 in the work place. Judging by the number of emails I receive on a daily basis from IT professionals who are struggling to make conventional email systems ‘bullet-proof’, it is clear this will play a key factor. However, time and information overload are real problems for most of us. We are all time poor and data rich and for many businesses, there is no other option than to develop current communication tools and look at new ones.”

“Web 2.0 is exciting and it does offer the opportunity for businesses, large and small, to be more efficient and productive. For this to work, there needs to be more reassuring, proven cases of success before it is more commonly used in business to improve productivity and increase sales,” adds Managing Director of Revolution Events, Rich Tribe. “Already 45% of Internet users spend most of their time on user generated websites but sound policies and clear practice guidance need to be in place to reassure IT professionals and office managers that business intelligence and data security is not at risk.”

The current lack of clear guidelines and training was also highlighted in the survey with 36% citing a lack of suitable training and education. Whilst only 29% said their current Computer Acceptable Usage Policy explicitly covered the use of social networking. The recent publication of the Government’s Digital Britain again highlights the need for far more focus on improving the level of IT competence and confidence amongst UK plc.

For more information about Mesmo Consultancy, please visit: www.mesmo.co.uk

About Dr Monica Seeley, Mesmo Consultancy

Dr Monica Seeley, founder of Mesmo Consultancy, is an international leading expert on email best practice. She specialises in enabling executives and their organisations to manage their electronic communications (especially email), more effectively to improve business performance. Mesmo Consultancy provides consultancy and training focused at both the individual and strategic perspective.

Monica is a Senior Visiting Fellow at Sir John Cass Business School, City University. Her research studies include the use of social networking tools to gain sustainable business benefits.

Her clients include APACS, Accenture, BT, Balfour Beatty, Department for Education and Skills (now Department for Children, Schools and Families), Gucci Group, HM Treasury, Islington Council, KPMG (Channel Islands), Lafarge, Levi Strauss, Lloyds Bank, New Forest District Council, Rolls-Royce, St Andrews University, St Helens Council, Shepherd Construction and Young's Brewery.

Monica is a respected commentator on the effective strategic use of electronic communications. Until 2008 she was author of The Times Crème column 'PC stress Busters' and is co-author of '*Managing in the Email Office*'.

Monica can be contacted at 01202 43 43 40 or monica@mesmo.co.uk or www.mesmo.co.uk.

About Revolution Events

Revolution Events is one of the UK's leading providers of innovative business forums, with an enviable track record in delivering high quality educational events for domestic and international markets. Since 1999, having organised more than 200 business events within a diverse range of markets, with particular strengths in emerging technologies, procurement & supply chain issues and new developments in the public sector.

Over the years, Revolution Events has worked with major partners such as the Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS), The European Association for e-Identity and Security (eema), the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA), PricewaterhouseCoopers, Lloyds TSB, the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (now CLG), the European Networking & Information Security Agency (ENISA), the National e-Procurement Project (NePP), Microsoft and Sage Software.

To find out more about Revolution Events please visit: www.revolution-events.com