

The New Collaboration: Social Media and the Life Science Opportunity



Study Parameters and Methodology

STUDY GOAL: DETERMINE THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LIFE SCIENCE PURCHASING PROCESS

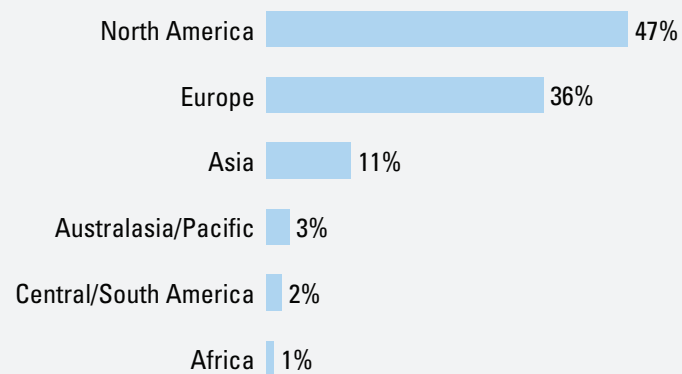
This report is based on an online survey conducted by BioInformatics, LLC in conjunction with PJA Advertising + Marketing.

To create the study, a 19-question online survey was fielded to selected members of The Science Advisory Board. With 35,000 members, The Science Advisory Board is one of the most established professional social networks for scientists on the Web. In order to reduce the potential for bias, the survey was also fielded to randomly selected life scientists not registered with The Science Advisory Board.

1,510 responses were collected between October 29 and November 2, 2007.

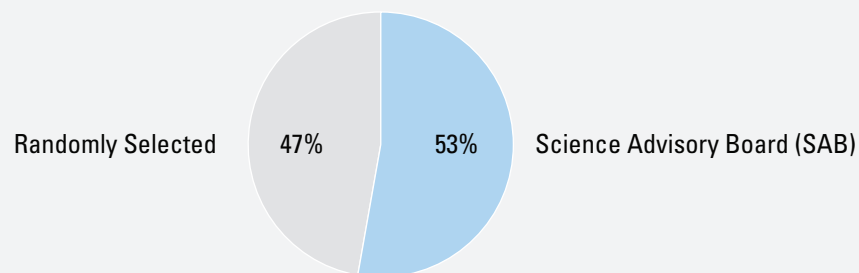
To provide additional detail, we have cross-tabulated results that compare North American, European and Rest of World respondents and added analysis by level of media engagement for respondents who also participated in BioInformatics LLC's 2006 Marketing to Life Scientists study. Over and over again, our results show that those less engaged with traditional media channels are quickly becoming leading proponents of social media.

Survey Participants by Region



(n=1,510)

Survey Participants: Registered Members of
The Science Advisory Board and Randomly Selected Scientists



(n=1,510)

Social Media and the Life Sciences

A SIGNIFICANT UNTAPPED OPPORTUNITY

Consider the sense of community among Apple Computer users, who are a perfect example of the kind of advocacy that few other brands have achieved. Similarly, the phenomenal growth of the computer gaming industry has been fueled partly by the community of users whose strong sense of shared identity grew online and contributes greatly to new product development. The bonding that takes place between these companies and their customers is based on sharing valuable information between buyers and sellers. It is not adversarial, but is based on both sides wanting the other to succeed.

Life science suppliers have an advantage over those in other industries in that their customers have great experience with social media in the form of online discussion groups and message boards. Yet there are very few examples of suppliers incorporating social media into their marketing and customer relationship programs. Scientists do not need to be convinced of social media's utility, they are just waiting for the conversation with their suppliers to begin.

Social Media and the Life Science Opportunity: [Ten Topline Findings](#)

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TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

1. Scientists interact with various forms of social media intermittently throughout the day.

Unlike many other technology professionals, most life scientists do not spend their day at a keyboard. As such, online communities for scientists do not lend themselves to constant personal interaction but instead must offer easily accessible content to support either directed search (e.g., seeking technical advice) or other resources that support their work.

Question:

On average, for each type of social media you use professionally, how many hours do you spend per *week* using it?

	Less than 1 hour	1 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	More than 4 hours	Total Respondents
Blogs	57%	32%	9%	2%	259
Content aggregators/portals/mashups	50%	32%	11%	7%	453
Discussion groups/message boards	59%	30%	8%	3%	753
Online communities/social networking sites	58%	29%	9%	4%	460
Podcasts/audiocasts	62%	27%	6%	4%	172
Wikis	62%	29%	7%	2%	360

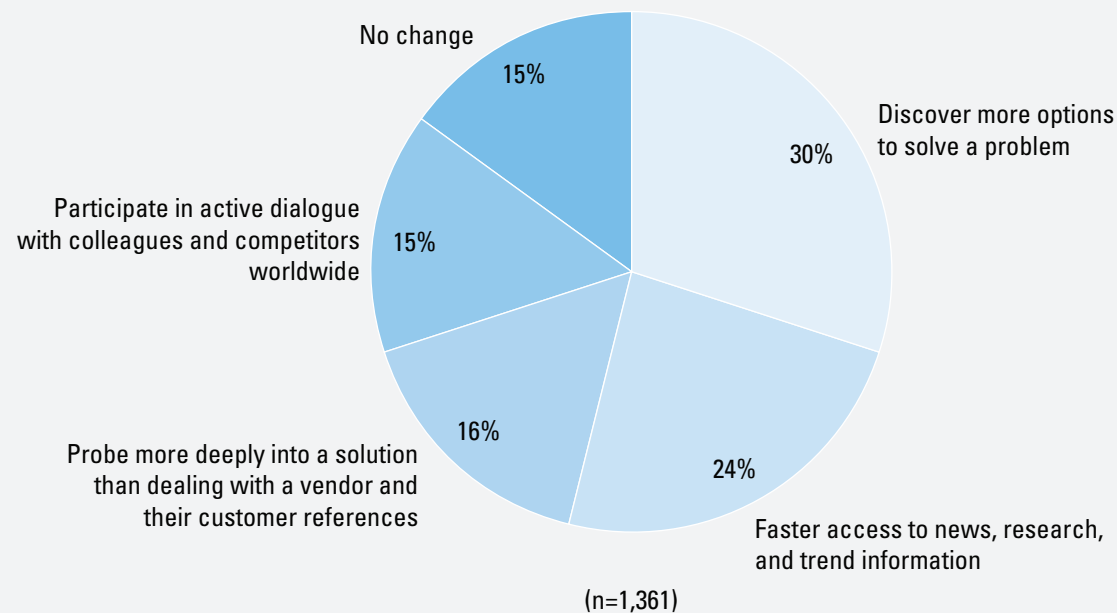
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

2. Social media provide scientists with a fresh perspective.

Scientists work in an environment characterized by facts, protocols, and approved procedures, where incremental progress is often accepted as a fact of life. Content and connections discovered online help scientists discover tools and techniques they may never have otherwise considered and to seek out answers to questions and problems they are unable to resolve.

Question:

How has social media changed the nature of your decision-making process?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

Highly media-engaged scientists put a higher premium on staying abreast of news, research and trend information and participating in dialogue with colleagues and competitors.

TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

3. Social media appeals to the most fundamental values of science – communicating, contributing and collaborating.

Social media is perceived to be a technological improvement on what scientists have always done to further the advance of their research and their field. The use of social media to promote supporting technologies can be aligned with these fundamental values.

Question:

For each type of social media, please identify the phrase that BEST describes its role in your research and/or professional activities.

	Allows me to make a more educated decision about purchasing new products and/or technologies	Facilitates the sharing of ideas with colleagues and/or the scientific community	Makes it easier to research new products and/or technologies	Simplifies my lab workflow	Total Respondents
Blogs	27%	49%	23%	2%	259
Content aggregators/portals/mashups	39%	13%	42%	6%	455
Discussion groups/message boards	26%	52%	19%	3%	752
Online communities/social networking sites	22%	50%	23%	5%	458
Podcasts/audiocasts	36%	24%	36%	4%	172
Wikis	32%	19%	38%	10%	355

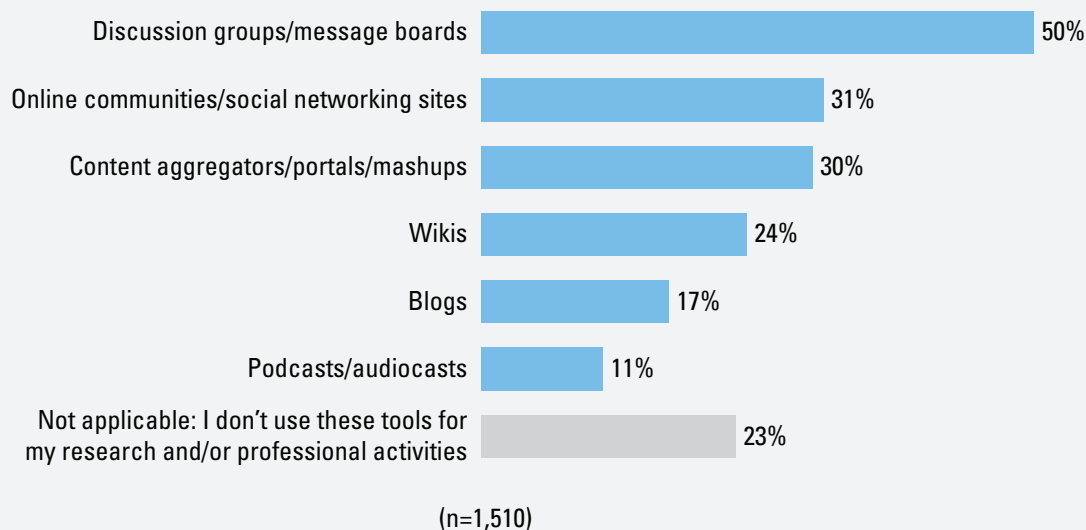
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

4. Tried-and-true discussion boards still dominate the social media landscape.

Most successful online communities use discussion boards, though few discussion boards have evolved into true communities.

Question:

Which type(s) of social media do you use in your research and/or professional activities?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

Consistently around the globe, approximately one-fifth of scientists do not yet use social media tools. Discussion groups and message boards remain the gold standard. Less media-engaged scientists use wikis by a 2:1 margin over highly engaged ones.

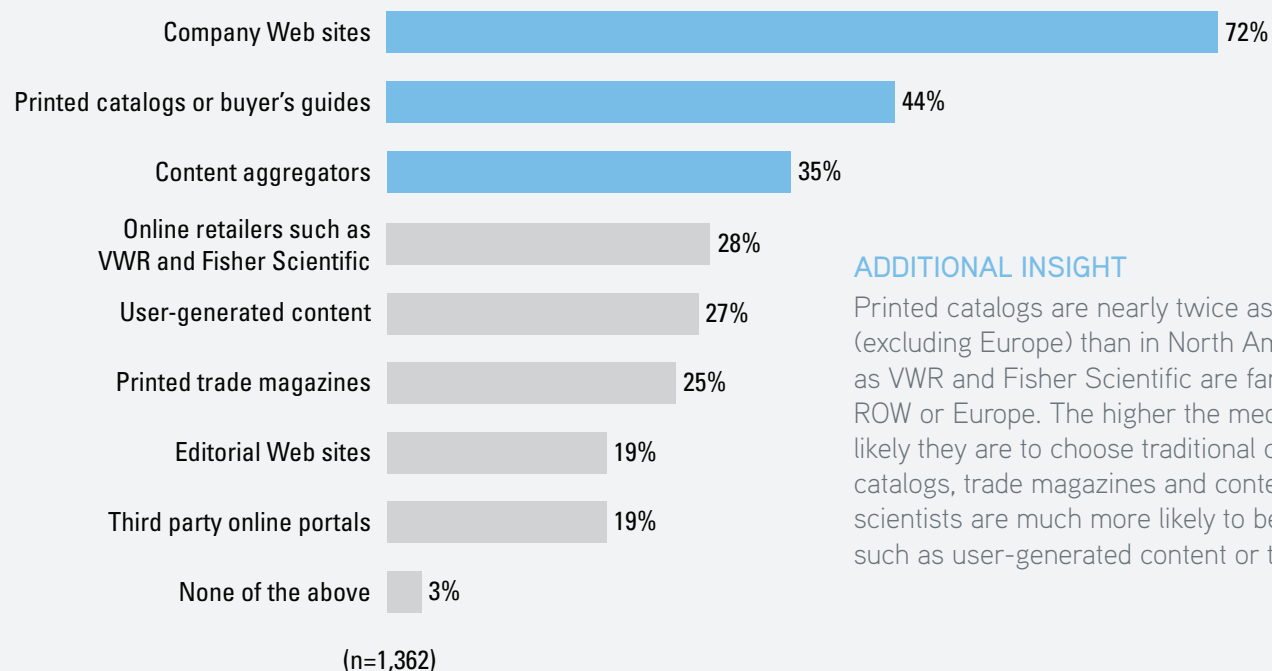
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

5. User-generated content is not yet a widely trusted source of product information.

Social media in the life sciences has not yet evolved to the point where online advice is a substitute for vendor supplied product information. Some suppliers are now experimenting with Web 2.0 techniques to build communities of users, and numerous online groups of users have formed organically to support one another – a logical extension of user groups focused on specific products seen in other industries.

Question:

What do you consider to be the THREE most trusted information sources for your purchasing decisions?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

Printed catalogs are nearly twice as popular in the Rest of World regions (excluding Europe) than in North America. Conversely, online retailers such as VWR and Fisher Scientific are far more popular in North America than ROW or Europe. The higher the media engagement of the scientist, the more likely they are to choose traditional channels such as company web sites, catalogs, trade magazines and content aggregators. However, less engaged scientists are much more likely to be attracted to new social media channels such as user-generated content or third-party online portals.

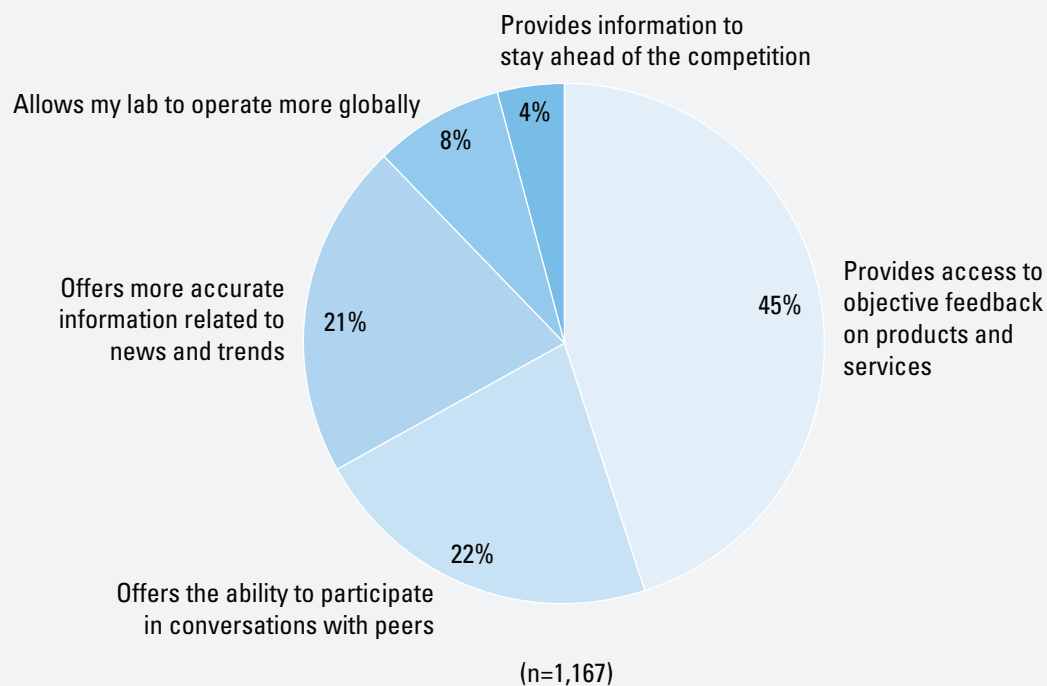
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

6. Insight and opinion from peers provides balance to vendor-supplied information.

Vendors are still considered the most authoritative source of information about their products but the opinions and experiences of peers helps scientists see through marketing hype and determine what is of greatest importance and value to them.

Question:

What is MOST valuable about social media and its relation to your purchasing process?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

North American and European Scientists find significantly more value in the objective feedback social media offers than scientists in the Rest of World group. That said, ROW scientists particularly value social media's ability to help them operate their lab more globally.

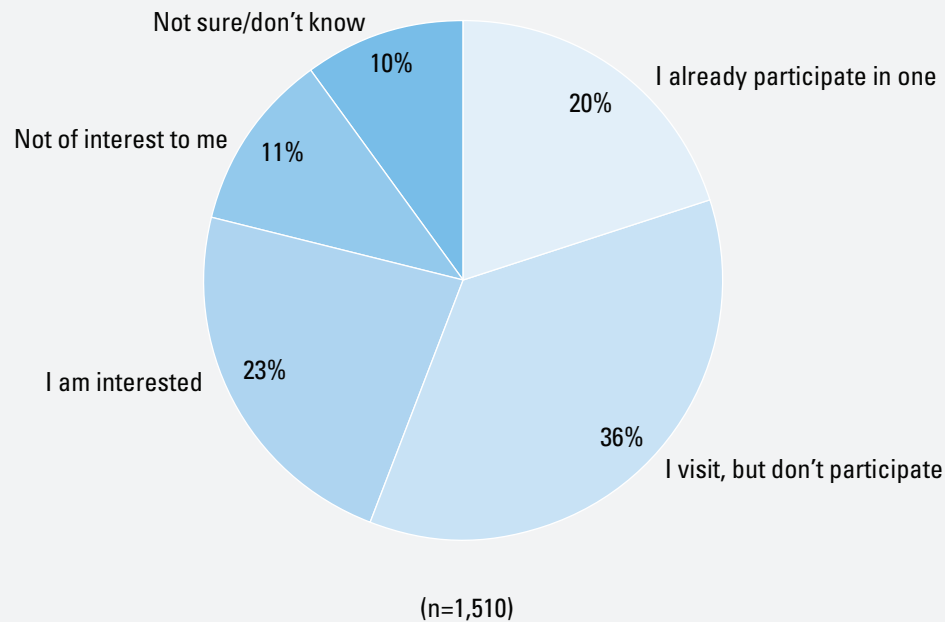
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

7. “Visiting” an online community is a form of participation.

Not all members of a community can be expected to actively participate in online social interactions. If visitors to a community find recurring value in the form of useful content, the community has achieved its goal. Note: both Apple and PC users are effectively equal in their social media participation.

Question:

What BEST describes your view regarding the role of online communities in your research and/or professional activities?



TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

8. Scientists agree that social media has influenced their purchasing decisions – but not the purchasing process.

In the near-term, the institutional purchasing practices at many life science accounts are unlikely to change because of social media.

Question:

Over the past six months, to what extent do you agree or disagree about the influence of user-generated content and social media (e.g., blogs, podcasts, online communities, Wikis, social networking, etc.) on your purchasing process?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Respondents
They have helped me to make a more informed decision	9%	45%	21%	16%	9%	1,355
They have made the purchasing process faster and more efficient	4%	23%	39%	25%	10%	1,349
They have had little to no influence on the purchasing process	17%	29%	20%	27%	6%	1,355

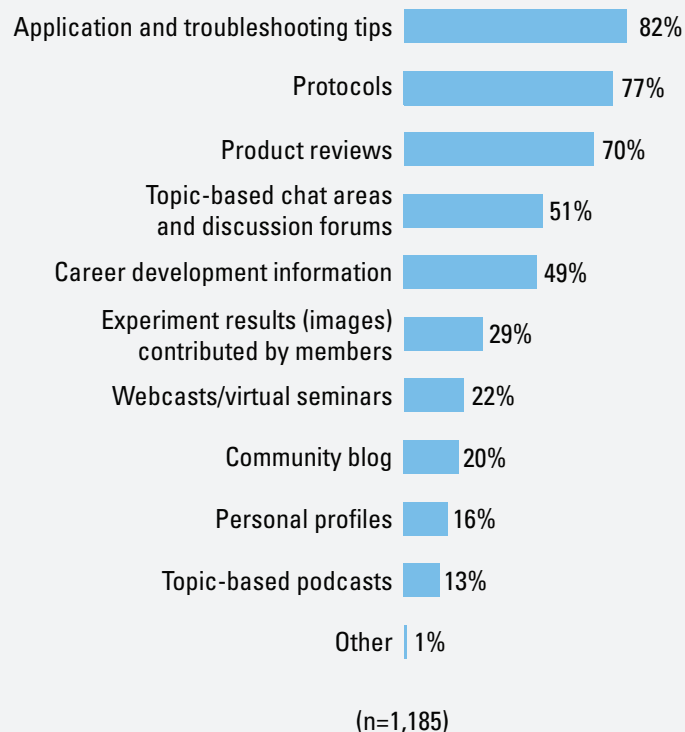
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

9. Scientists want content that helps them do their jobs better.

Science is advanced by building upon the work of others. Content that elevates a scientist's professional performance or know-how is perceived to be more valuable than the opportunity to make personal connections.

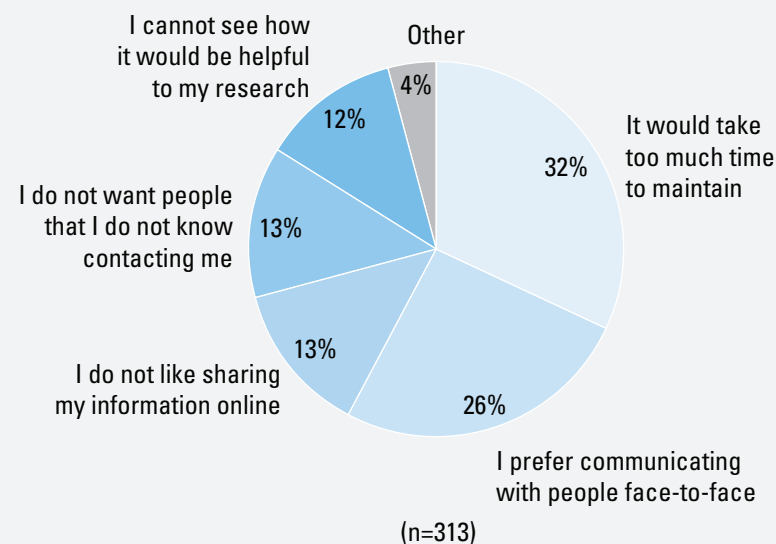
Question:

What feature(s) do you expect an online life science community to provide?



Question:

What are your TWO top objections to an online life science community?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

North American scientists object in particular to being contacted by strangers, Europeans to sharing information online, while Rest of World scientists have a hard time seeing how social media would be helpful to their research. Less-engaged scientists are particularly interested in topic-based chat and discussion forums as well as blogging and career development information.

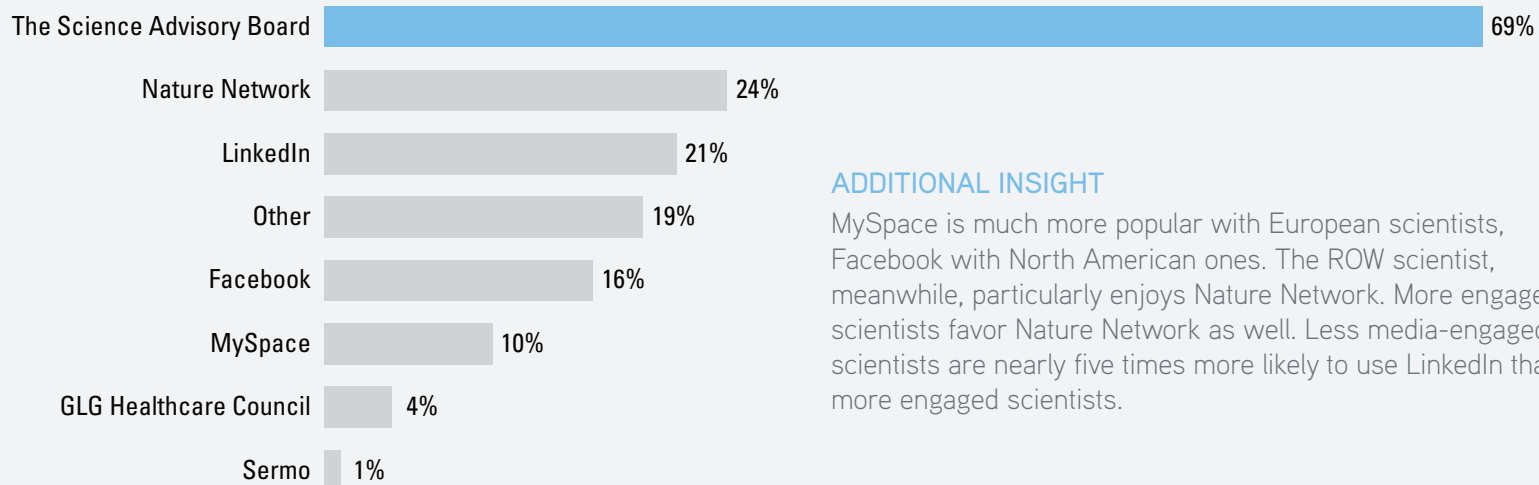
TEN TOPLINE FINDINGS

10. There are no gated communities on the Web.

Members of The Science Advisory Board join and participate in other communities – each with its own value proposition. Professional social networks by definition must be exclusionary, but linkages with other credible online communities are mutually beneficial.

Question:

In which social networking sites do you currently participate on a professional basis?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

MySpace is much more popular with European scientists, Facebook with North American ones. The ROW scientist, meanwhile, particularly enjoys Nature Network. More engaged scientists favor Nature Network as well. Less media-engaged scientists are nearly five times more likely to use LinkedIn than more engaged scientists.

(n=789: 489 SAB, 300 Randomly Selected)

Study Implications

TAPPING THE SOCIAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

Clearly, life scientists already are using social media.

Science blogging conferences are springing up around the globe, Seed Media Group currently hosts a ring of 40 blogs authored by scientists from around the world, and Facebook groups formed by research scientists abound. Life scientists were among the first professionals to use the Internet to communicate, collaborate and contribute to the benefit of the community as a whole, and based on the results of this research are clearly doing more. Just as interesting, those scientists whom more traditional media haven't reached are among the most avid new users of wikis, LinkedIn, blogs and other social media tools.

While a number of third parties have created successful business models around their online communities, relatively few life science suppliers have even begun to leverage the opportunities presented by social media. In an environment where the average scientist buys products from a dozen or more vendors, making it easier for them to open a dialogue with you can only strengthen their loyalty. Based on the information we have gleaned from this survey – and on past research conducted by BioInformatics, LLC – we have assembled a short list of 10 steps that vendors should consider taking to make their sites more social media-friendly experiences.

1. Make your site a destination for what life scientists care about.

If your Web site doesn't focus on application and troubleshooting tips, protocols, and other items scientists want to see, add them.

2. Let users talk back. Your site should feature channels for customers to add input (ideally anonymously) and communicate with each other, even if some of that commentary may not reflect ideally on you.

Consider a blog from your top scientists and R&D staff, discussing their latest innovations and thoughts about the space. Invite a popular blogger to guest on your blog. Or start your own company wiki to define the most relevant terms to your company. Remember that honesty is the coin of the realm, and remember that listening is half of communicating.

3. Share and share alike. Scientists rank imagery from experiments highly as valuable content online. Create a gallery of the best data you and your customers create and promote it as a way to boost the confidence (and competitive juices) of your best customers. And remember that participants in a training workshop are likely to welcome the opportunity to share their experiences after using your product for the first time if you encourage them to go online.

Study Implications

TAPPING THE SOCIAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

4. Link to what's hot. If you know your customers favor particular discussion groups and message boards, provide the links in your resources section. If you can stream news from the field to appeal to the highly media-engaged scientist, all the better.

5. Advertise on the right blogs. Media shops have sprung up in the last 3 years that specialize in nothing but putting influential bloggers together with interested advertisers. Use strategically placed Interactive Media Units to link blog fans to your site – or give them a branded experience without having to leave the page.

6. Monitor the conversation. If people are complimenting your products online, feature links to this content on your own site.

7. Find your Influentials. It's right there in your CRM data: the customers who are listening to more Webcasts, downloading online guides, coming back again and again to offers you make. Think about social media techniques to turn these customers into true advocates of your brands. Not only for the revenue they bring, but for the less engaged colleagues who look to them for advice and counsel.

8. Deputize the most devoted. Many companies have already discovered enormous value in developing private, password-protected communities where customers are compensated for participating in product co-creation, input, critiques and other activities.

9. Start a podcast series. Make it easy for scientists to download your content and listen to it while they work. Create podcasts that walk scientists step by step through your most popular protocols. Bridge the space between users and members who actively promote and talk about you.

10. Use social media yourself. It's high time to flatten your technology adoption curve. If your company or lead products don't have a Facebook page, start one. If you don't post your promotional videos on You Tube, it's a short path to get there. Throwing a pizza party for customer labs is good, but it's not like your marketing has to end there.

NEED HELP?

Building a social media program requires objectives, a strategy, a technological plan and resources. We can help. For more information on making your company more social media savvy, contact us at **Bioinformatics, LLC** or **PJA Advertising + Marketing**