

November 11, 2010

Fight Social Media Stagnation

by Augie Ray

for Interactive Marketing Professionals



November 11, 2010

Fight Social Media Stagnation

Build Trust And Advocacy With Targeted Content And Engagement Strategies

by **Augie Ray**

with Emily Riley and Jennifer Wise

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It was easy to grow a brand's social media marketing program over the past few years; a flood of new consumers entering social networks and other social venues provided a burgeoning audience. But as saturation approaches, increasing the size of your base of fans, followers, and advocates will require new strategies, insights, and tools. Plan a rich content strategy around your target audience's key behaviors to unleash advocates, foster more user-generated content (UGC), and build trust.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 **Social Media Growth Slows As Saturation Approaches**
- 5 **Adapt Marketing Activities For Social Media Saturation**
 - Improve The Content Experience
- RECOMMENDATIONS
- 6 **Commit To Customers Now That They're Committed To Social Media**
- 6 **Supplemental Material**

NOTES & RESOURCES

Forrester interviewed user companies, including Bazaarvoice and Citibank.

Related Research Documents

["A Global Update Of Social Technographics®"](#)
September 28, 2010

["Social Media Marketing For Financial Services"](#)
September 7, 2010

["Peer Influence Analysis"](#)
April 20, 2010

SOCIAL MEDIA GROWTH SLOWS AS SATURATION APPROACHES

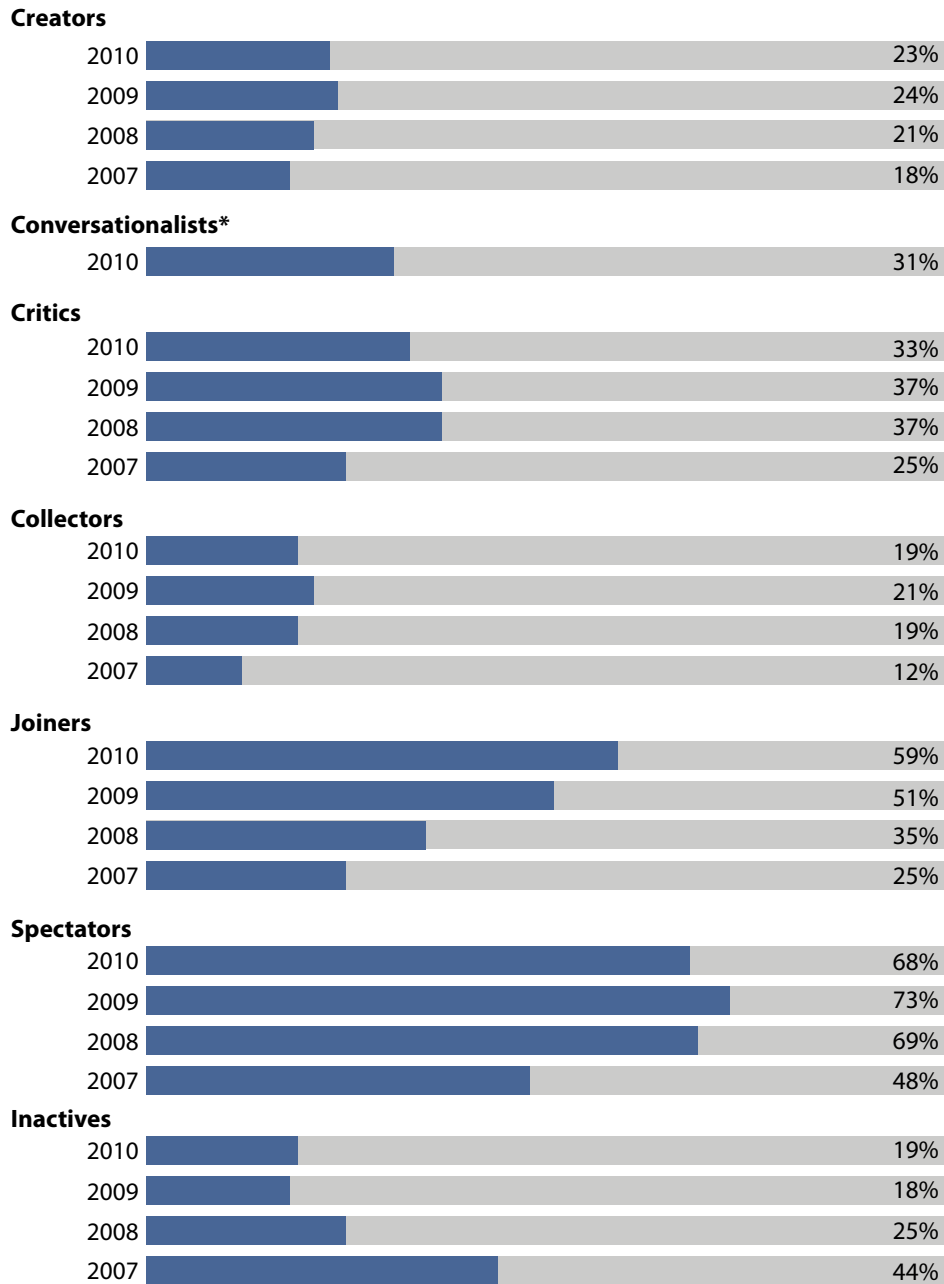
At first it may sound alarming that many social behaviors are stagnating, but this really shouldn't come as any surprise considering how rapidly consumers have adopted social media. As social media reaches ubiquity, growth rates inevitably must decline (see Figure 1).

In 2007, the first year Forrester produced Social Technographics® data, just 25% of US adults were Joiners, maintaining a profile on a social networking site; three years later, that figure is 59%. While a figure that far below 100% may not seem like a point of saturation, it is important to put this into context — use of search engines is a mature and omnipresent activity, but just 71% of US online adults use a search engine on a monthly basis (see Figure 2).¹

But there are other factors at work, as well. Further growth in consumer social media behaviors will be limited because:

- **Innate human behaviors restrict social behaviors.** Saturation of a behavior doesn't always mean that 100% of people engage in that behavior. In the real world, a minority of individuals are creators — writing, composing, or snapping pictures for anything other than personal enjoyment. It is not surprising that social Creator behaviors plateau well below 100%. In 2010, 23% of US online adults exhibit Creator behavior, and unless human nature changes, we won't see rapid increases in these behaviors in the future.
- **Privacy concerns limit older Americans' participation.** While the percentage of Gen Y consumers who are very concerned about privacy increased negligibly in the past year, there was a considerable jump in concern among those 44 and older (see Figure 3).² This concern is altering behaviors; between 2009 and 2010 there was a notable increase in the number of these older adults who never comment on a blog, post ratings and reviews, or contribute to online forums.
- **Social networking is slowly replacing other social channels.** The growth of social networks, particularly Facebook, means that consumers have less time for other types of social sites. While Joiner behavior grew from 2009 to 2010, Spectator behavior decreased. This means fewer online US adults are reading blogs, online forums, and discussion groups; in fact, the only Spectator behavior that demonstrated growth in the past year was reading other people's updates on Twitter.

Figure 1 Social Technographics® Growth From 2007 To 2010

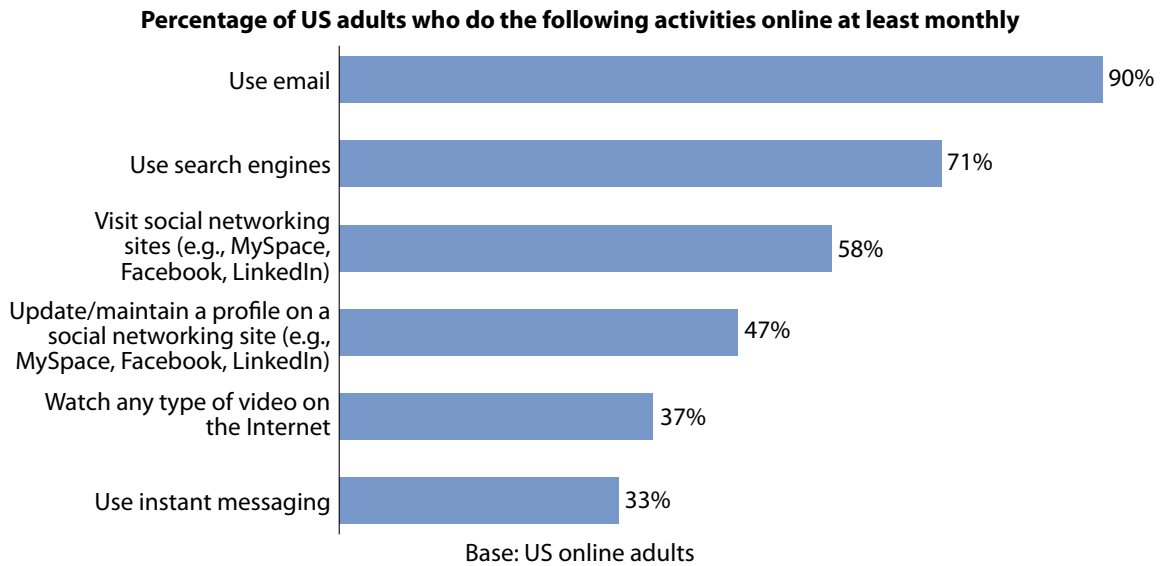


Base: US online adults

Source: North American Technographics Online Benchmark Survey, Q2 2010 (US); North American Technographics Interactive Marketing Online Survey, Q2 2009 (US); North American Technographics Media And Marketing Online Survey, Q2 2008; and North American Social Technographics Online Survey, Q2 2007

*The Conversationalist rung of the Social Technographics ladder was added in 2010.

Figure 2 Saturated Consumer Digital Behaviors

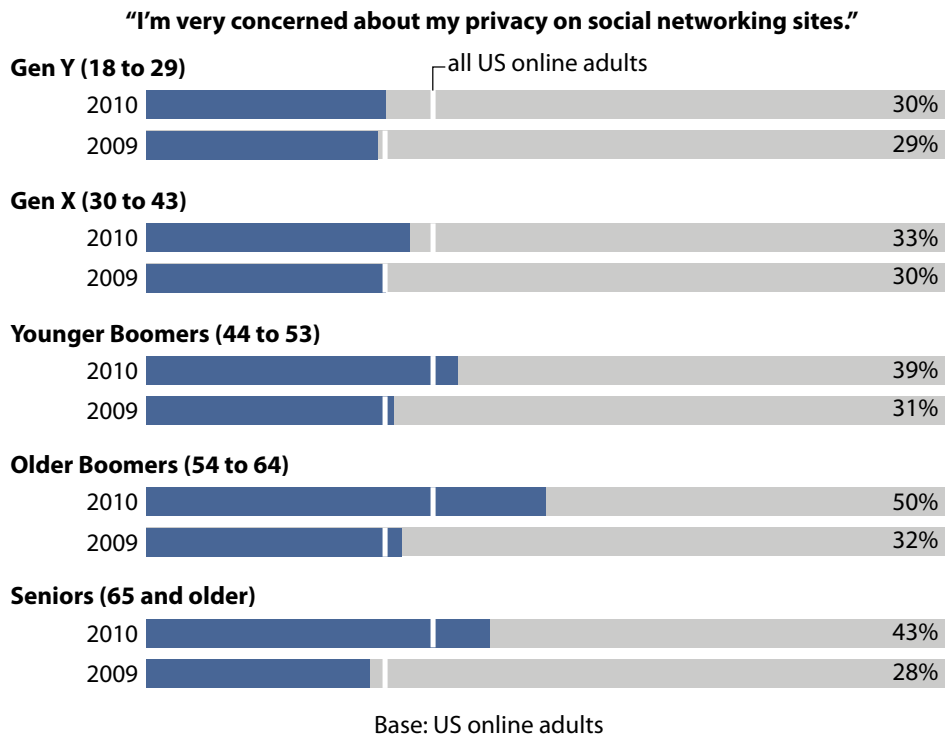


Source: North American Technographics® Online Benchmark Survey, Q2 2010 (US)

58078

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 3 Older Consumers Concerned About Privacy



Source: North American Technographics® Interactive Marketing Online Benchmark Recontact Survey, Q2 2010 (US) and North American Technographics Interactive Marketing Online Survey, Q2 2009 (US)

58078

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

ADAPT MARKETING ACTIVITIES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SATURATION

Social media will continue to evolve as new technologies and tools are introduced, but the changes in the coming years will not be as great as in the past few. This doesn't make social media marketing strategies any less relevant; rather, it means marketers must align strategies to the more mature market:

- **Focus on your own audiences' Social Technographics.** While the topline data on US adults is informative, it is not a substitute for understanding the variety of Social Technographics of your specific audiences. For example, while aggregate Creator behavior remained level between 2009 and 2010, there was significant growth in the number of people aged 18 to 34 who upload a video they created at least monthly.
- **Increase your social networking with older adults.** Although older adults may be shying away from more complex social behaviors like Creator and Critic, they continue to adopt Joiner behaviors within social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Between 2009 and 2010, the total number of online US adults who are Joiners increased, and adults 35 and older accounted for virtually all of this increase.

Improve The Content Experience

With the number of Creators and Critics leveling off, it will be increasingly difficult to encourage *more* people to create user-generated content (UGC); as a result, getting the most from your existing Creators and Critics is necessary. Accomplish this by:

- **Improving consumption of social content.** Improve the way UGC is consumed, and you'll increase the amount of UGC that is created. Recently, Twitter improved the way people consume Tweets to encourage greater levels of engagement. This same approach works for brands, as well. Bazaarvoice reports that its clients see increases in contributions when consumer photos and videos are made more evident. "Adding a media gallery made photo contributions more visible, and this awareness increased participation," notes Gerardo Dada, senior director of product marketing.
- **Engaging with fans and followers:** How many brands are actively listening and responding? Not enough; while almost two-thirds of financial services firms have a presence on Twitter and Facebook, just 42% reply to users' posts or comments.³ But Citibank is breaking through. Says Anna O'Brien, vice president of social media, "The more we've engaged in social media, the more useful feedback we've received directly from consumers. That feedback has led to action and ultimately made our business stronger as a result."
- **Getting Mass Influencers influencing:** Marketers can no longer count on their corps of influencers to keep growing merely because social media behaviors grow; instead, creating more influence requires marketers to understand, reach, and activate those consumers who already

possess influence. Eighty percent of the influence impressions and posts about products and service come from just 16% of consumers in the US, and the concentration of influence is even greater with particular product or demographic categories.⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMIT TO CUSTOMERS NOW THAT THEY'RE COMMITTED TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Even the best social media marketing plan cannot mask a key barrier to participation — as consumers integrate social media tools into every aspect of their private and public lives, they are concerned about their privacy. While this concern is particularly pronounced among older consumers, almost one-third of Gen Y consumers are “very concerned” about privacy. Building trust is the best strategy for marketers who want to commit to customers with a long-term social media presence. Trust can be accomplished by:

- **Being clear.** Don't assume that consumers know the benefits of joining your community, friending your brand on Facebook or participating in a UGC program. Clearly define what's in it for the consumer and the brand. Leading brands such as Amazon earn trust by plainly communicating to consumers the benefits of participating, the data that will be collected, and how that data will be used.
- **Being transparent.** Facebook recently unveiled new functionality to permit its users to see the data that is collected by the applications users have authorized. Over time, this sort of transparency of data will become expected; consumers who subscribe, join or “like” will expect to review the data brands gather. Providing visibility and access to the information you collect from your fans, friends, and advocates builds trust.
- **Engaging.** Brands that encourage customers to listen to their every message in social networks but demonstrate little interest in hearing consumers' messages in return damage trust and hurt relationships. The best social media marketing programs cannot foster trust in social channels if brands fail to acknowledge, thank, apologize to, help, respond to, and show interest in consumers. Trust cannot be earned by mere presence in social channels but requires active engagement.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Companies Interviewed For This Document

Bazaarvoice

Citibank

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Source: North American Technographics Benchmark Survey, Q2 2010 (US, Canada).
- ² The percentage of Gen Y users who said they were “very concerned about my privacy on social networking sites” increased from 29% to 30% in the past year. The percentage of Older Boomers who felt the same way increased from 32% to 50%, and Seniors increased from 28% to 32%. Source: North American Technographics Interactive Marketing Online Survey, Q2 2009 (US), and North American Technographics Interactive Marketing Online Benchmark Recontact Survey, Q2 2010 (US).
- ³ Out of 24 financial firms studied, 65% were present on Twitter, 59% were present on Facebook, and 42% were replying to users’ posts. See the September 7, 2010, “[Social Media Marketing For Financial Services](#)” report.
- ⁴ There are 29 million Mass Influencers in the US, representing 16% of the adult US online population. See the April 20, 2010, “[Peer Influence Analysis](#)” report.

FORRESTER®

Making Leaders Successful Every Day

Headquarters

Forrester Research, Inc.
400 Technology Square
Cambridge, MA 02139 USA
Tel: +1 617.613.6000
Fax: +1 617.613.5000
Email: forrester@forrester.com
Nasdaq symbol: FORR
www.forrester.com

Research and Sales Offices

Forrester has research centers and sales offices in more than 27 cities internationally, including Amsterdam; Cambridge, Mass.; Dallas; Dubai; Foster City, Calif.; Frankfurt; London; Madrid; Sydney; Tel Aviv; and Toronto.

For a complete list of worldwide locations visit www.forrester.com/about.

For information on hard-copy or electronic reprints, please contact Client Support at +1 866.367.7378, +1 617.613.5730, or clientsupport@forrester.com.

We offer quantity discounts and special pricing for academic and nonprofit institutions.

Forrester Research, Inc. (Nasdaq: FORR) is an independent research company that provides pragmatic and forward-thinking advice to global leaders in business and technology. Forrester works with professionals in 19 key roles at major companies providing proprietary research, customer insight, consulting, events, and peer-to-peer executive programs. For more than 27 years, Forrester has been making IT, marketing, and technology industry leaders successful every day. For more information, visit www.forrester.com.