



Social Media

n-gen Generational Index Report

September 2009

Overview

This report presents a discussion on the use of social media in the workplace.

The results of n-gen's Generational Index Report are also shared. The research for the Generational Index report was conducted for n-gen by Leger Marketing in March 2009, with a representative sample of 806 employed Canadians aged 18 and over. This method simulates a probability sample which would yield a maximum margin of error of +/-3.5%, 19 times out of 20. Our research posed questions such as: Who is using social networking sites at work? Which sites do they use? How often do they use them?

We layer on a generational perspective to explain why there traditionally has been reluctance by organizations to permit the usage of social networking sites, or to think about how to utilize this technology internally to drive business and learning forward. We then discuss why it is important that organizations accept and maximize, for internal purposes, employees comfort with these technologies. It is important to note that the employee workforce is segmented into four distinct generational cohorts. The cohorts are as follows:

<i>Traditionalists:</i>	<i>1922-1945</i>
<i>Baby Boomers:</i>	<i>1946-1964</i>
<i>Gen Xers:</i>	<i>1965-1980</i>
<i>Gen Ys:</i>	<i>1981-2000</i>

Given the need to understand and respond to generational differences, we provide some areas for consideration as it relates to building and enhancing organizational people practices.

Social Media

Using social networking sites for marketing and branding purposes is common practice for consumer products and services by organizations. Companies are using YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, among other social media vehicles to promote products, to build brand affinity, and to encourage purchasing decisions. The use of these vehicles for marketing purposes is seen as legitimate and necessary in our web-based marketplaces. Interestingly, the use of social media to tap into networks within the workplace, meaning within an office or a team, is considered controversial. We were interested in exploring the use of social media/social networking in the workplace - the 'who', 'why' and 'what'. We maintain that forward-thinking organizations should plan on using social media to communicate with employees, to encourage learning between employees, to build employee networks, and to increase internal employer brand awareness. HR departments and senior leaders should get ahead of the curve by internally applying these technologies to increase employee engagement and productivity.

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It seems as if quarterly, a new social media vehicle tries to break into the marketplace to capture the attention of users as a hip, new way to build a social network. We have evolved from RSS feeds to Twitter, with a new platform surely coming just around the corner. There are a number of definitions available to define social media:

- ❖ Social media is content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. (Wikipedia)
- ❖ A category of sites that is based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites like LinkedIn or Facebook, social bookmarking sites like Del.icio.us, social news sites like Digg or Reddit, and other sites that are centered on user interaction. (Search Engine Watch)
- ❖ An umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words and pictures. (Anvil Media Inc.)
- ❖ Online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with each other. (Television Bureau of Advertising)

All of these definitions have factors in common: web-based, the possibility of interaction between multiple users, and sharing of information. What is important to note is that in defining social media, we need to include any site that allows for interactivity between participants. Thus, social media includes picture sharing sites, travel advisory boards, dating sites and professional networking sites, as each allow users to build a social network.

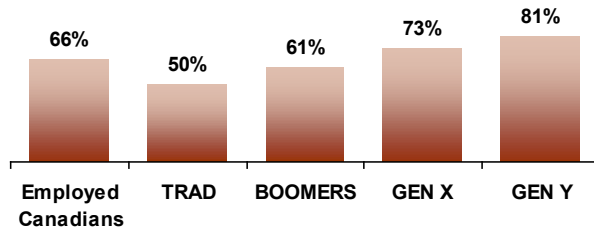
What is interesting is that the very technology that is deemed essential to engage customers and consumers is often feared as being inappropriate or dangerous for internal usage by employees. Many organizations have banned the use of social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace in the workplace, citing reasons of IT security or employee productivity concerns. In particular, from the thousands of managers with whom n-gen has presented to, the prevailing belief is that young employees are ‘wasting time’ at work by visiting social networking sites.

n-gen Research

In our research, we explored the theme of social media/social networking usage in the workplace. We wanted to determine whether or not Traditionalists and Baby Boomers also used social media at work, or if it is truly limited to only the younger generations as is often asserted by managers and senior leaders.

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Visit Social Networking Sites at Work



66% of employed Canadians use social media at work. Not surprisingly, the younger generations have a greater percentage of use than the more experienced generations. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to assume only Gen Ys spend time on social networking sites, as we have over 50% of Baby Boomers who admit that they spend time on social networking sites while at work. Despite popular belief, every generation uses social media at work, though the frequency does vary (e.g. 16.3% of BBs use Facebook a few times a week at work, vs. 31.2% of Gen Xers and 45.3% of Gen Ys).

So which social networking site does each generation use?

	TRAD	BOOMERS	GEN X	GEN Y
YouTube	26%	45%	56%	72%
Facebook/MySpace	21%	33%	52%	67%
Travel advisories	32%	28%	28%	25%
Picture-sharing	13%	18%	19%	22%
Linked In	1%	8%	14%	8%
Dating sites	2%	5%	8%	6%
Twitter	2%	4%	7%	8%
Second Life/Virtual Worlds	2%	3%	3%	2%

What did surprise us, is how many Traditionalists and Baby Boomers (1 in 5 and almost 1 in 2 respectively) spent time on YouTube, followed by Facebook/MySpace and travel advisories. It is also surprising how few people actually use Twitter. Since our survey was completed in March 2009, the usage of Twitter has increased astronomically, so it will be important to monitor how widespread its usage becomes. In June 2009, a small survey by PMN received a lot of press stating that Gen Ys are not drawn to the Twitter medium. How commonplace tweeting becomes, and which generation tweets the most, will be interesting to research in the future.

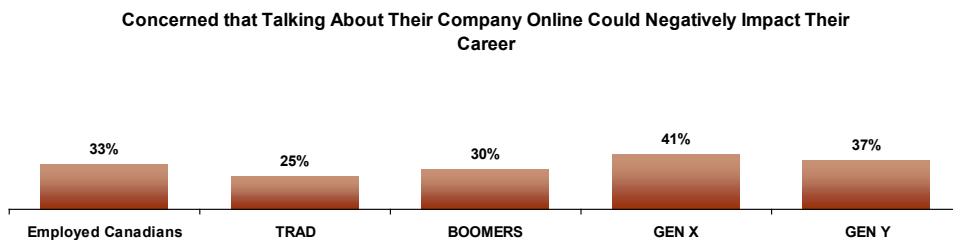
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Generational Considerations

From a generational perspective, we begin with the perspectives of Gen Xers and Gen Ys using social media at work first, before focusing on the opinions of the experienced generations. The strong prejudice of Traditionalist and Baby Boomer managers of accessing social networking sites at work perplexes many Gen Xers and Gen Ys. While a Traditionalist or Baby Boomer might spend time going for coffee with colleagues, or will stop by a team member's desk to chat about their family or vacation –in essence face-to-face networking - younger employees do the same thing via social networking sites. Moreover, it is increasingly acceptable that an employee might do his/her banking online or even make the occasional e-commerce purchase. With such personal activities having reached degrees of acceptability in the workplace, it is no wonder that Gen Ys and many Gen Xers question why it is unacceptable for employees to post a message on his/her Facebook, or to send a tweet on Twitter while at work. As one Gen Y once said in an n-gen workshop “why is it ok for my colleague to check the sports scores on sportsnet.com, but it is not ok for me to check my Facebook page?” IT security risks cannot be the only reason for banning the use of social media at work, as there are inherent risks with having employees access any external website.

Perhaps, the reason many Traditionalists and Baby Boomers report prejudice against the use of social networking sites at work is two-fold. First, these two cohorts remember a time when they, as new entrants into the workplace, would not have dared to do anything that might appear to be contrary to formal or informal cultural norms in the office. A Baby Boomer would not have made a personal phone call in an open concept office, and certainly would not have put his private cell phone visible on the desk. Baby Boomers might have been very worried that colleagues and their manager would think that they weren't giving 110% to their job, all the time. Secondly, many Traditionalists and Baby Boomers may be unfamiliar with how to use certain social media and have only heard of reports of Gen Ys posting negative messages about work (either from work place computers or home computers). Therefore, to ensure a level of professionalism, they would avoid communicating any casual or inappropriate messages during work hours, from a work computer or BlackBerry.

In our survey, we did ask participants how worried they are that talking about their company online could negatively impact their career:



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Not surprisingly, only 25% and 30% of Traditionalists and Baby Boomers, respectively, were concerned, since most in these cohorts would never talk about their company online. If they did, then they would ensure that the language would be positive. More Gen Xers are aware that talking about your employer at all online poses an inherent career risk – perhaps a reflection of Gen Xers skepticism. They believe, more than any generation, that posting anything on the web (even positive) might be misconstrued by a manager or an organization. The fact that more than 1/3 of Gen Ys worry about the impact of talking about their employer online, however, is an interesting statistic – we anticipate that this number will increase in the future. What is most relevant to employers is whether or not Gen Ys are prepared to accept the consequences of their actions, when they post what they think and feel about working for your organization. In one n-gen session, a Gen Y stated that for her generation, it is more important to share and even warn other Gen Ys of what it is like to work at an organization, than the risks of facing any potential consequences.

Impact on People Practices

When adopting any new technology, organizations should consider the strategic and people implications to the organization. Rather than reject social media in the workplace, we suggest that organizations use these media to build internal networks that improve knowledge transfer. Moreover, senior leaders can use social media to stay in tune with the pulse, energy and engagement levels of the organization. An effective way to get senior leaders on board with the use of social media is to determine how many of their peers and colleagues at other organizations are already maximizing the use of these tools.

- ❖ When preparing to leverage social media internally, consider the following implications on people practices:
- ❖ What does HR have to do to guide employees on the proper usage of social media sites in the workplace?
- ❖ How can HR use social media to build networks within the organization?
- ❖ How can individual departments use social media to encourage product/service innovation from employees?
- ❖ How can learning and development include social media?
- ❖ How can senior leaders use social media to communicate and build relationships with employees?

For information on how n-gen People Performance Inc. can help you to design, develop and deploy a comprehensive performance management process, please contact 1-877-362-7564 Ext.1 or info@ngenperformance.com.

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i. Generation Y: We Are Just Not That Into Twitter (Participatory Marketing Network: June 23, 2009)

n-gen People Performance Inc.

As pioneers since 2003 in providing solutions for managing generational differences in the workplace, n-gen is the partner of choice for industry leaders. By addressing issues related to generational differences in the workplace, our clients have become more targeted in responding to the values, expectations and motivations of all four generations, thereby increasing employee engagement.

n-gen has worked with 10 of the 14 Canadian Fortune 500 companies, as selected by Forbes magazine in 2008. n-gen's diverse client group spans small, medium & large enterprises, including 5 of the top 6 Canadian banks, 20 leading post-secondary institutions in North America, 12 of Canada's largest energy companies, and government agencies at the federal, provincial, and municipal level. More than 25,000 people have benefited from n-gen's expertise in the last 6 years, by attending a workshop or a presentation.

n-gen's training programs, e-learning, and consulting services provide people managers at all levels, from front line to CEO, the strategies and techniques needed to manage, engage and lead a multigenerational workforce.

Based in Toronto, Canada, n-gen's expertise is sought after by leading-edge organizations across North America who believe maximizing the skill sets of all four generations is an integral part of building a sustainable business strategy.



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