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The digital divide

Social media have become vital cogs in the wheels of PR, but how are clients embracing them? **Arun Sudhaman** finds out in the *PRWeek/Diffusion Digital Integration Report*

Findings from a landmark *PRWeek* survey of 128 clients, drawn from across in-house comms, marketing and digital departments, reveal exactly how organisations are grappling with the challenge of integrating social media into their existing operations.

The *Digital Integration Report* should be required reading for anyone involved in comms. There has been much conjecture about what clients want from digital, but quantitative data is still difficult to come by.

It is easy to assume, for example, that the value of social media is well under-

stood by clients. Almost two-thirds of respondents, accordingly, see digital PR and social media as 'a real comms and business opportunity'.

Yet nearly one-third of them say they are open-minded but need to see more hard evidence of their potential value.

Even if the strategic value is accepted, deciding on specific tactics can remain complex. Twitter, picked by three-quarters of respondents, is now the most widely used social media channel.

Surprisingly, a lower proportion (65 per cent) have employed social media monitoring. Diffusion MD Daljit Bhurji says: 'Social media monitoring, just from a pure

reputation management perspective, should be as much a core service now as having a clipping agency.'

An overwhelming majority (90 per cent) believe social media should be integrated into traditional comms. Yet, when asked where responsibility should sit, the highest proportion (36 per cent) plumped for the marketing department.

At 34 per cent, PR departments followed close behind. 'If we are to avoid being crowded out by other marketing disciplines, PR needs to build on this and continue to be the loudest and most persuasive advocate for connected digital communication,' warns Bhurji.

With which external agencies do you work on social media?



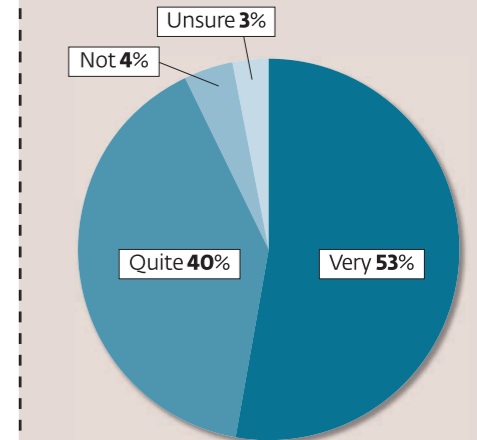
Handling social media in-house is the most popular option, followed by those that use a PR agency; 22 per cent opt for a traditional digital agency; 13 per cent for an ad agency; 10 per cent for a media agency; and eight per cent for a standalone social media shop.

What are the primary drivers and benefits of social media and digital PR investment?

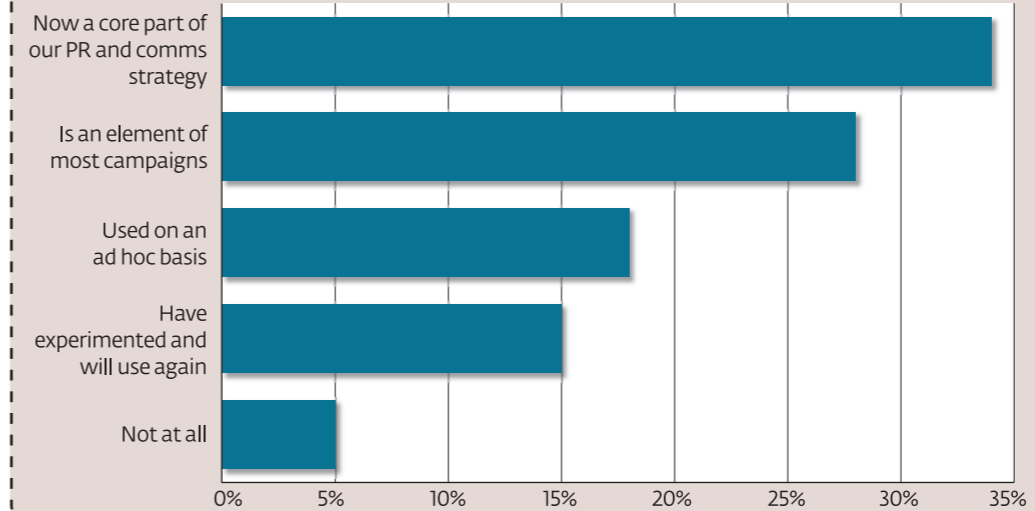


Social media remain, primarily, a branding tool, with fewer than half of clients using them to help manage reputation. Just 13 per cent saw benefit in handling crisis comms, 37 per cent said they drove website traffic, while five per cent picked product development.

How important a consideration is SEO to your online PR and social media activities?



To date, to what extent have you embraced social media and digital PR?

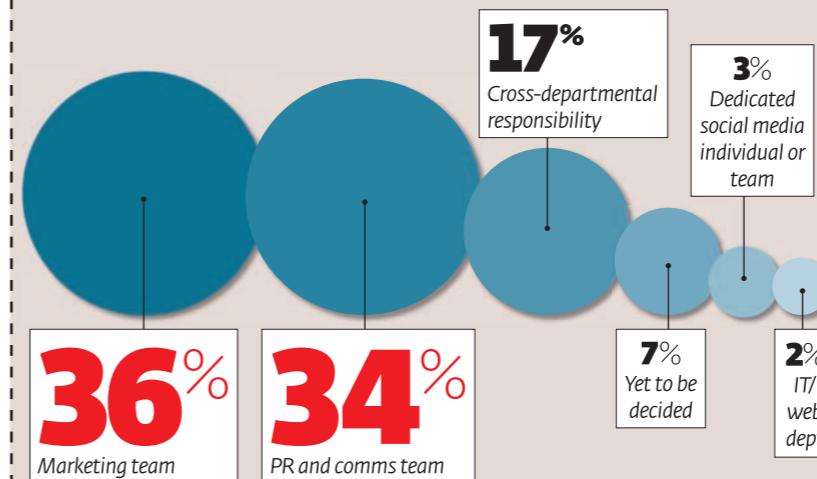


On a personal level, which describes your own attitude to digital PR and social media?



Almost one-third of clients still want to see more hard evidence of social media's potential value to their organisations. Eight per cent, meanwhile, saw 'major challenges and risks to our communication'. Not one respondent viewed it as a 'passing fad'.

Where does ownership of social media and digital marketing sit within your organisation?



How I see it



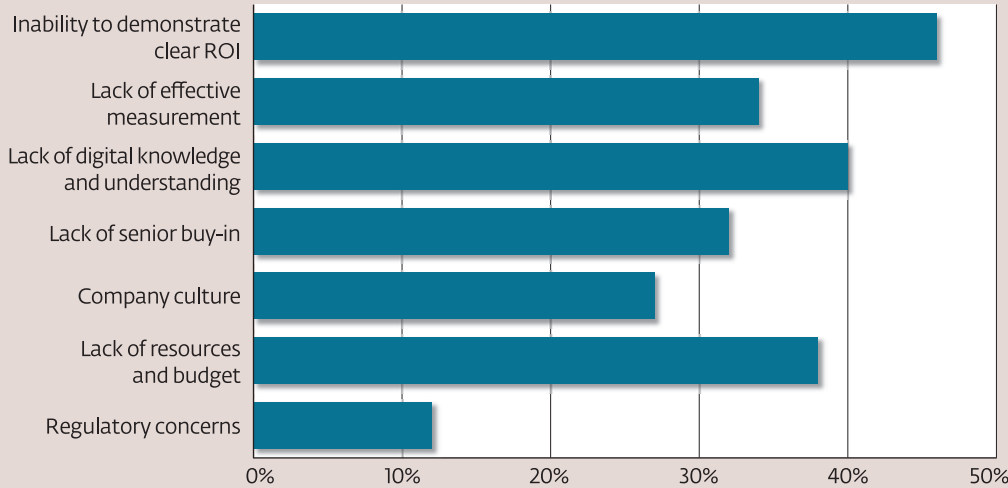
Simon Warr
Board director, communications and public affairs, Jaguar Land Rover

I do find these results surprising. It is hard to say whether people are seeking ownership or trying to avoid ownership. The other part that's surprising is that more people are not of the same view as me – that this is cross-functional. The challenge is how, as an organisation, you co-ordinate and align all that activity and ensure you are

speaking with a consistent voice and are not duplicating effort and spending. There may be a difference for example, between the types of social media monitoring that HR and PR are employing. You have all these different functions that will have a degree of engagement around them. Each will probably say they should lead it and others should follow. You need to make sure they are all singing from the same song sheet. It would be odd to end up saying PR has the sole lead for social media or marketing has it. It transcends the structure.

Digital Integration Report

What do you see as the key barriers preventing wider adoption of social media and digital PR for your organisation?



Which type of firm is best placed to help organisations integrate traditional and social media?



PR agencies lead by a fair margin when it comes to integration, ahead of standalone social media shops; 16 per cent picked traditional digital agencies, while media (12 per cent) and ad agencies (seven per cent) scored poorly; 21 per cent opted for 'no agency'.

How satisfied are you with your current lead PR agency's social media abilities?



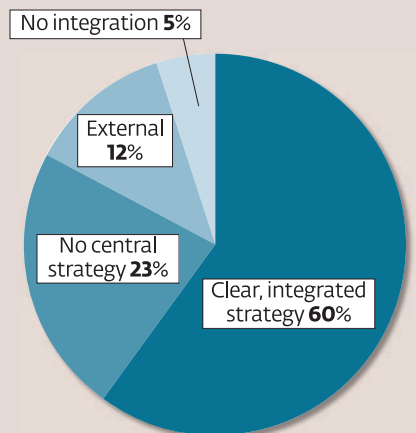
That almost 15 per cent of clients were dissatisfied with their PR agency's social media abilities should cause some concern. Just 50 per cent of clients were satisfied with their PR agencies when it came to social media, with 34 per cent still unsure.

How would you prefer to measure the ROI of social media and digital PR campaigns?



A critical question saw most clients opt for an increase in customers, leads or customer retention. The need for sales metrics becomes undeniable; 24 per cent would like to gauge social media ROI by measuring the reduction in customer comms costs.

Which describes the level of integration of your organisation's digital comms and marketing?



How I see it



Asam Ahmad
Head of media relations (consumer), Virgin Media

I do not believe social media are being undervalued by clients, but there is still a lot of work to be done to take advantage of the platform. A big aspect of that is fear, of negativity and of potential resource requirement. I take the opposite view – it is important for a customer service-oriented organisation to show you are listening and can manage and respond accordingly. ROI is difficult to measure

– one of the challenges is what metrics to use. The 2009 figures [see right] do not seem to be out of line with what I would expect. However, within that, investment into social media can sometimes require resource and investment into online channels that may not appear directly on marketing/PR budgets. For example, Twitter is an excellent, rapid-resource customer service element, but I would include that element in our budget. These figures are not too different to ours. We are probably a little bit closer to 10 per cent in 2009. Certainly the way we have done it makes it hard to split out.

Approximately what percentage of your marketing/PR budget did you invest in social media and digital PR in 2009, compared to your 2010 plans?

