

GUIDE TO AGENCY GROWTH
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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This is a different type of report into social media.

It will not talk breathlessly about how many people are now using social media globally, it won't dazzle you with a host of infographics showing the level of mobile engagement, and it won't try to excite you with anecdotes about how brilliantly brands are creating shareable content and going hyper-viral. There aren't even any pictures of Millennials having fun.

There are already enough reports like that, and they are of limited value to people running creative agencies. You want to know more precisely what all this means to you, whether there is any evidence that investment in this field will produce tangible commercial benefits, and perhaps most importantly what the practical steps are that you need to take if you're going to start making it happen.

That is what this report will cover. It is based on desk research into the social presence and activity

of the Campaign Top 100 and the Design Week Top 100, as well as survey responses from a sample of 50 agency leaders. We aim to help you answer these questions:

- How do we compare to other agencies on social media?
- Why are other agencies investing in social media?
- What's stopping agencies from getting more out of social media?
- What practical steps can we take to improve our social media performance?



How do we compare to other agencies on social media?

There has been a lot of hype around social media for many years and this has left many agency leaders and marketers uncertain and insecure about how well they are performing in this area.

Believe this hype and it would be easy to think that every agency is spending hours a day blogging, posting, tweeting, liking, commenting and sharing.

We wanted to find out the facts. So in July 2017 we analysed the social media activity of every agency in the Campaign and Design Week Top 100s. We measured them across five criteria.

- **Presence** – what % have a page, an account, a channel, etc
- **Popularity** – what is the average number of followers on that platform
- **Activity** – how many posts, tweets, updates, etc., did it log that month
- **Basic engagement** – what was the average number of likes that each post gained
- **Deeper engagement** – what was the average number of shares or comments

Not all measurements were possible. For example, on Pinterest there are no dates for activity so we were unable to measure activity in that month. Not every channel offers opportunities for deeper engagement.

However, the research does give a broad indication of activity levels in the creative agency sector, and will allow agency leaders to benchmark their own performance.

It is little surprise to see that Twitter and LinkedIn are the most popular platforms. Our sector is present, popular and broadly active on those two platforms at least. Yet, beyond that there is clear opportunity.

Some agencies have recognised and are exploiting the opportunity, and those overall figures mask a wide variety in performance – from BBH with its 100k+ Twitter followers, highly active and engaged pages on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, and nascent YouTube presence – right through to many agencies with barely any presence at all.

Yet, looking at the aggregate figures, there clearly could be more engagement, and there are channels with considerable potential – YouTube stands out – that are almost unexplored territory for our sector. So, why are the agencies that are forging ahead in this channel doing it? Where precisely is the opportunity?



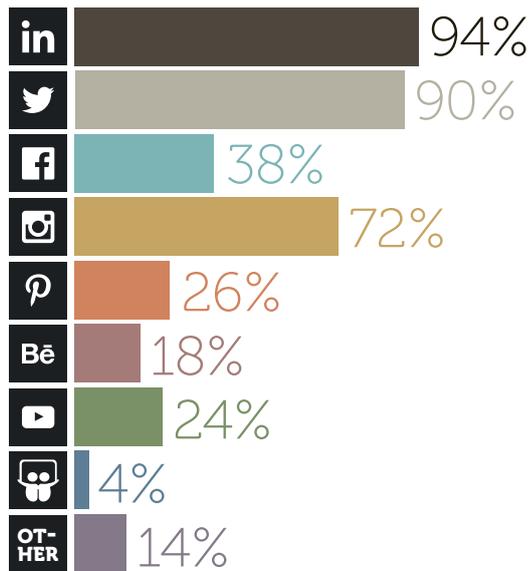
DESIGN WEEK TOP 100

PLATFORM	PRESENCE	POPULARITY	ACTIVITY	BASIC ENGAGEMENT	DEEPER ENGAGEMENT
	99%	2,424	18	1.6	n/a
	91%	2,123	3	11	0.03
	56%	602	3	12	n/a
	61%	730	5	3.4	0.03
	11%	15	0.3	0.2	0.02
	17%	39	n/a	n/a	n/a
	21%	66	n/a	n/a	n/a

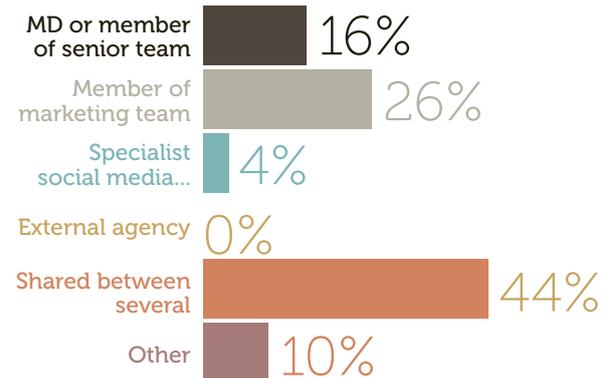
CAMPAIGN TOP 100

PLATFORM	PRESENCE	POPULARITY	ACTIVITY	BASIC ENGAGEMENT	DEEPER ENGAGEMENT
	93%	9,842	17	37	n/a
	87%	12,246	2.6	3.8	0.06
	55%	2,844	2.8	29.22	n/a
	42%	1,266	3.9	0.39	0.02
	20%	190	0.16	n/a	n/a
	3%	1.6	n/a	n/a	n/a
	15%	27	n/a	n/a	n/a

WHICH PLATFORM DOES YOUR AGENCY USE?



WHO RUNS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT?



Why are other agencies investing in social media?

1 | Enhance the agency brand

When we asked 50 agency leaders why they invest in social media, 61% told us their primary motivation was brand enhancement. This is no surprise. We all know that people whose opinions we care about will form their opinions of us by looking at our websites, by visiting our offices, by meeting our teams, and by viewing us or interacting with us on a marketing or communications channel. Social media is simply another channel through which we can convey our brand positioning.

The creative agency sector by and large understands and values this role that social media plays. A decade ago many still dismissed social media as a passing fad or a space for the under-25s. No one seriously believes that any more. Whether it is the top designer looking for their next challenge or marketing directors keeping abreast of the agency market, most will now go to social channels before they visit a website, and certainly before they agree to meet your team or see your studio.

2 | Attract new business

The second most cited reason in our survey was to gain new business leads (45%). Again, this is little surprise – new business is always a priority for creative agencies. Agencies are keen to discover the possibilities here.

For some this involves a few people in the agency engaging more or less regularly on a few channels. At others it is a more sophisticated programme of social selling – profiling target organisations, using online tools to discover prospect profiles, connecting with them, sharing content, striking up conversations and gradually building up relationships. Many other agencies have yet to even look into this area, much less develop it as a coherent strategy.

Those that do are ignoring an opportunity for growth. Twenty, or even ten, years ago, agencies could win new business by mailing, emailing or phoning potential clients. They still can, but it has become far harder. To maintain a healthy pipeline involves a far more sophisticated process across a wider range of channels, of which social media is one. Our survey shows that creative agencies recognise the potential here, but are yet to fully get to grips with it.

3 | Get on the radar of journalists and other key influencers

Far fewer respondents to our survey told us they see social media as a good way to influence journalists or judges on some award schemes. This is another missed opportunity. Consider what industry journalist, Tom May, has to say:

“I write about creative projects on a day-to-day basis for the likes of Creative Bloq, Computer Arts, net magazine, Creative Boom and more. I’m constantly being invited to lunch with agencies, or a tour of the studio, so they can fill me in on what they’ve been up to, but I just don’t have the time. And while I would love to find a spare hour to trawl through agency website news pages, to catch up on their latest projects, in the real world, there’s always an email to answer or a ringing phone to pick up.

“So I do find social media a useful tool for discovering cool new agency projects. When a particular project is getting a lot of attention on Twitter, say, that’s going to filter through to me from my trusted contacts, easily and effortlessly. That’s not by itself reason enough to write about it, but it is a good step in getting me to notice it and give it some thought in the first place.”

Tom is not alone. According to research from marketing platform Hubspot, 96% of journalists use Twitter every week, with 70% of them citing it as the most important channel for reaching them, and 52% believing they will be using it even more fully in the future.

An oft-cited reason for not engaging more fully with social media is that “none of the people we want to speak to are on there – they’ve all got better things to do”. Even if that is true, it misses the potential of the channel for reaching journalists – and other key influencers like judges on some award schemes – who can pick up on your activity there and take your work, ideas and name to a far wider audience.

4 | Staff engagement and recruitment

Every agency knows its people are its most valuable asset, and many agencies invest significantly in programmes to make those people feel valued, rewarded and motivated. For many people, however, the greatest motivation is public recognition of a job well done. Social media offers an ideal place to showcase the great work your team is producing.

Strong employer brands attract the best talent, and being seen as an employer that recognises its team, as well as an agency producing great work, will help grow your talent pool. Furthermore, when you are actively recruiting almost everyone who is thinking of applying for the job will check out your social media presence. What they find there will affect their view of your company. Deliver a negative impression and those with a choice will take their talent elsewhere.

What's stopping agencies from getting more out of this channel?

There are clear reasons to invest in social media. It's why almost all agencies have established a presence on Twitter and LinkedIn, around half are on Facebook and Instagram, and roughly one in ten are making some use of Pinterest, YouTube and Vimeo. But how well are those agencies achieving their objectives?

We asked that question and it produced a mixed response – a neat bell curve in fact, with half of respondents scoring themselves one to five, and the other half of them six to ten. 2% gave themselves a perfect ten, and 2% admitted to a dismaying one. Most agencies are present and active on social media, but most feel they could be more active and more strategic.

What stops them doing more? Time.

68% cite lack of time as their main obstacle, followed by a lack of expertise in social media (36%) and lack of content (34%). Speak to most agency leaders and they will tell you something along these lines: "We should be making more of the channel, but to be honest I don't know exactly what to do. Hashtags, likes,

pins – how do I use them? And what should I say there? One thing's for sure – I don't have time to figure it all out or to start creating content to post on there. I've got an agency to run."

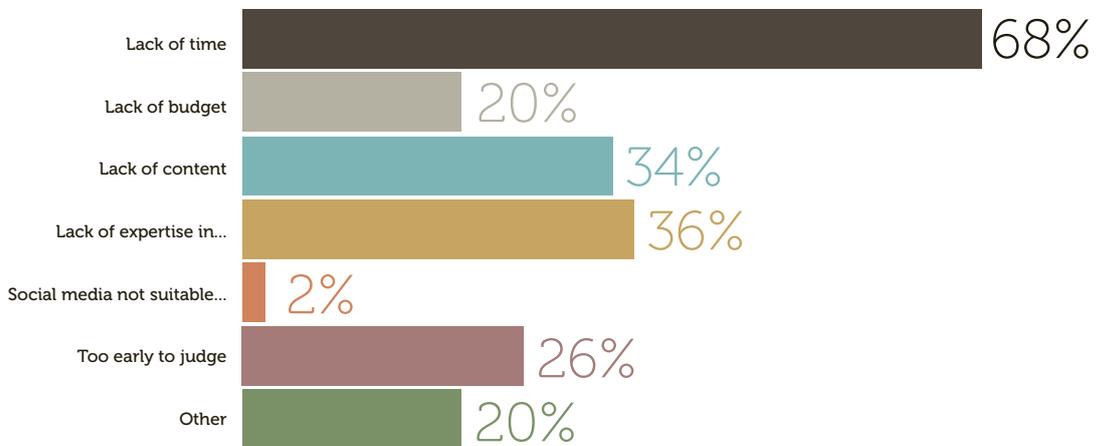
It's not a lack of budget that holds agencies back. Only 20% cited that as their main obstacle, and not one of our respondents expects their investment in social media to decline in the next three years. 70% expect it to increase.

Agencies are not taking greater advantage of the opportunities offered by social media because they lack the time to focus firstly on creating content for the channel and secondly on mastering the mechanics of the platforms.

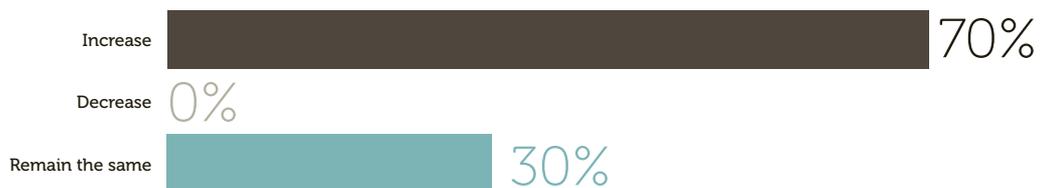


“Most agencies are present and active on social media – the challenge now is to be more active and more strategic”

WHAT ARE THE MAIN OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING THOSE OBJECTIVES?



DO YOU EXPECT YOUR INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA TO INCREASE, DECREASE OR REMAIN THE SAME IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?





A social media strategy: 7 Steps to Follow

The agencies that have found time to develop a successful social media strategy have done two things. Firstly, they have taken the right approach. The time they have invested has been spent productively, heading in the right direction. Secondly, they have broken the task down into manageable steps. There are seven steps to follow.

1 | Define your audience

Any communications strategy must begin with a clear view of who you want to reach. Think about the opportunities we mapped out above – who are your clients, potential clients, key influencers, employees and potential recruits? What do you know about them? Can you define them by sector, location, and so on?

Look beyond this basic demographic profiling, and think too about their psychological profile. What are the opportunities and threats they face? What are the issues that you can help them with? What do they come onto social media for?

2 | Work out where they are

Once you know who you want to talk to, you can think about where they are likely to be. Twitter is virtually ubiquitous, as is LinkedIn in the world of business, so most agencies start on those two platforms. In our sector Instagram and Pinterest offer opportunities for visual engagement, and a growing number of agencies are finding Facebook is a good platform for internal engagement. Video production has become far more affordable in recent years, and engagement on the likes of YouTube and Vimeo will grow.

We look here only at seven of the most popular platforms. There are many others you might want to consider. If a section of your audience is overseas it changes the equation again. It is important to

spend some time working out which parts of your audience are on which platforms so you can direct your communications appropriately and not waste resource pushing messages out on a platform where the audience is not right, or where you have no potential audience at all.

3 | Work out what you want to say – and be distinctive

Social media is noisy. It is hard to stand out. And no one goes onto social media to hear from an agency. This is why so many social media consultants focus on the viral idea. There are two problems with this approach: firstly, it is incredibly rare that content does go viral, and secondly, it runs the risk of your agency becoming associated with the viral content as opposed to your work, ideas and capabilities.

A better approach is to work out what you want to become known for, articulate that in a distinctive, compelling and relevant way, and then say it again and again and again and again and again. It is this focused repetition of a simple but interesting point that will result in the recognition you are aiming for.

Creative agencies are famously good at helping their clients find distinctive, compelling and relevant messages; they are famously bad at doing it for themselves. It is usually a good idea to bring in an external facilitator to help you understand and articulate your point of difference. ►►



4 | Don't rely on the intern

Social media is too important to be left to an intern, no matter how much they know about the channel, or how keen they are to help. This is not about the channel, it is about your agency.

Your intern will be able to help with delivery – uploading content, prompting the senior team to engage, highlighting interesting content, and so on – but when it comes to the actual engagement you need the senior team to do it, because they are the people with the greatest understanding of, and stake in, your agency.

It is essential to involve that senior team, and any other people in your agency who are keen. Gaining buy-in will not always be easy, and is usually best done in a workshop where you outline the potential benefits, share examples of similar agencies that are gaining these benefits from more effective social media activity, and then agree a plan of action.

You know who you want to reach and where you plan to engage with them, so the next step is to connect with them. From there, it is a case of creating compelling, relevant content and then pushing it out so that your audience sees it.

5 | Invest in quality content

Content creation is one of the areas where agencies typically bring in external help. These experts draw out your ideas, opinions and thoughts, and then shape them into reports, articles, videos, podcasts, infographics, or some other form of content. The ideas, opinions and thoughts need to come from your agency, but few agencies have people with both the time and the ability to create high quality content that will both interest the audience and deliver the agency messages.

The analogy with clothes is often useful. You can make them yourself but it is usually wiser to leave it to specialists. You wear them, they become an integral part of how people see you, and you can choose cheap clothes or expensive clothes. It is vital they fit you. They should suit you. And ultimately they should make you look good.

6 | Learn the tricks and make it a daily habit

Did you know that tweets with images receive 18% more clicks than tweets without images? Or that LinkedIn posts with links have a 200% higher engagement rate? How do you use hashtags on Facebook? How often should you post? Is it ok to retweet or does that just look spammy? When is the best time to post? What about image rights on social media?

It is questions like this that damage the confidence of you and your senior team on social media. It breeds inaction. So, address it head on with a workshop that will give you clear information on what to do and what not to do, and will leave each member of your "social media team" with their own action plan of daily and weekly social media tasks. Armed with both content and confidence, very soon social media becomes a habit.

7 | Make your content work hard

You now have a social media plan. You will be enhancing your brand, attracting new business leads, getting noticed by influencers, and inspiring both existing and future team members. However, beyond this you have also laid the foundations for broader and deeper engagement with your audience.

After all, you have invested significantly in content and now you need to make sure it works hard across channels. Post it on your website, pitch it to publications, both print and online, in the creative media but also the verticals you target and the broader business and national media.

Email it directly to your marketing database, track who reads it, who opens it, who views your content, and who visits your website. They may contact you, but if not pick up the phone to them. Think how you can turn your content into a talk, and look for opportunities to speak at relevant events. Print it out and leave them at meetings.

Do all of this and social media will have proved the catalyst for positive agency transformation. There are creative agencies that are today doing all of this and reaping the benefits. Is this the time for you to join them?

“The challenge is to create high quality content and to get to grips with the practicalities of social media sharing. Agencies that figure both out are discovering the transformative potential of social media..”





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