

For: Marketing
Leadership
Professionals

Benchmark B2B Social Marketing Efforts

by Kim Celestre, January 13, 2014

KEY TAKEAWAYS

B2B Marketers Embrace Social And Are Moderately Satisfied

B2B marketers have been using a variety of social platforms and tactics, and they are generally happy with social's impact on business outcomes. Investment in social is healthy and reflects an optimistic outlook on social's contribution. But only a few tactics and platforms get an "A" grade from this selective group of marketers.

The Four Groups Of Social Tactics And Platforms Are Worth Different Levels Of Effort

B2B social tactics fall into four groups: essential, promising, overvalued, and optional, based on varying levels of adoption and satisfaction. Marketers should focus their efforts on the essential tactics, such as branded blogs, branded communities/forums, and LinkedIn, and the promising tactics, such as customer ratings and reviews.

To Plan And Evaluate Your Strategy, Use The POST Methodology

To plan your social strategy effectively, use Forrester's POST (people, objectives, strategy, and technology) methodology. You should start by understanding how your target audience uses social and then identify your social marketing objectives. Once you have completed those two steps, you can craft a strategy and choose your tactics.



Benchmark B2B Social Marketing Efforts

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WHY READ THIS REPORT

Business-to-business (B2B) marketers have fully embraced social tactics to help them meet their reach, depth, and relationship objectives. What they don't know is whether their adoption of social tactics is consistent with their peers'. In this report, we examine the key benchmarks that B2B social marketers are looking for — including which social marketing tactics and platforms B2B marketers are adopting, their levels of satisfaction those tactics, and how heavily marketers are investing in them.

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Forrester used data from the Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey in writing this report.

Related Research Documents

[Integrate Social Into Your Marketing RaDaR](#)
August 7, 2013

[The Social Behaviors Of Your B2B Customers](#)
July 17, 2013

[How B2B Marketers Use Social Now](#)
May 13, 2013

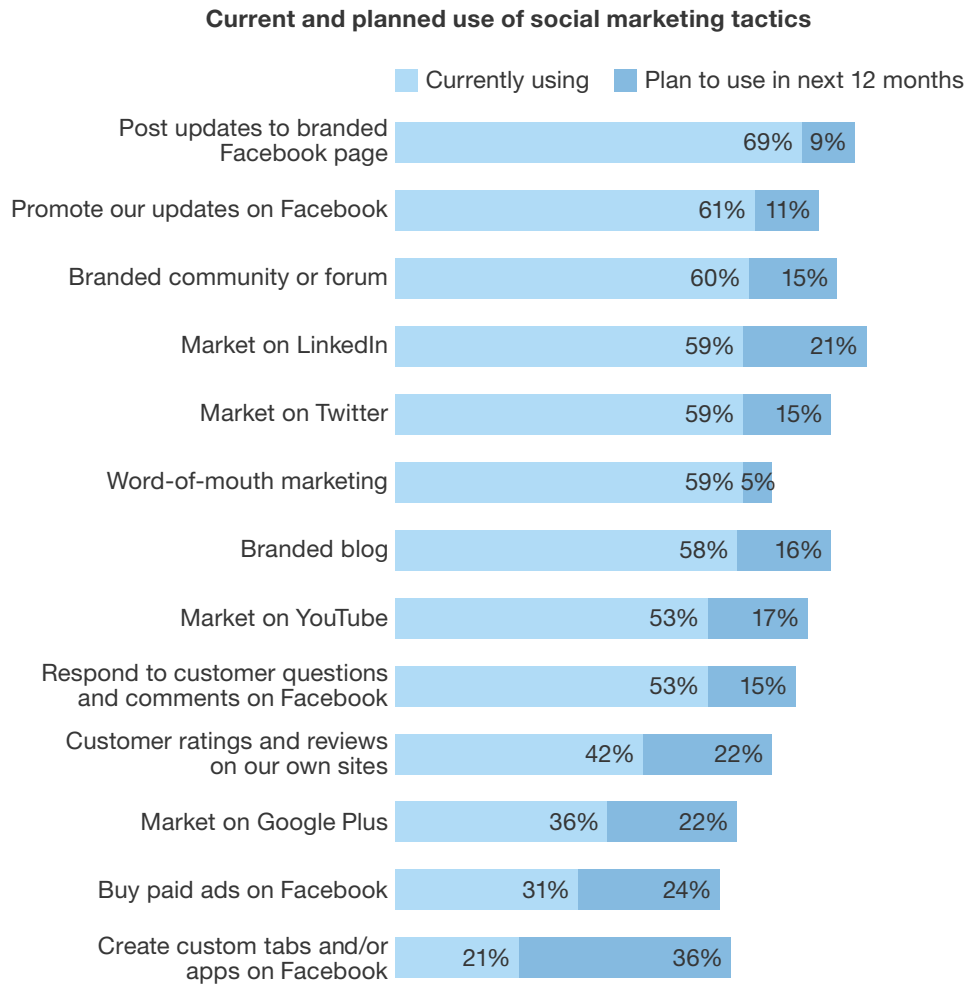
B2B MARKETERS WEAVE SOCIAL INTO THE MIX AND GIVE IT GOOD REVIEWS

B2B marketers weave social across the entire marketing mix, using combinations of tactics to help them achieve their reach, depth, and relationship objectives.¹ We fielded our Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey and found that:²

- **B2B marketers use a variety of tactics and platforms.** B2B marketers currently implement a multitude of social marketing tactics, and more than 20% plan to use even the less popular tactics, like Facebook paid ads and custom tabs, in the next year (see Figure 1-1). The three social networks they use most are Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Google Plus is at the back of the pack (see Figure 1-2).
- **B2B marketers feel that most social tools are making the grade.** On a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), at least 40% of respondents are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the social tactics and platforms they are using. And a few tactics, such as customer ratings and reviews, branded blogs, and branded communities/forums, stand out as the clear favorites.
- **Investment plans reflect cautious optimism.** In 2013, more than a quarter of B2B marketers allocated no budget to social (see Figure 2-1). But marketers appear to be optimistic in 2014. Nearly two-thirds of the marketers who commit budget to social marketing expect their social marketing budgets to increase by at least 10% (see Figure 2-2).

Figure 1 B2B Marketers' Adoption Of Social Tactics And Platforms

1-1 | B2B marketers adopt a variety of tactics



Base: 95 B2B digital marketers and eBusiness professionals in US, UK, and Canada

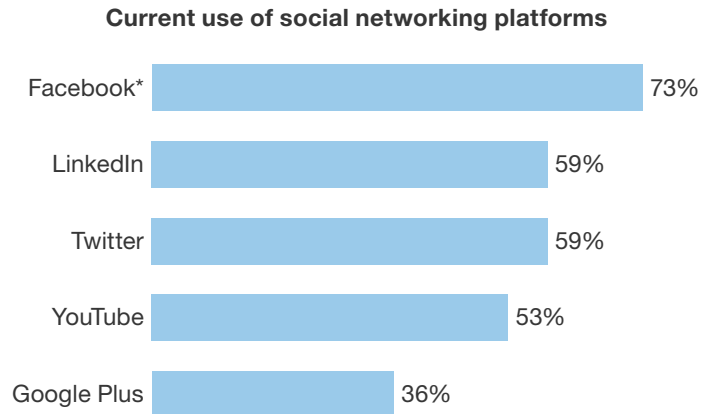
Source: Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 1 B2B Marketers' Adoption Of Social Tactics And Platforms (Cont.)

1-2 | B2B marketers use multiple social networks



Base: 95 B2B digital marketers and eBusiness professionals
in US, UK, and Canada

Source: Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey

*This includes marketers who said they currently post updates to their branded Facebook pages, respond to customer questions and comments on Facebook, promote their updates on Facebook, buy paid ads on Facebook, and create custom tabs and/or applications on Facebook.

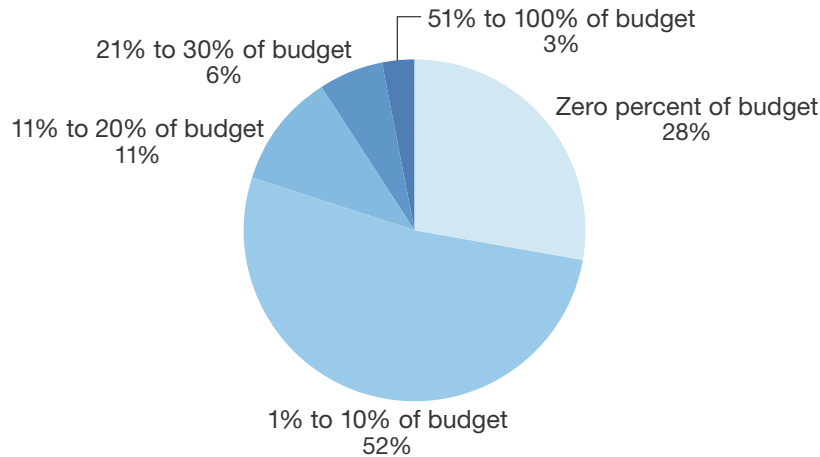
108841

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 2 B2B Marketers Are Optimistic About 2014 Social Marketing Investment

2-1 | Current investment

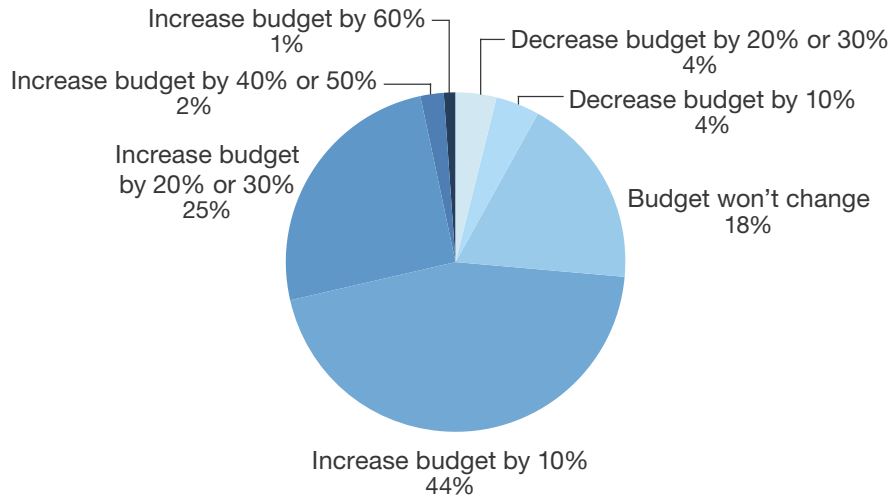
“What percent of your total marketing budget do you spend on social media marketing?”



Base: 95 B2B digital marketers and eBusiness professionals in US, UK, and Canada

2-2 | Planned investment for 2014

“How much do you expect your budgets for social media marketing to increase or decrease in 2014?”



Base: 68 B2B digital marketers and eBusiness professionals in US, UK, and Canada who commit part of their marketing budget to social marketing (percentages may not total 100 due to rounding)

Note: No social marketing budget changes smaller or larger than those shown here are expected in 2014.

Source: Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey

But Adoption And Satisfaction Are Misaligned

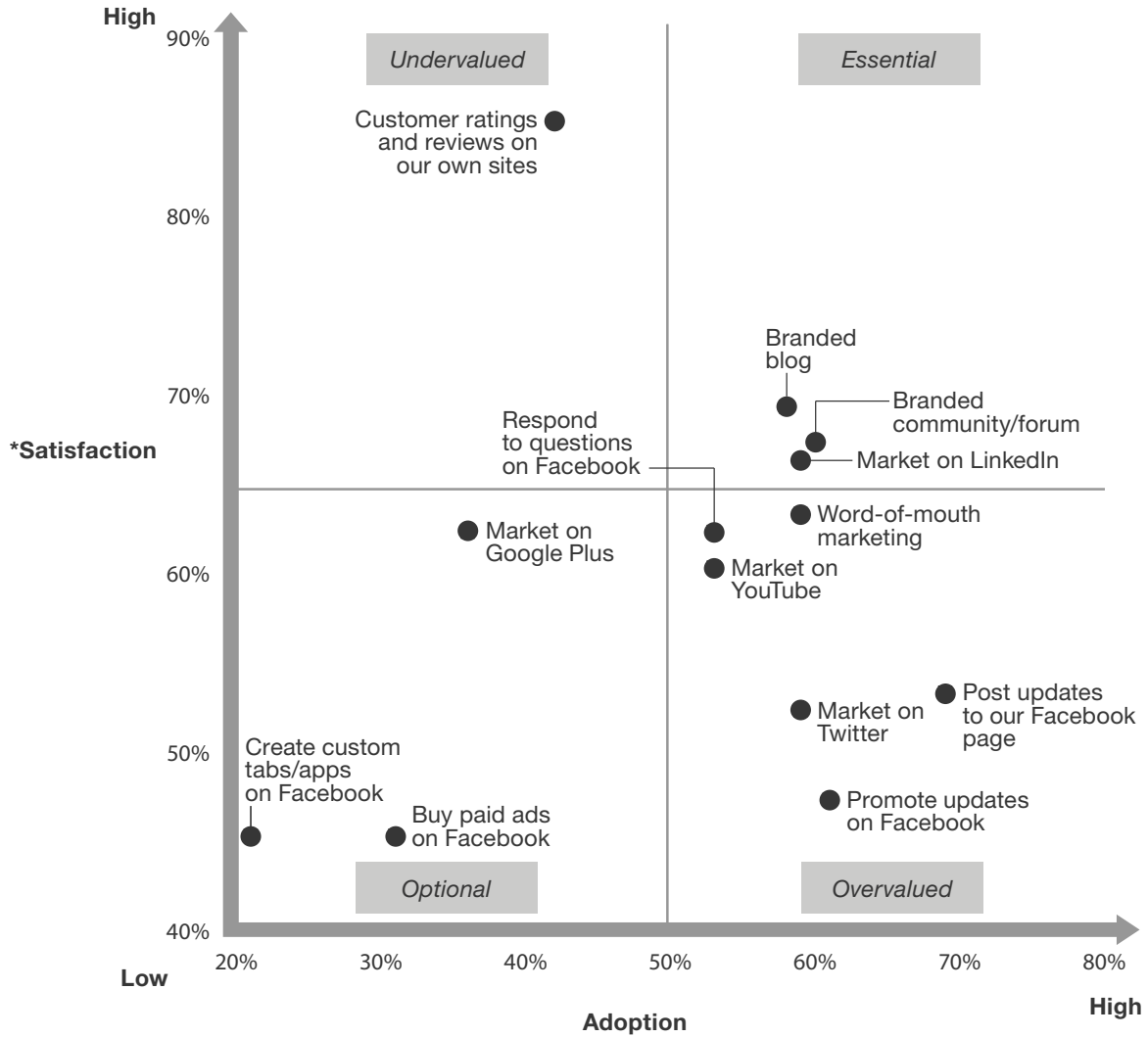
Although B2B marketers have become more comfortable with implementing social, they too often flock to less-successful social tactics and ignore the social tactics that work best (see Figure 3). We found that:

- **Only some use ratings and reviews, but they give the tactic the highest satisfaction score.** Fewer than half of B2B marketers use ratings and reviews on their branded websites — a lower adoption rate than many other social tactics. However, they give it by far the highest satisfaction score of all the tactics we included in our survey. Although ratings and reviews require significant investment to incorporate into a brand's product pages, it's proven that they drive increased purchases — especially for companies that sell their products and services online.³
- **Branded blogs receive the second-highest satisfaction score.** More than half of the B2B marketers we surveyed have implemented a branded blog and are pleased with the results. The branded blog was one of the first social marketing tactics to be adopted by B2B marketers, and it continues to provide an effective and low-cost channel for publishing thought-leadership content on branded websites where buyers explore products and services.⁴
- **Many use branded communities and are very satisfied with results.** More than half of B2B marketers own a branded community and give it the third-highest satisfaction score when compared with other tactics. An online community typically requires a large amount of budget and staff, too, but B2B marketers reap the rewards of their investment as their community members begin to influence prospects and their strategy makes a positive impact on lead generation and sales objectives.⁵
- **A majority post to their Facebook brand pages, but they give the tactic a low satisfaction score.** Nearly 70% of B2B marketers maintain branded Facebook pages, but the tactic receives low satisfaction scores, as do promoted Facebook posts. Why are B2B marketers dissatisfied with Facebook brand pages and promoted posts? Because very few of their prospective buyers are going to the brand's Facebook page or clicking on its promoted posts. As creating and maintaining a branded Facebook page is “cheap” compared with other social tactics, B2B marketers continue to include it on their social marketing tactic checklist. But B2B marketers may finally be realizing Facebook's limitations as a viable B2B marketing channel, with only 9% planning to increase use of this tactic in 2014.

Figure 3 Social Tactics And Platforms Fall Into Four Groups

“Which of the following marketing channels and tactics does your company use?”

“How satisfied are you with the business value your company has achieved by using each of the following marketing channels and tactics?”*
 (Percentage of respondents using each channel/tactic who selected 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 [very dissatisfied] to 5 [very satisfied])



Base: 95 B2B digital marketers and eBusiness professionals in US, UK, and Canada (multiple responses accepted)

Source: Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey

108841

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Most Marketers Use Facebook But Prefer Other Social Platforms

B2B marketers use a variety of social networks, but only one gets a high grade. We found that:

- **Facebook tactics are most popular but usually less effective.** Despite strong adoption overall, Facebook gets the lowest satisfaction scores when compared with other social networks. Fewer than half of B2B marketers indicate they are “somewhat satisfied or very satisfied” with tactics such as Facebook paid ads, promoted updates, and custom tabs/apps.⁶ But despite its failure to contribute to business objectives, B2B marketers are attracted by Facebook’s 1 billion-plus active users.⁷ However, research has consistently shown that B2B buyers do not go to Facebook to inform a purchase decision.⁸ B2B marketers should consider shifting investment to proven Facebook tactics like Q&A, which gets the highest satisfaction scores of all Facebook tactics in our survey, and use the social network to complement a customer support strategy.
- **LinkedIn offers B2B marketers more value than any other public social network.** Almost 60% of B2B marketers surveyed currently use LinkedIn, and they give it the highest satisfaction scores vis-à-vis other social platforms. As LinkedIn continues to roll out more sophisticated advertising solutions and company page enhancements like its new Showcase Pages, it will accelerate to make its way to the top of the list of preferred social networks for B2B marketers.⁹
- **Twitter fails to reach its full potential.** Almost 60% of B2B marketers surveyed use the platform, yet they are less satisfied with Twitter’s business contribution than they are with LinkedIn, Google Plus, and YouTube. B2B marketers primarily use Twitter to drive awareness; however, Twitter’s marketing solutions, such as sponsored posts and advanced targeting, could capture more attention if these tactics were to help B2B marketers effectively and efficiently reach their buyers.
- **Google Plus lacks marketing momentum.** Only one-third of B2B marketers use Google Plus, but those who do are more satisfied with it than with Twitter. B2B marketers like Google Plus because it provides a B2B-relevant audience, the ability to easily target specific “circles” of individuals (e.g., customers, partners, and prospects), and has the potential to positively affect Google search rankings.¹⁰
- **YouTube appeals to the few who know how to use it.** Approximately half of B2B marketers use YouTube, which puts it in fourth place behind Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Although YouTube has tremendous reach, with more than 1 billion unique monthly visitors, B2B marketers have yet to determine the optimal YouTube strategy that will effectively reach a diverse group of buyers.¹¹ In addition, creating high-quality video content comes with a cost — a cost that B2B marketers are hesitant to add to their marketing budgets.

SOCIAL TACTICS AND PLATFORMS FALL INTO FOUR GROUPS

Based on these adoption and satisfaction ratings, we categorize the social tactics and platforms that B2B marketers use into four groups:

- **Essential: high adoption and high satisfaction.** This category includes social tactics and platforms that are marketers' ideal choices. Branded blogs, branded communities, and LinkedIn are the clear "essentials" for B2B marketers who feel that they are getting good results from these tactics.
- **Undervalued: low adoption but high satisfaction.** Social tactics and platforms such as customer ratings and reviews are still emerging, but high satisfaction among B2B marketers who are now using customer ratings on their own sites reflects that they are delivering positive business value.
- **Overvalued: high adoption but low satisfaction.** These social tactics and platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and word-of-mouth marketing, while widely used, fall short of B2B marketers' expectations.
- **Optional: low adoption and low satisfaction.** These social tactics and platforms, such as Facebook paid advertising and Google Plus, are used by very few marketers. B2B marketers are either still testing the waters with these tactics or have become disillusioned with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FIRST, CRAFT A STRATEGY BASED ON THE POST METHODOLOGY

There are several key steps that marketers must take to achieve social marketing success. The first and most important is to decide on strategy. To do this, follow Forrester's POST methodology:¹²

- **People.** You need to understand your target audience first — who they are, what their social media behaviors are, what social content they like to consume, and so on.
- **Objectives.** Next, you need to identify your social marketing objectives — reach, depth and relationship.¹³
- **Strategy and technology.** Based on a clear understanding of your target audience and your objectives, you'll be ready to choose a strategy and the technologies — tactics and platforms — to execute it.

NEXT, PRIORITIZE TACTICS BASED ON THE FOUR GROUPS

Having identified the right tactics and platforms, you should calibrate how you approach each social tactic and platform according to which of the four groups it's in:

- **Make the essential ones your top priority.** If you're already on board with these, commit to sticking with them. If you're among the few who haven't tried them, do it.
- **Invest in the undervalued ones.** If you've already invested here, continue to do so and monitor whether the tactic spreads among your peers. If you haven't, these are worth trying.
- **Back off from the overvalued ones.** Cut your investment in these if you've already stepped in. If you haven't, consider yourself lucky — and keep it that way.
- **Get just a taste of the optional ones.** If any of these is new to you, consider testing it so you're familiar with how it works. Cut those that aren't new to you, or decrease the amount you budget for them — at least, for now.

THIRD, USE THE CUSTOMER LIFE CYCLE TO MEASURE YOUR SOCIAL EFFORTS

Start by examining which of your social programs support each stage of your customers' journey.¹⁴ Then analyze which social platforms and tactics you use for each program and see whether those tactics move your audience to the next stage of the life cycle: from discovery to exploration, from exploration to purchase, from purchase to engagement, and from engagement back to discovery.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Methodology

Forrester's Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey was fielded in August 2013 to 395 interactive marketers and eBusiness professionals. For quality assurance, we screened respondents to ensure they met minimum standards in terms of content knowledge, job responsibilities, budget insight, and company size and revenues. Exact sample sizes are provided in this report on a question-by-question basis.

The sample was drawn from members of Research Now's online panel, and respondents were motivated by receiving credits that could be redeemed for a reward. The sample provided by Research Now is not a random sample. While individuals have been randomly sampled from Research Now's panel for this particular survey, they have previously chosen to take part in the Research Now online panel. This data is not guaranteed to be representative of the population, and, unless otherwise noted, statistical data is intended to be used for descriptive and not inferential purposes. While nonrandom, the survey is still a valuable tool for understanding where users are today and where the industry is headed.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Forrester's RaDaR model is aligned with the customer life cycle stages of discover, explore, buy, and engage. Marketers must choose the appropriate mix of social marketing tactics that will help them achieve their reach, depth, and relationship objectives. See the August 7, 2013, "[Integrate Social Into Your Marketing RaDaR](#)" report.
- ² We have defined B2B marketers as digital marketers or eBusiness professionals that target primarily or only businesses in the US, UK, and/or Canada.
- ³ Sixty-five percent of US online adults who have used customer ratings/reviews indicated they agree with the statement, "I prefer to buy products/services from websites that allow customers to post ratings/reviews." Agreement is 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 [strongly disagree] to 5 [strongly agree]. Source: North American Technographics® Retail Online Benchmark Recontact Survey, 2013.
- ⁴ Many B2B marketers have found that blogs can be quite effective for thought leadership campaigns. IBM's Big Data blog is a great example of a successful blog and was a finalist in our Forrester 2012 Groundswell Awards. Source: Kim Celestre, "B2B Marketers, Get Inspired By Our 2012 Groundswell Award Winners!" Forrester Blogs, October 26, 2012 (http://blogs.forrester.com/kim_celestre/12-10-26-b2b_marketers_get_inspired_by_our_2012_groundswell_award_winners).
- ⁵ Forrester's Total Economic Impact™ (TEI) methodology provides a way for you to determine the potential value of a community that you are planning to implement or to estimate the current ROI of your existing B2B community. See the February 14, 2013, "[The ROI Of 'Owner' Communities](#)" report.
- ⁶ Seventy-three percent of B2B marketers use one form of social marketing on Facebook. This includes marketers who said they currently post updates to their branded Facebook pages, respond to customer questions and comments on Facebook, promote their updates on Facebook, buy paid ads on Facebook, and create custom tabs and/or applications on Facebook. However, buying paid ads or creating custom tabs/apps on Facebook have adoption rates of 31% or less, which is lower than any other social marketing tactic looked at within our study. Source: Q3 2013 North America And UK Digital Maturity Online Survey.
- ⁷ Source: Facebook (<http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts>).
- ⁸ Our research confirms that Facebook is not a relevant and/or influential information source for B2B decision-makers. In fact, only 2% of B2B decision-makers use Facebook exclusively for business at least monthly. The question is, when will B2B marketers finally throw in the Facebook towel? See the July 17, 2013, "[The Social Behaviors Of Your B2B Customers](#)" report.
- ⁹ LinkedIn continues to extend its suite of marketing solutions to give the platform more impact for driving awareness and exploration of a brand's products and services. In November 2013, the social network announced the launch of "Showcase Pages." Source: LinkedIn (<http://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/ms/company-pages/showcase-pages.html>).
- ¹⁰ The jury is still out on whether Google Plus has the potential to be a viable B2B social network. Here is additional Forrester research that shows that B2B marketers are skeptical that it will gain traction with buyers. See the May 13, 2013, "[How B2B Marketers Use Social Now](#)" report.

¹¹ Source: YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>).

¹² To understand how to use the POST methodology to set your social marketing strategy, see the October 1, 2013, “[The POST Process Drives Social Success](#)” report.

¹³ Use Forrester’s RaDaR model to choose the social marketing objectives that are relevant for your audiences. See the August 7, 2013, “[Integrate Social Into Your Marketing RaDaR](#)” report.

¹⁴ Measure social marketing’s value by whether it supports your customers’ journey. See the November 21, 2012, “[Win The Social Marketing Measurement Game](#)” report.

About Forrester

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