

# Engaging the New IT Buyer: 4 Social Media Trends and How Marketers Should Adjust

White Paper



Social media has changed the way that professionals solve problems, build strategies, and research purchasing decisions in the workplace. It has given them the ability to expand beyond the resources available within their own organizations or through standard research materials and product overviews, instead tapping into the knowledge of their peers around the world. These peers have firsthand, frontline experiences and expertise that is shared, learned from, and put into practice to help individuals and companies achieve greater success together than they could alone.

In short, today's professional is making smarter decisions through social media. Trends indicate that reliance on this source of experience-based information is only going to increase.

In a recent report from DemandGen Report and Genius.com\*, nearly half of B2B buyers responding to the survey indicated that they first consulted peers to determine the potential impact of a purchase to build a business case for adoption, and then received approval even though the project was unbudgeted. In the same report, 59% of respondents reported that they engage with peers during the purchasing research phase, and more than 80% said they contact solution providers directly – all trends that indicate a shift in the way buyers are getting information and making decisions about their purchases.

The impact of these trends on B2B marketers is significant: strategies and tactics must evolve with the changing consumption habits and preferences of professionals in target audiences. There is also a growing awareness among professionals when it comes to their receptiveness to advertising and marketing. While they are accepting of a marketer's presence and promotions, the delivery must be transparent and add real value. Push marketing tactics like e-mail and display advertising still work, but opportunities for deeper engagement through social media can help marketers build trust and relationships that ultimately yield a higher return on marketing investments.

This white paper will provide an overview of the current trends in social media use in the workplace. Readers will learn how social media affects decision making, how organizational approaches and policies develop around these new channels, and how marketers should adapt and adjust to the changing dynamic that social media represents.

*\*Source: DemandGen Report and Genius.com, "Inside the Mind of the New B2B Buyer"*

<http://www.genius.com/marketinggeniusblog/2767/a-glimpse-inside-the-mind-of-the-new-b2b-buyer.html>

Trends discussed in this white paper are based on findings from the sixth wave of the Toolbox.com/PJA Social Media Index survey series, which was conducted between July 28 and August 18, 2010. More than 2,200 IT professionals from 109 countries participated in the 26-question survey; participants were recruited from the online communities at Toolbox.com.

### Trend #1: Social Media Consumption Among Professionals Continues to Increase

Consumption of social media, which includes user-generated content from sources like Toolbox.com, Wikipedia, Twitter, and Facebook, continues to increase among the IT professionals who participated in the sixth wave of the Toolbox.com/PJA Social Media Index. In comparison to the previous wave, which reported IT professionals consuming social media at a rate of 4.59 hours per week, the sixth wave saw a 28% increase to 5.86 hours per week.

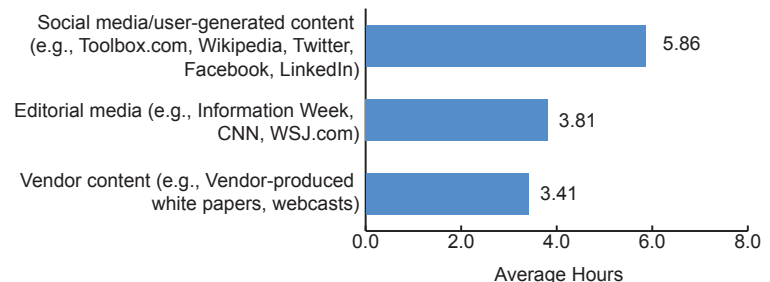
Social media consumption represents 45% of total media consumption among IT

professionals. In comparison, consumption of editorial media, which includes sources like Information Week, The Wall Street Journal, and CNN, accounted for 29% of total media consumption among IT professionals. Similarly, vendor content like white papers and webcasts was consumed 26% of the time.

#### *Takeaway for Marketers*

Professionals reported significant increases in consumption of social media, which continues to outpace that of editorial and vendor content. By no means does this trend discount the importance of editorial and vendor content, both of which continue to play an important role in how professionals make decisions in the workplace. However, it does speak to the shift from paid media to earned media. Marketers must now earn rather than buy attention, which forces them to create and deliver relevant information that offers professionals added value.

**How many hours during an average week do you spend online consuming or participating in the following media types?**



Source: [Toolbox.com/PJA Social Media Index, Wave VI](#)  
2,222 Responses

No longer are professionals limited to researching content produced by editors or solutions providers, but can now also turn to peers who have firsthand experience with the products and solutions being evaluated. Through social media, the ability to collaborate with like-minded professionals has expanded beyond colleagues in the workplace to a worldwide network of peers. The trends in this survey point to the recognition of this value among professionals, who have become increasingly reliant on peers to help them make informed decisions.

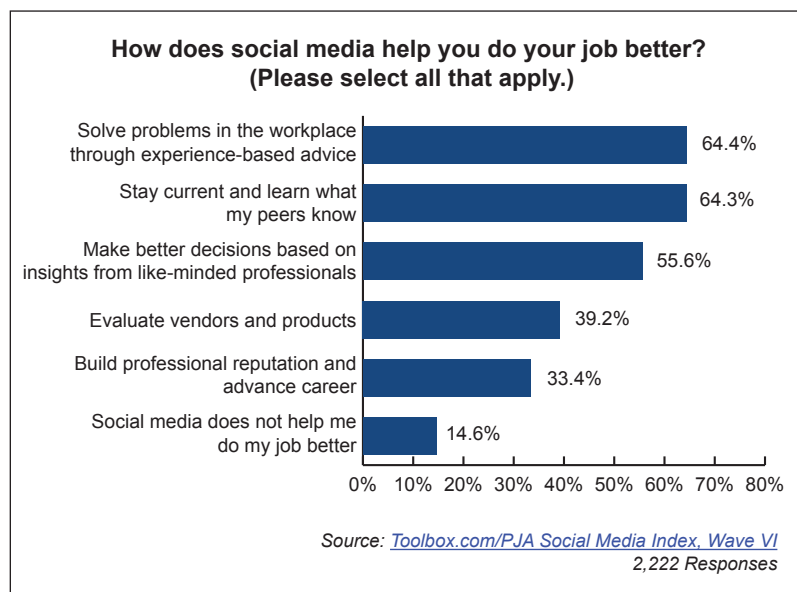
Social media is now a trusted resource that is relied on by professionals to make workplace decisions. Marketing dollars have been following this trend, with analysts like Forrester predicting an increase in social media marketing spend to \$3.1 billion in 2014\*. By focusing on social media as part of an integrated strategy, marketers will ensure that they have a presence in the places where target audiences are spending a significant amount of their work week.

\*Source: Forrester, "US Interactive Marketing Forecast"

[http://www.forrester.com/rb/Research/us\\_interactive\\_marketing\\_forecast\\_2009\\_to\\_2014/q/id/47730/t/2](http://www.forrester.com/rb/Research/us_interactive_marketing_forecast_2009_to_2014/q/id/47730/t/2)

### Trend #2: Solving Problems, Staying Current, and Making Better Decisions Are the Top Uses of Social Media in the Workplace

Among the IT professionals surveyed, 64.4% of respondents cited "solving problems in the workplace through experience-based advice" as the top goal of their use of social media on the job. This response was followed closely by the need to "stay current and learn what my peers know" at 64.3% of survey participants. Less than 15% of respondents feel that social media does not help them do their jobs better.



Additionally, “making better decisions based on insights from like-minded professionals” garnered 55.6% of responses among IT professionals, and “evaluating vendors and products” was a priority for 39.2% of respondents.

### *Takeaway for Marketers*

The first trend in this survey, the increased consumption of social media in the workplace, shows marketers where they should be investing more time and effort. This second trend, which points to the *why* of social media consumption among professionals, gives marketers deeper insight into how they should be interacting with target audiences through these channels.

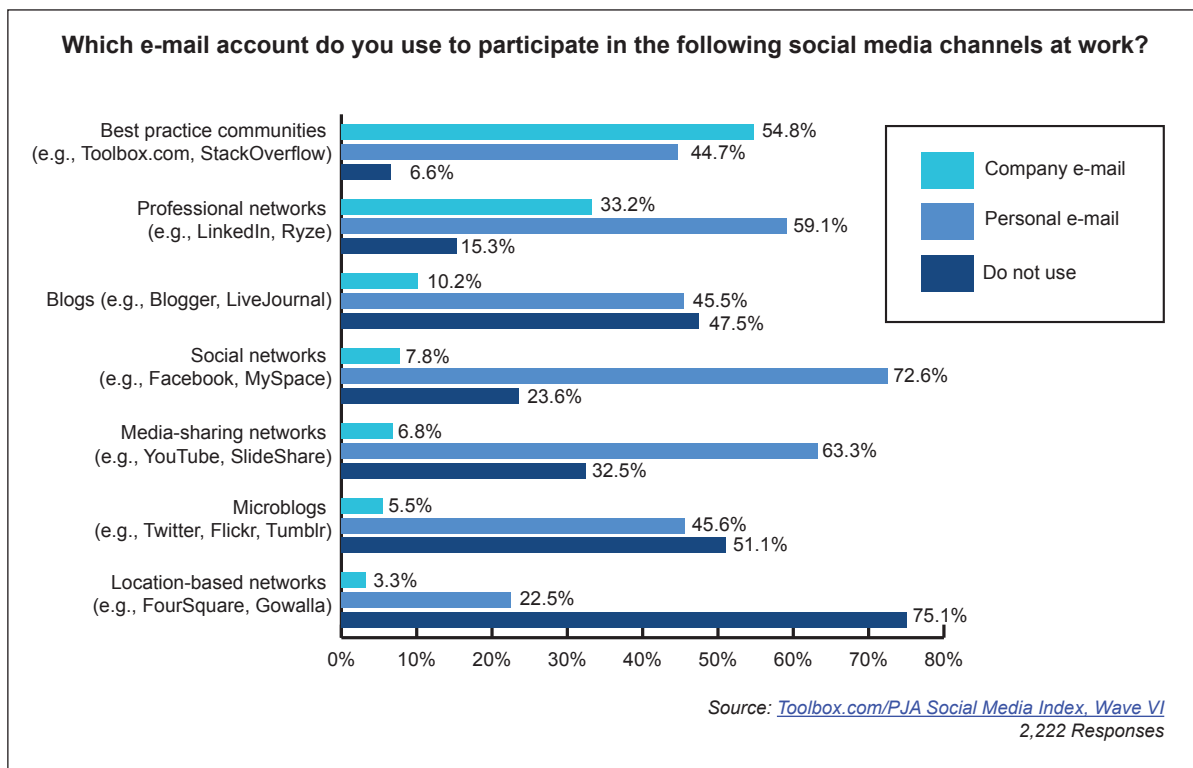
This trend identifies an opportunity to become part of the collaborative process taking place in social media settings. Professionals welcome participation from marketers: in the fourth wave of the Toolbox.com/PJA Social Media Index survey, more than 76% reported that social media marketer participation is essential. However, this participation must add real value for professionals – providing solutions to the problems they are discussing, or by taking action on the feedback that professionals are providing. According to recent research from The Corporate Executive Board’s Marketing Leadership Council, one approach that is currently working for marketers includes:

- Listening to relevant conversations among customers and prospects
- Filtering those conversations to determine where they can contribute
- Identifying company employees with the expertise to respond
- Linking back to the company site when appropriate to add value to the conversation

Above all, marketers must be transparent when interacting in social media settings to ensure that they build trust with their audiences.

## Trend #3: The Majority of Professionals Use Their Company E-mail Addresses When Participating in Best Practice Communities

The majority of IT professionals using best practice communities like Toolbox.com or StackOverflow use their company e-mail addresses when registering and communicating through these channels, an indication that they see these communities as an extension of their daily workflow. Among the survey respondents, 54.8% use their company e-mail addresses in best practice communities. In comparison, 33.2% of respondents use their company e-mail addresses in professional networks like LinkedIn, and only 7.8% use it in social networks like Facebook and MySpace.



### Takeaway for Marketers

Where and when IT professionals choose to use their company e-mail addresses builds on and supports the second trend reported in this white paper, namely that professionals are using best practice communities to collaborate with their peers to solve problems, stay current, and make better decisions. These tasks represent an important part of the workflow, and best practice communities have emerged as a natural extension of the

tools that are available to professionals to complete these tasks. Using a company e-mail address is an indication that professionals themselves recognize these communities as part of their job.

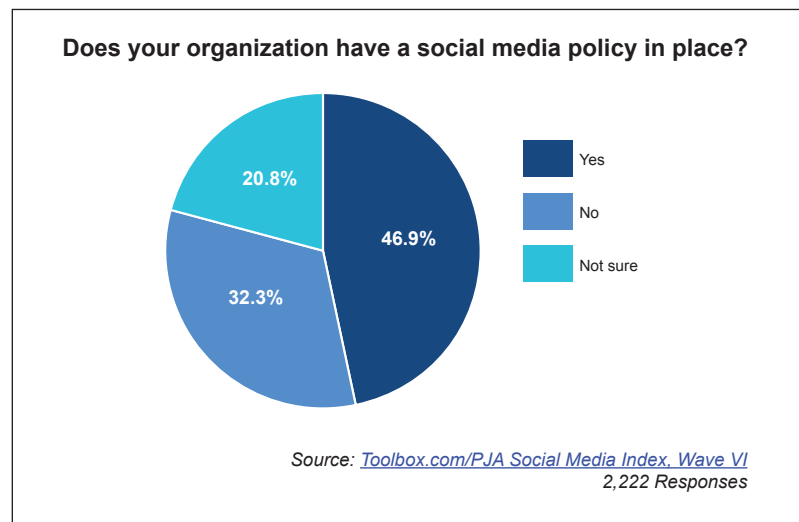
For marketers, this trend is confirmation that best practice communities, more than any other channel surveyed, give them a greater chance of reaching their target audiences while they are on the job or in the workplace. Likewise, the information that marketers provide in these settings reaches potential buyers while they are seeking solutions to help them solve problems or meet another need in the workplace.

### **Trend #4: Companies Are Generally Supportive of Social Media for Professional Use, But There Is Still Progress to be Made**

Despite the increase in social media consumption among IT professionals, less than half of respondents reported that their company currently has a social media policy in place. Another 20.8% of respondents were unsure if a policy exists at their company.

Many companies block the use of social networks like Facebook and MySpace (45.6%), media-sharing networks like YouTube and SlideShare (39.4%), and microblogs like Twitter (32.7%). However, a smaller percentage of professional networks (11.4%) and best practice communities (4.9%) are blocked by these same companies.

Despite the lack of clear social media policies and the existence of corporate policies blocking some social channels, more than 40.1% of IT professionals report that their company makes it “easy” or “very easy” for them to use social media to gather the information they need to do their jobs.



### *Takeaway for Marketers*

Greater social media success can be achieved when employees across the organization engage with customers and prospects as well. Subject matter experts and individuals who can add value to conversations will be in virtually every department within a company. However, an important key to that success is ensuring that all individuals who participate have a clear understanding of the organization's goals, strategies, and approved tactics for communicating through social media. This can only be achieved with a clearly articulated and enforced social media policy in place. Marketers should help drive these policies to ensure that individual efforts are supporting goals and not undermining them.

### **Conclusion**

Since the inception of the Toolbox.com/PJA Social Media Index survey series in May 2007, IT professionals have nearly doubled the rate at which they consume social media content to support their jobs. Fueled by the improvement in on-the-job efficiency that social media participation has afforded them, these increases in social media consumption show no signs of slowing.

Marketers should view these trends as fertile opportunities to take their marketing strategies to the next level. They represent a call from professionals for deeper levels of marketing engagement through social media, engagement that helps professionals meet specific needs: solving problems, staying current, and doing their jobs better.

To view the full results of the Toolbox.com/PJA Social Media Index: Wave VI, visit <http://www.toolbox.com/news/pjasurvey>



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### About PJA

PJA is a \$75 million advertising and marketing agency with offices in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and San Francisco, California. PJA serves a global roster of technology, life science and healthcare clients that includes: Novell, GE Healthcare, Boston Scientific, Limelight Networks, Pegasystems, Trend Micro, Infor, and TriZetto. For more information, visit [www.agencypja.com](http://www.agencypja.com).

### About Toolbox.com

Toolbox.com helps professionals do their jobs better by enabling them to easily share knowledge with experienced peers. The online communities at Toolbox.com provide the tools through which executives and professionals collaborate to solve problems, make decisions, and increase workplace efficiency. Through innovative marketing services, advertising partners become part of the conversation and engage professionals as they research, discuss, and influence purchasing decisions. This combination of community and advertising value has made Toolbox.com a leading destination for professionals and a leader in online advertising. Toolbox.com is a division of The Corporate Executive Board (NYSE: EXBD).