

B2B Marketing Goes Social: A White Horse Survey Report

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In March 2010, White Horse conducted a survey of corporate marketers of their companies' use of social media marketing. 104 marketers across a range of businesses weighed in on their brands' degree of social participation, social marketing staffing and resources, executive support, and success measurement. The results provide a snapshot of the current state of social media marketing and demonstrate its rapid evolution over the last three years.

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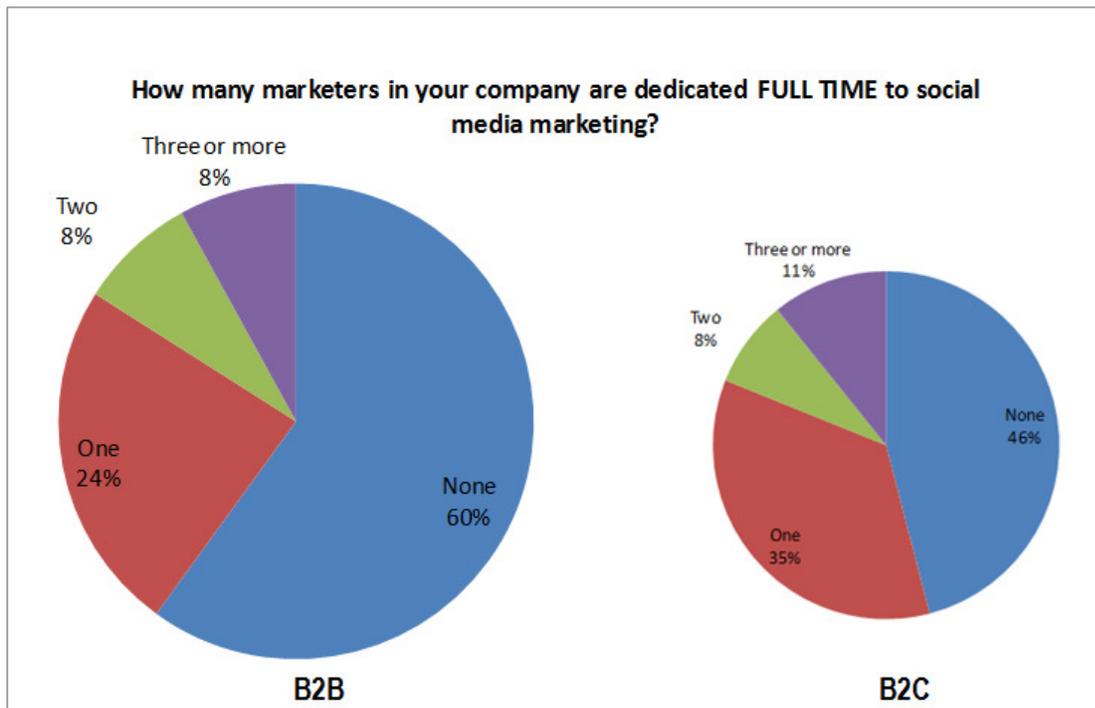
Because White Horse maintains a specialized practice area in B2B marketing, we were especially interested in uncovering insights into how B2B marketers are approaching social media marketing in comparison to their B2C colleagues. The results proved illuminating. Contrary to the widely held perception that B2B marketers have been slow to adopt social media marketing tactics, our survey found high rates of adoption or planned adoption of most common tactics, as well as a general recognition of the importance and relevance of social media to B2B marketing. Yet the survey also showed that B2B marketers face greater internal obstacles to adoption. Many B2B companies remain fundamentally "handshake" businesses, reliant on one-to-one connections between sales reps and customers;

consequently, B2B marketers have work to do convincing their organizations that social media is fertile ground for cultivating the kinds of leads that their sales forces thrive on.

The report that follows examines responses by B2B marketers mirrored against B2C marketer responses from the same survey.

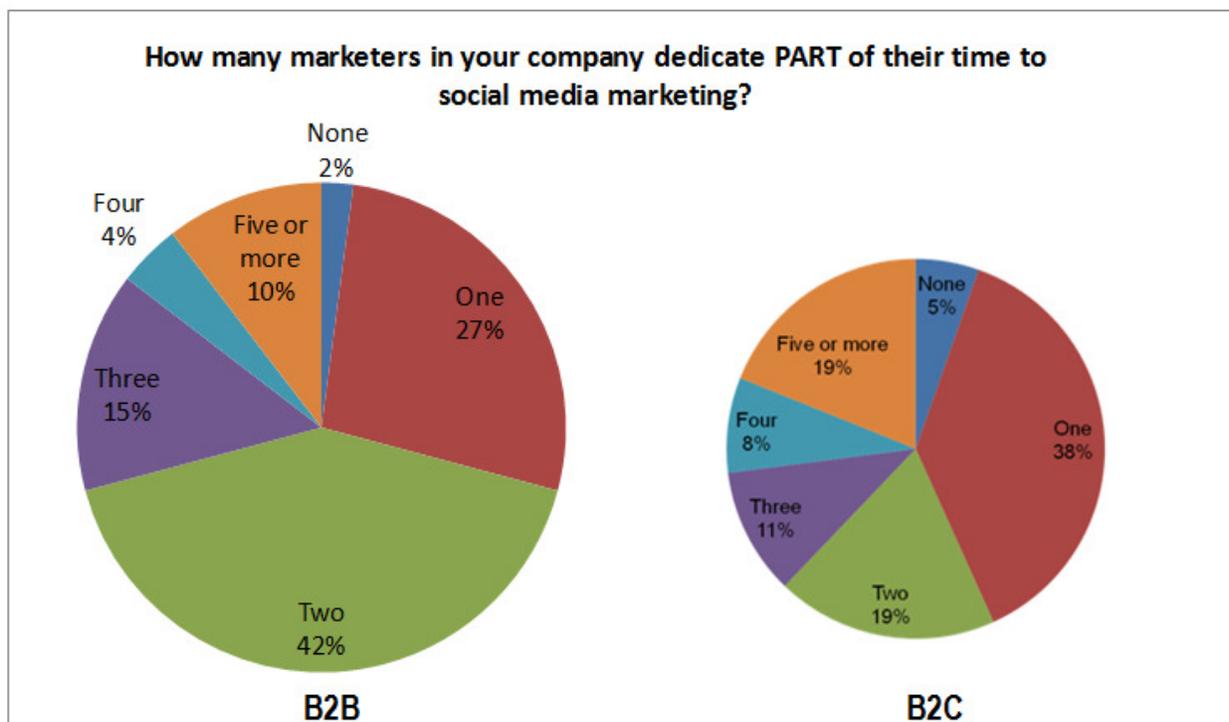
Staffing

Our survey found 40% of B2B companies devote one or more full time marketers to social media marketing, as compared to 54% of B2C companies. Given the relatively smaller size of marketing departments in B2B organizations, this level of representation is significant; it underscores the maturing role of social media as a core component of B2B marketers' arsenal.



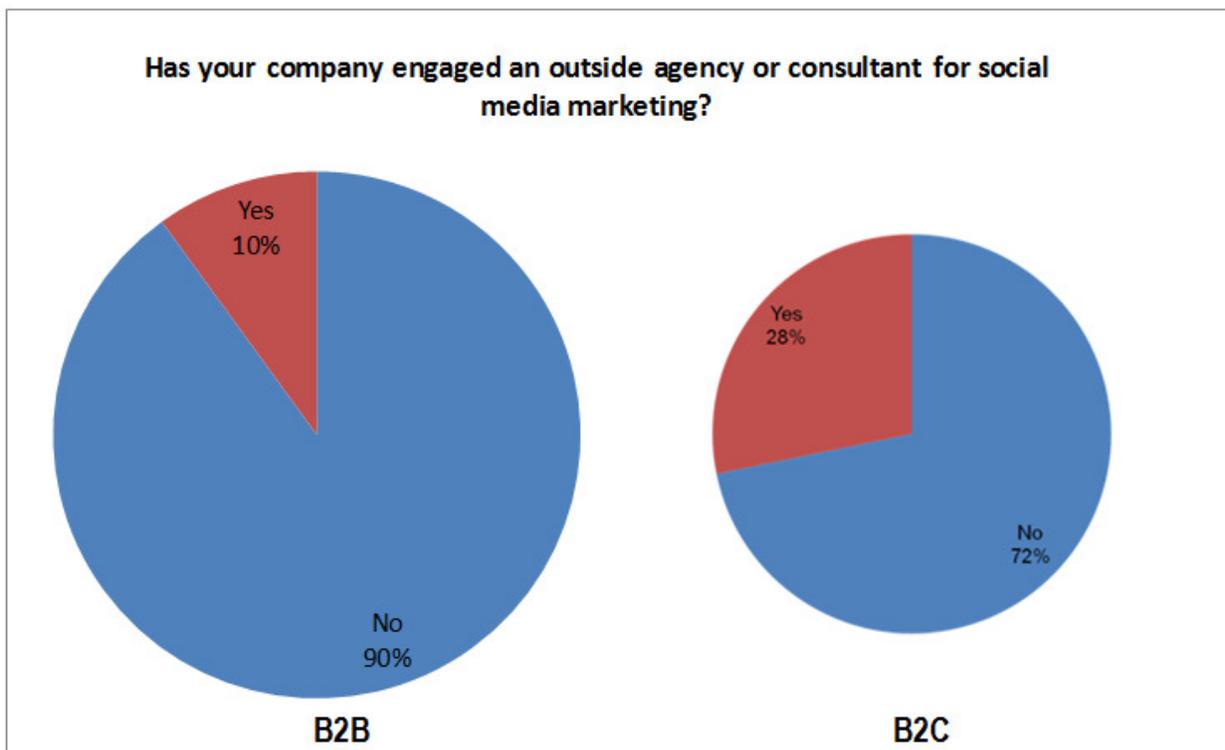
Staffing, cont.

The more illuminating finding is the prevalence of part-time social media management within B2B marketing departments: 71% of B2B organizations surveyed devote two or more part-time marketing resources to social media management, as compared to only 62% among B2C marketers. Broader ownership of social media in B2B marketing departments reflects the “many hats” approach of B2B marketers, with marketing roles defined by product groups or customer types rather than by marketing specialization, e.g., digital vs. traditional. We see broad ownership as a positive trend; companies’ use of social media can be more authentic and more personal when multiple marketers participate within their area of focus. But it also highlights the need for governing strategy and a common set of best practices, which most companies still lack.



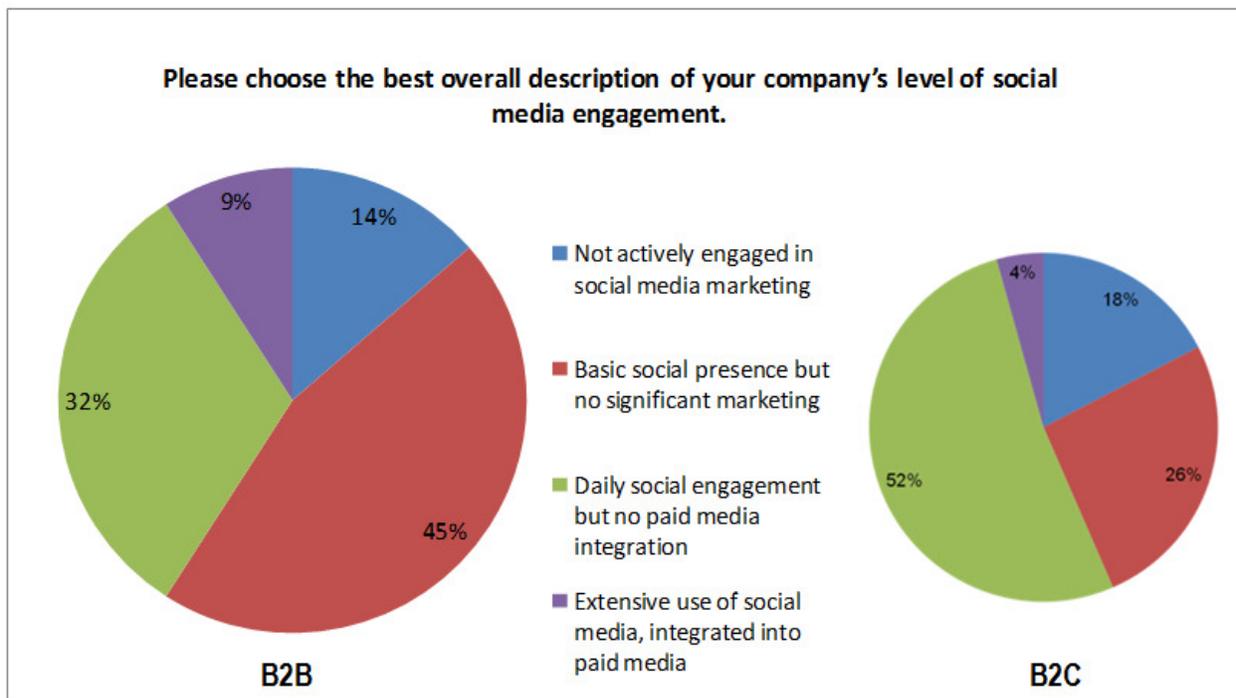
Staffing, cont.

We feel strongly that B2B companies will benefit from engaging digital agencies to guide strategy and best practices for social media marketing, but our survey shows that this has not yet occurred. Only 10% of B2B companies have engaged an agency for help with social media, as compared to 28% for B2C companies. This is consistent with B2B companies' overall lower rates of agency engagement across all marketing activity, but it demonstrates that agencies offering social media services need to work harder to define their value to B2B organizations. Our survey asked respondents to identify in what capacity they used outside agencies for social media, and the sample size was too small to chart, but most indicated that strategic governance and planning were the primary roles. Most B2B organizations will manage social media effectively on their own if such strategy and planning is in place.



Engagement

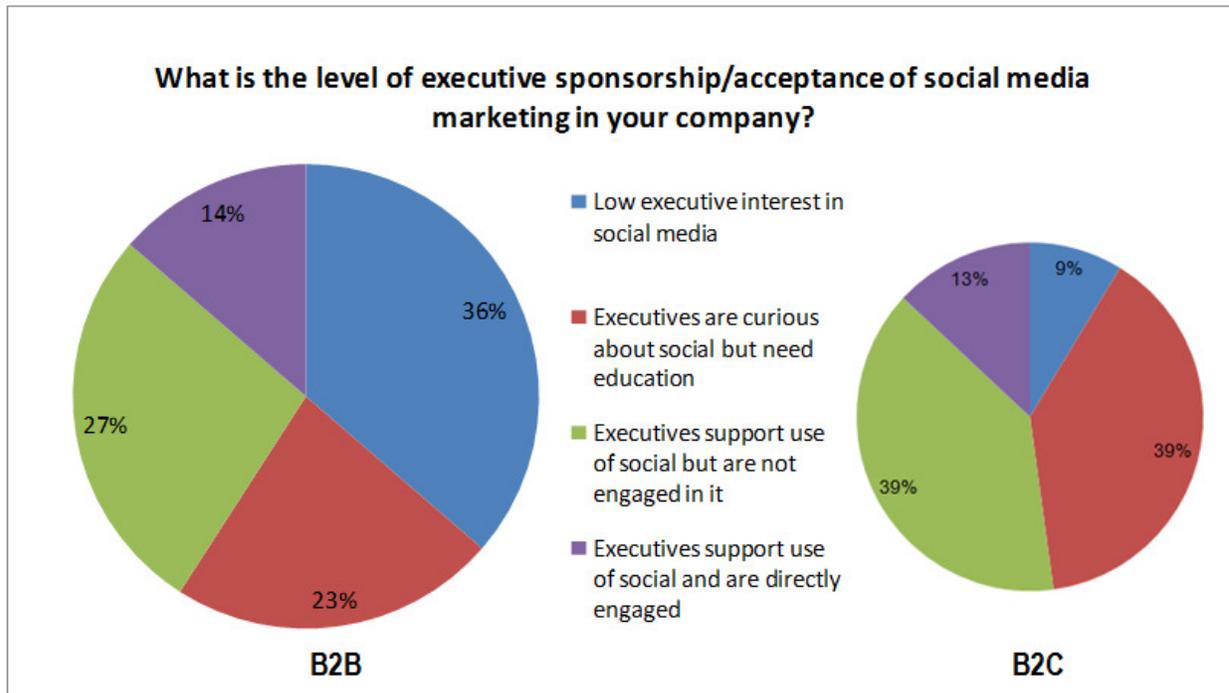
Consistent with other studies like Business.com's 2009 Social Media Marketing Survey, we found that B2B companies' overall engagement in social media was comparable to their B2C counterparts. Only 18% indicated that they had no current social media activity, compared to 14% for B2C. The degree of engagement varied widely, however; nearly half of B2B marketers have only the basic "tent stakes" of a social media presence, e.g., a Twitter and Facebook account, or a company blog, and only one-third are engaged in social media day-to-day. Based on the survey and our daily conversations with B2B marketers, we expect to see a significant shift toward day-to-day social engagement in 2010 as a natural evolution in the social media marketing process. Our survey actually found that the most sophisticated use of social media – full integration with paid media activity – was slightly more prevalent among B2B marketers than B2C. Our hypothesis is that the leaner, more ground-level marketing strategies typical of B2B are more easily and naturally integrated across channels



Engagement, cont.

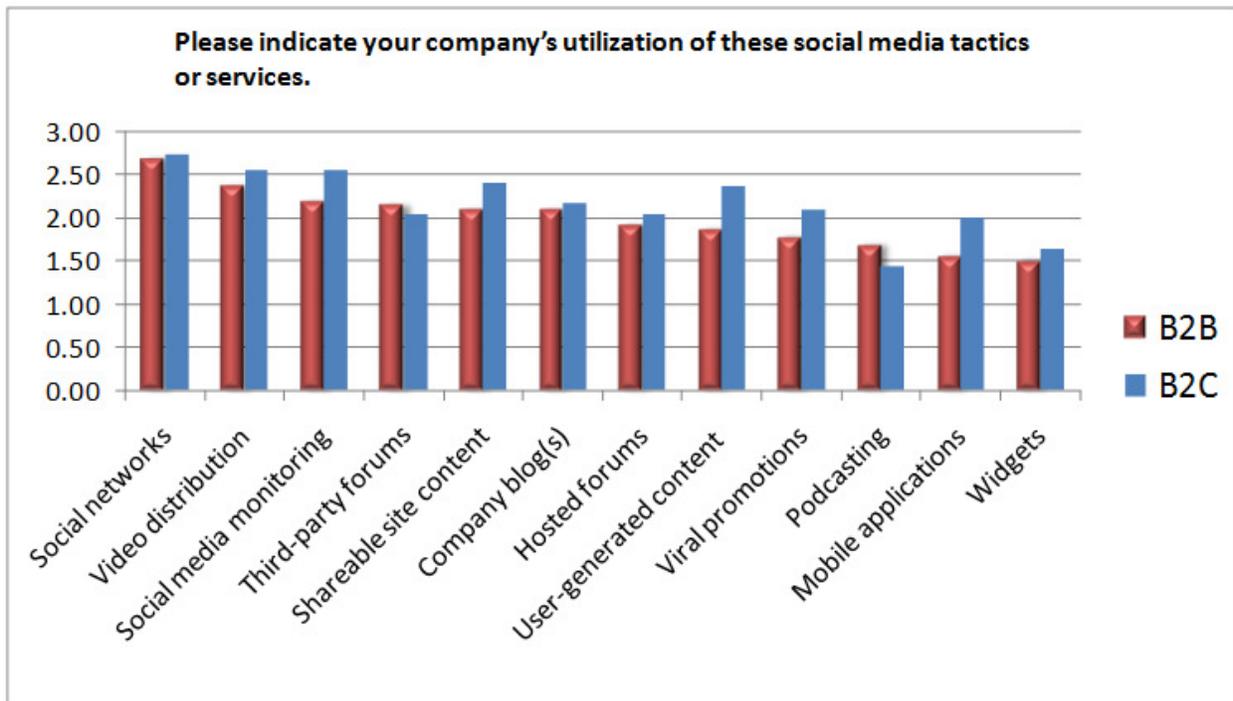
The biggest obstacle that B2B marketers face in pursuing social media initiatives – corroborated further in additional responses below – is lack of executive buy-in. While B2B marketing departments eagerly embrace new ways to engage in the traditional practice of networking with prospects, many of their executives haven't seen the light: more than one-third of B2B marketers report low executive support for social media, as compared to only 9% for B2C marketers. Here again, B2B marketers can potentially benefit from greater agency engagement in helping to build business cases for social media marketing in quantifiable terms, demonstrating for executives the expected return in leads generated.

On the other end of the scale, however, deep and direct executive engagement is as typical of B2B marketers as it is for B2C; once again, this reflects the ground-level nature of much of B2B marketing, in which executives often play an active role.



In asking B2B marketers to indicate their usage of specific social media services or tactics, we found that their usage trends largely reflected those of marketers as a whole, with the longest-standing practices, like networks, blogs, and forums, showing widespread usage, while less proven tactics like mobile applications and widgets are much less widely used.

The survey demonstrated that a social network presence, e.g., a Facebook and/or Twitter account, is fundamental; more than 95% of marketers across both B2B and B2C indicated that they have such a presence or plan to have one in the near term. The more illuminating results were in areas where B2B marketers surpassed B2C in usage: B2B marketers are slightly more likely to participate in third-party forums and to produce podcasts. Both of these results point to effective use of social tactics to support traditional B2B marketing activities; third-party forums are excellent venues for connecting with prospects in much the same way as conferences and trade shows provide such opportunities, and podcasts are comparable to the tried-and-true use of whitepapers as lead generation and maturation tools.



Obstacles

Our survey found the most significant variance between B2B and B2C marketers are in the internal obstacles faced when trying to deploy social media programs. Both agencies and marketers seeking to drive adoption of social media in B2B organizations should be aware of these important differences.

Because most B2B organizations are far less brand-sensitive – their brands tend to be known more narrowly and deeply within their chosen fields – they don't suffer the worries of B2C organizations in terms of customer backlash. B2C marketers were far more likely to express concerns over loss of brand control and negative customer feedback. And because B2B marketers usually participate in complex, consultative sales rather than direct sales, there tends to be less concern about proving direct ROI for social media initiatives.

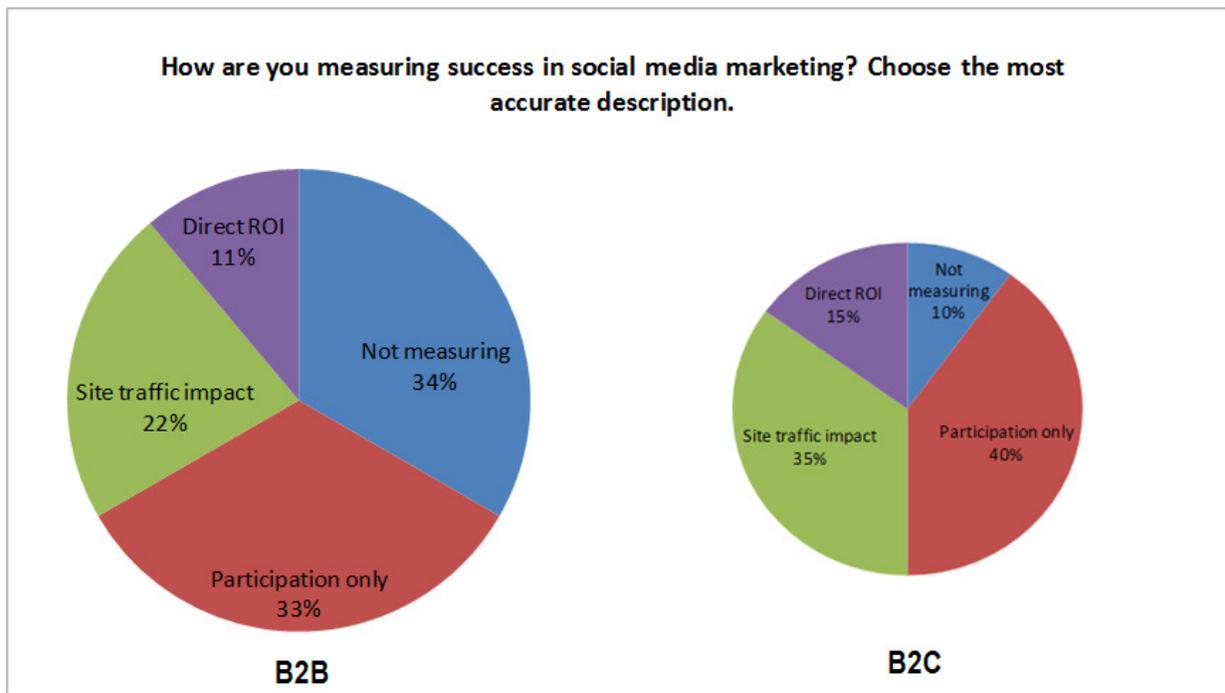
The real uphill battle for B2B marketers goes back to the challenge of executive buy-in: B2B cultures are far more likely to perceive social media as being irrelevant to their field, and to express a preference for traditional marketing. Once again, White Horse believes that business cases for B2B social media marketing must be built differently: they must effectively map new social venues to traditional tactics in order to show how social media simply provides new ways of doing what B2B marketers have always done well: build relationships.



Measurement

Finally, our survey gauged marketers' approach to social media measurement – one of the most urgent questions surrounding social media adoption. Among B2B marketers using social media, significantly more – more than one-third – are not measuring results, compared to only 10% of B2C marketers. This isn't necessarily problematic; coupled with B2B marketers' lower concerns regarding social media ROI, we can conclude that many B2B marketers see the inherent value of engagement apart from its measurement, in much the same way that cultivating leads through business networking has a value that's not immediately measurable.

Not surprisingly, neither B2B nor B2C marketers are measuring direct ROI to any significant degree; the emerging consensus is that such efforts are often fallacious, given the multiple, complex influences that lead to purchase.



Conclusions

Our survey revealed a B2B landscape in which social media plays a significant and ever-growing role in the marketing arsenal, but one which is in no danger of supplanting traditional tactics. As noted, we believe strongly that the ultimate evolutionary stage of social media marketing is its integration with traditional tactics, and B2B marketers are uniquely well-positioned to make this leap. Social tactics align more naturally with highly relationship-driven B2B tactics than they do with awareness-centered B2C tactics. In order to establish leadership in social media marketing, B2B marketers must overcome the inertia of internal politics by continually proving the relevance of social media conversations to their business' reliance on solid customer relationships.

As a full-service digital agency with a specialized B2B practice, White Horse helps B2B marketers find the right fit for social media marketing and other digital marketing methods in their unique business environments. Companies like Ingersoll-Rand and Cisco rely on us to help guide their marketing programs in the digital arena. For more information about this survey or White Horse services, contact us at sales@whitehorse.com or 1-877-471-4200.

Be sure to register for our free B2B marketing resource center, the B2B Brain Trust, at whitehorse.com/b2bbraintrust