

Survey of Personal and Institutional Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media at Colleges and Universities

Despite the hype surrounding Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and dozens of other social media applications, the concept of social media is not new. In its various forms, it has been around about 20 years — nearly as long as the Web itself. From the start, social media has helped create virtual communities and connections by joining individuals with like interests, passions and goals in ways they could not otherwise be connected given the limitations of geography, time and travel. However, what is new is that these online communities and connections are now fast becoming mainstays of human interaction both at play and at work. Consequently, human resources (HR) professionals are asking themselves, “How should my organization be using social media?”

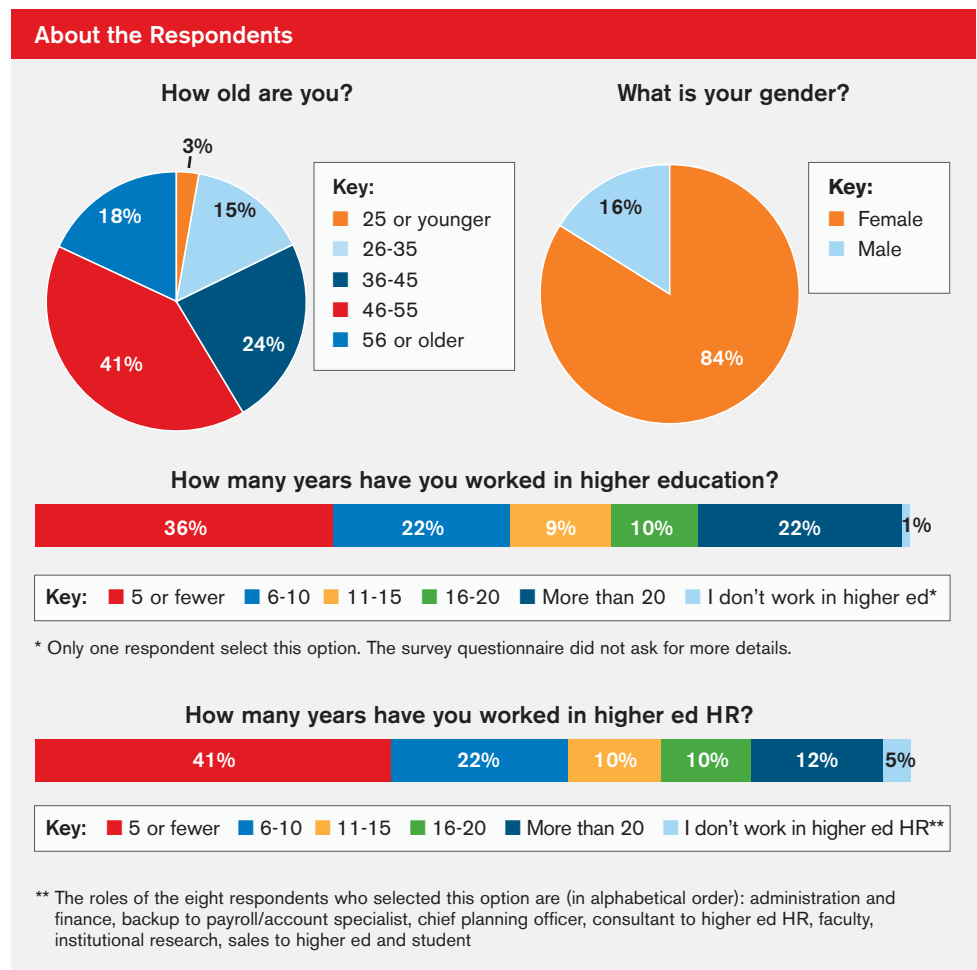
To find out how colleges and universities are using social media to communicate both on and off campus, CUPA-HR and Sibson Consulting invited HR professionals in higher education to take a brief, online survey in 2009. Participants were also asked about their own use of social media. This report summarizes the results of the *Survey of Personal and Institutional Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media at Colleges and Universities*, which are of anecdotal, not statistical, interest.¹

The box below provides self-reported information about the 148 respondents, more than half of whom are age 46 or older. Although, in Sibson’s experience, this demographic is representative of employees in higher education, the survey respondents’ ages should be kept in mind when reviewing the results, because other studies have shown that the adoption of social media applications by adults, age 18 to 44, is much more prevalent than use by adults age 45 and older. While a majority of the survey’s



College and University Professional Association for Human Resources

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¹ The text box on page 2 classifies the social media options discussed in this report and briefly describes them.

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The Twelve Types of Electronic Communication and Social Media Addressed in the Survey of Personal and Institutional Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media at Colleges and Universities

Information Delivery

E-mail

Listservs This is e-mail list software.

Instant messaging This is a form of *real-time*, text-based communication.

Text messaging This form of communication uses mobile phones.

Online Publishing

Wikis Wikis (a Hawaiian word for “fast”), which consist of linked Web pages, are built using wiki software and typically allow users to add content.

RSS Feeds RSS is text noting which content on a Web site is new. Web site users must subscribe to RSS feeds. There is no consensus on what the initials “RSS” stand for, but one common explanation is that it is an abbreviation for “Really Simple Syndication.”

Blogs These Web pages resemble online journals that are updated regularly.

Social Networks

LinkedIn This social networking Web site focuses on professional networking. It was launched in 2003 and has more than 40 million registered users. As of October 2009, LinkedIn had more than 20 million visitors, making it number 49 of the top 50 most visited Web sites, according to comScore’s Media Metrix service.*

Facebook This Web site allows users to create their own personal profiles and manage who can access that information. Users can join various organization-based or geographic networks. They can use Facebook to send messages and/or profile updates to their contacts. In October 2009, Facebook which was launched in 2004, was the fifth most visited Web site, according to comScore’s Media Metrix service.* In November 2009, Facebook had more than 100 million monthly visitors, according to comScore.**

Twitter Use of this blogging service, which limits each entry to 140 characters, is referred to as “microblogging.” Entries on Twitter are referred to as “Tweets.” Tweets can be published and accessed through cell phones and PDAs, as well as through computers. Twitter was launched in 2006. As of November 2009, Twitter had more than 60 million unique visitors, according to comScore.

Image Sharing

Flickr This Web site allows users to share photos. Flickr was launched in 2004.

YouTube This Web site allows users to share videos. YouTube was launched in 2005.

* See http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/11/comScore_Media_Metrix_Ranks_Top_50_U.S._Web_Properties_for_October_2009

** See http://blog.comscore.com/2009/12/facebook_100_million_visitors.html

“A large majority of respondents (76 percent) see social media’s potential for business use.”

respondents are familiar with and have used key social media applications, they do so less frequently than their younger counterparts.

PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A large majority of respondents (76 percent) see social media’s potential for business use. Forty-six percent indicated their institutions have a strategy for using social media, are developing such a strategy, *or* need a social media strategy. One respondent wrote:

“We are developing an intentional strategy in one of our schools, but not as a whole organization. We need to be.”

One-third of respondents believe social media applications have potential for business use, but are not sure how they apply to their institutions. For example, a respondent shares:

“I am seriously considering the use of social media to boost the quality and speed of our communication with people in the department and across the university. The potential is great, but I have not yet quite figured out how to exploit it.”

“One-third of respondents believe social media applications have potential for business use, but are not sure how they apply to their institutions. ”

Graph 1 summarizes respondents' overall perception of social media.

PERSONAL USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The survey asked respondents to categorize how often they use each of 12 forms of electronic communication and social media. An overwhelming majority (87 percent) indicated that they are “constant users” of e-mail. Given the pervasiveness of e-mail with its 24-7 access through personal digital assistants (PDAs), this is not surprising. However, respondents' comments suggest the volume of e-mail messages received may be discouraging their own exploration of other forms of electronic communication and social media:

“I spend most of my day on e-mail so I have little interest in participating in social media with the exception of listservs.”

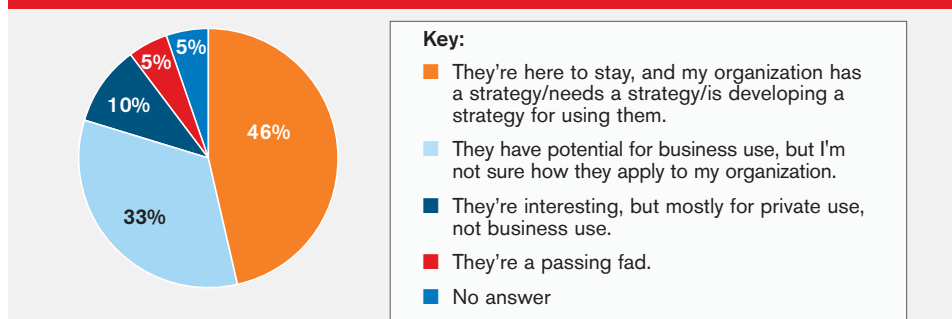
“Personally, I have a hard enough time keeping up with e-mails and consider Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter as spam.”

With this in mind, it is worth noting that “constant users” of the other forms of electronic communication and social media are a very small group, representing 15 percent or fewer of all respondents, as illustrated in Graph 2.

When “constant” and “regular” users are grouped together, the following are the five types of electronic communication and social media used most frequently after e-mail: listservs, Facebook, text messaging, LinkedIn and wikis. Each is used by 20 percent or more of the survey respondents.

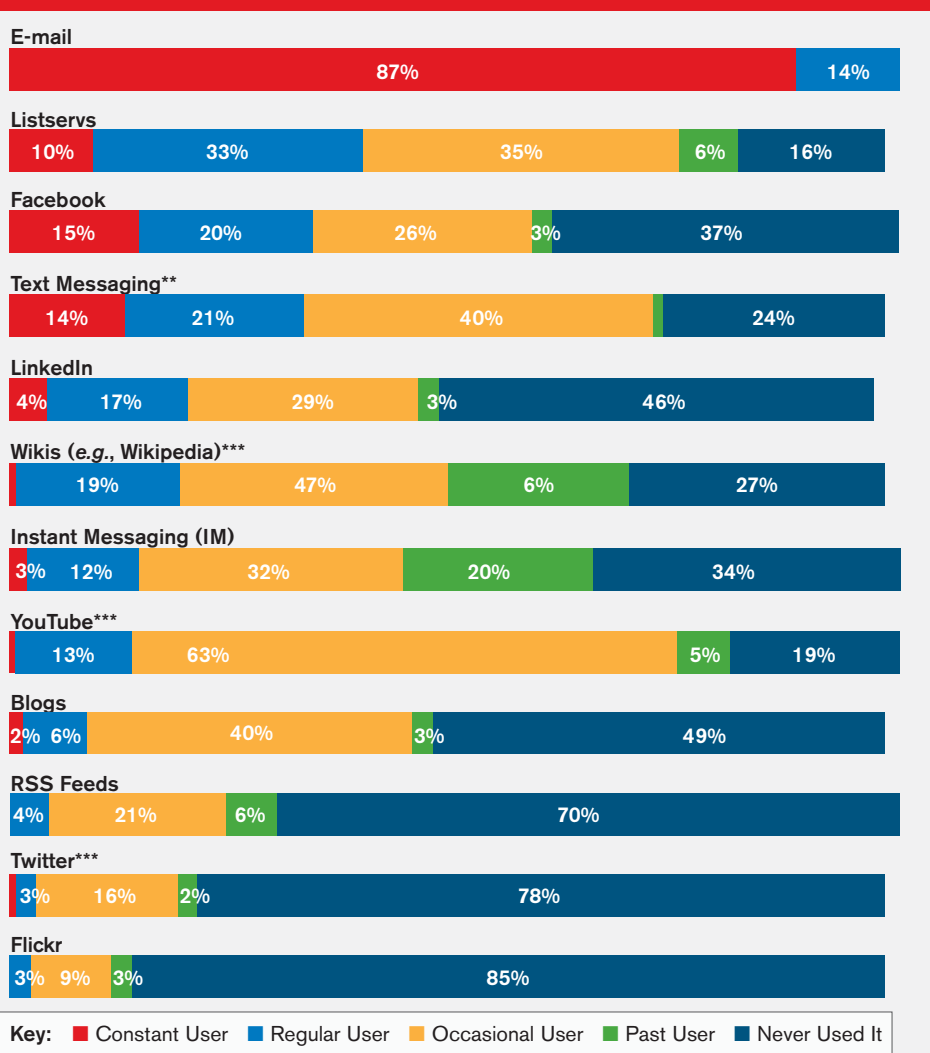
It is also important to consider the “occasional” use of these tools. For example, as shown in Graph 2, more than half of respondents (63 percent) are “occasional users” of YouTube. When respondents' “occasional” use

Graph 1: Which statement best describes your overall perception of social media?*



* Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Graph 2: Which of the following best describes your current usage of the electronic communications listed below?*



* Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

** The green segment of this bar represents 1%.

*** The red segment of this bar represents 1%.

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“A number of respondents commented that they have a lot to learn about social media.”

is combined with those using the applications “regularly” “or “constantly,” it is clear that a majority of respondents are at least aware of and willing to try many of these electronic communication and social media tools.

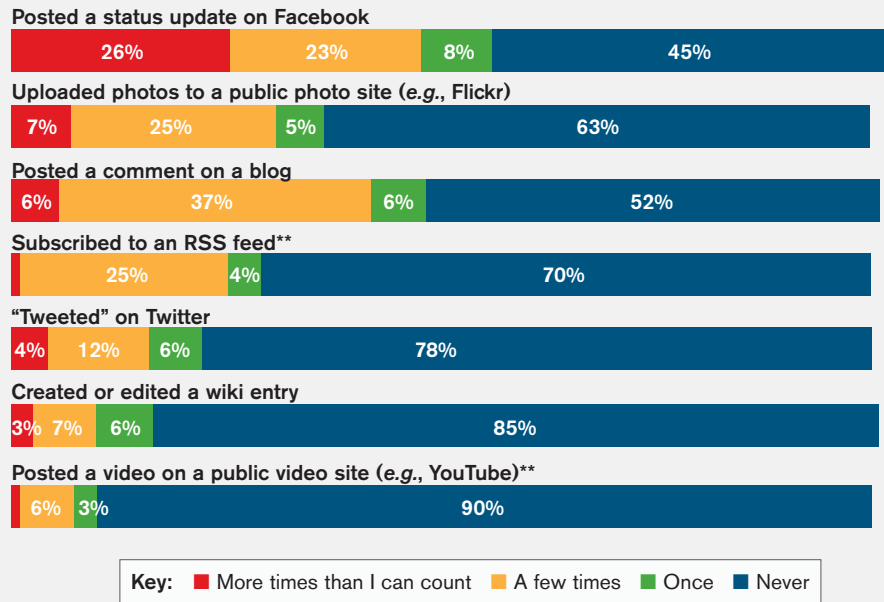
That said, a number of respondents commented that they have a lot to learn about social media. Many do not understand its “usefulness,” have no time to “social network electronically,” and/or “don’t get” social media. Two respondents referred to social media as being “narcissistic.”

Other respondents are working to fill their knowledge gap. One commented:

“I’m in the process now of learning more about social media — albeit reluctantly. It’s not something I like using but I am seeing our younger workforce utilizing these communication methods and, as a professional communicator working in higher education HR, I can’t afford to not learn about strategies and techniques that can help me connect better with a large and growing portion of our workforce.”

When asked about seven specific social networking activities, which are listed in Graph 3, most respondents indicated that they have never engaged in them — with one exception: posting a status update on Facebook, which 49 percent of respondents have done at least a few times. So, while respondents are accessing a range of social networking applications (as illustrated in Graph 2 on page 3), they appear to be passive users of the technology.

Graph 3: How often have you done the following?*



* Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

** The red segment of this bar represents 1%.

“While respondents are accessing a range of social networking applications, ... they appear to be passive users of the technology.”

The survey also asked respondents about whether they use electronic communication and social media for personal use only, business use only, both or not at all. Graph 4 on page 5 summarizes the results. Almost all respondents (99 percent) use e-mail for personal and business use. That is the only type of electronic communication used for both purposes by a majority of respondents. More than half of respondents use the following types of electronic communication and social media for personal use only: Facebook (52 percent), YouTube (52 percent) and text messaging (50 percent). Almost two-thirds of respondents (62 percent) use listservs only for business.

INSTITUTIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The survey asked respondents how often their institutions use each form of social media to (1) communicate with faculty and staff and (2) to communicate people outside of the institution. According to a large majority of respondents, e-mail is used regularly for both purposes. However, most respondents were uncertain about the frequency with which their institutions are using the other forms of electronic communication and social media to communicate on and off campus. Graph 5 on page 6 presents these survey results.

Some respondents noted that their institutions are using social

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networking primarily to connect with students:

“I view the social networks (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) primarily for communication with the students not with staff.”

“Certain departments use quite a few social media tools, especially to target our younger students.”

One respondent identified demonstrating the business reasons for using social media for internal communication as a key challenge:

“Most of the Directors [and] Deans... do not understand or see the value of social networking. In my attempts to develop a strategy to use it, I have heard, ‘it’s just an excuse to screw around at work.’ This institution is really missing the boat on this topic.”

CONCLUSION & COMMENTARY

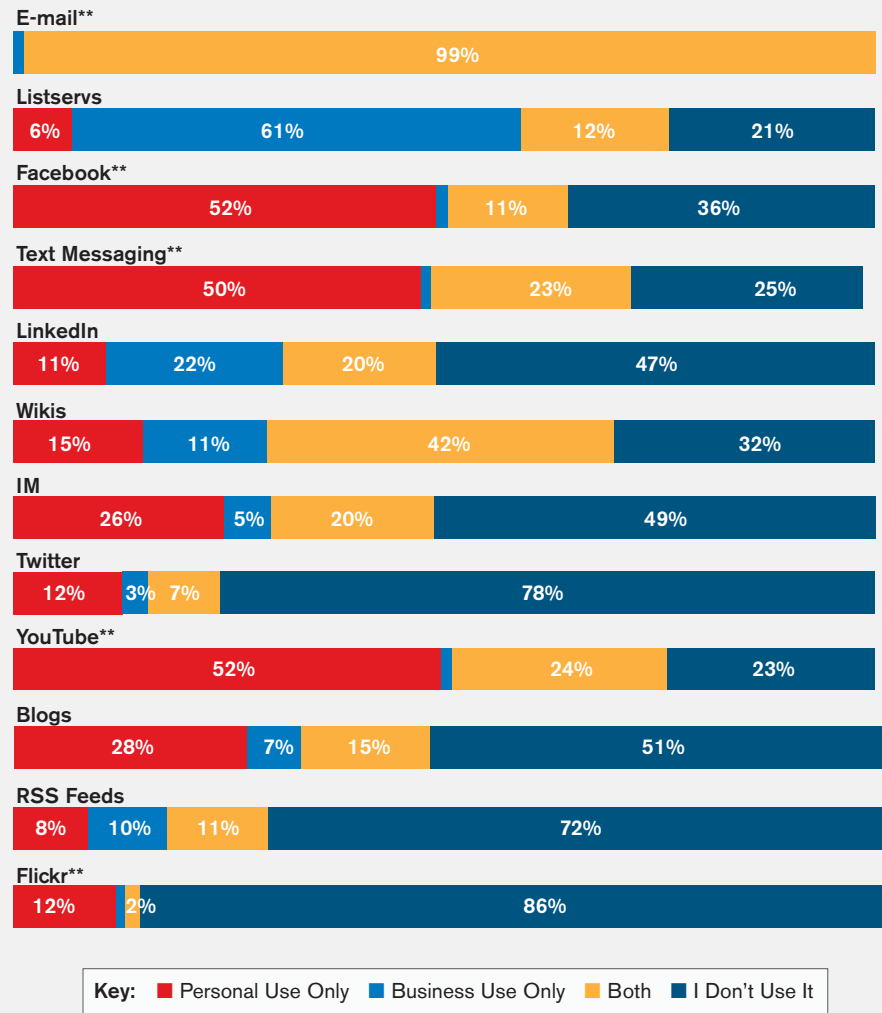
According to an April 2009 news release on the online landscape by The Nielsen Company, there was a 73 percent increase in time spent on social networking sites over the previous 12 months, and use of social networks has exceeded use of Web-based e-mail.² A June 2009 news release from the same organization indicated that the number of total minutes spent on Twitter and Facebook between April 2008 and April 2009 exploded: by 3,712 percent and 699 percent, respectively.³

The results of CUPA-HR and Sibson Consulting’s *Survey of Personal and Institutional Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media at Colleges and Universities* suggest that HR professionals at colleges and universities may be lagging behind

² See http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/pr_090422.pdf

³ See http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/pr_090602.pdf

Graph 4: Do you use each of the following forms of electronic communication for personal use, business use or both?*



* Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

** The blue segment of this bar represents 1%.

these national trends. Research suggests that an increasing majority of their institutions’ workforce is using a range of social media applications. Indeed, there is widespread use of social networking technology and tools across campuses. However, survey respondents indicate the potential use of these tools for communication with their institutions’ employees is in its infancy. Respondents agree they should

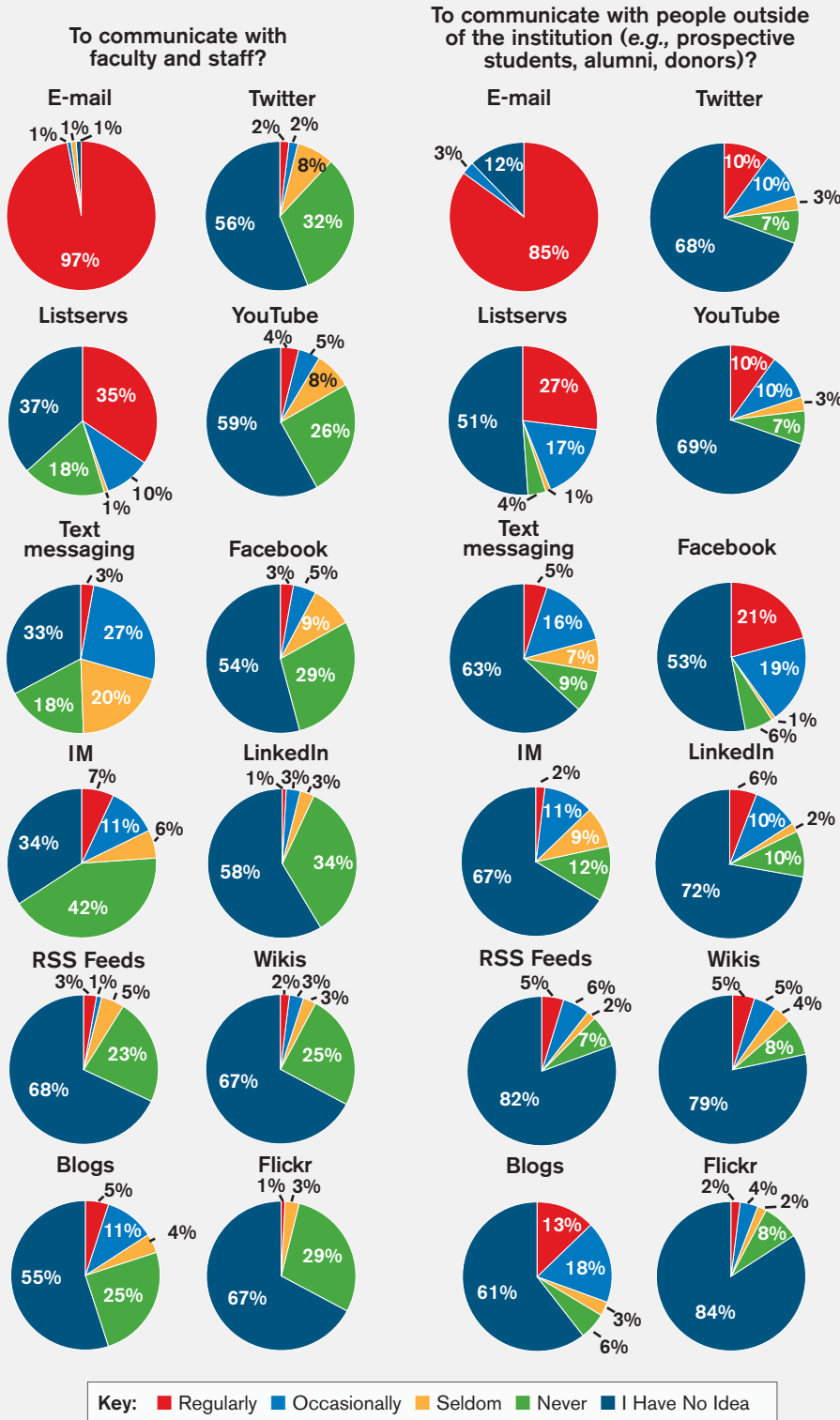
be “doing something” with social media, yet, they have not clearly defined why, or where, or how to start.

One respondent surfaced an important challenge and possible barrier:

“We had an opportunity to utilize a social networking software free of charge and we turned it down because the organization was afraid of the liability that it could create.”

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Graph 5: To the best of your knowledge, how often does your institution use each of the following forms of electronic communication?



In spite of this perception, social media can be a valuable add-on to an institution's communications approach — creating the opportunity for conversation at all levels, building communities of interest and fostering a sense of affiliation with the institution. Yet, as survey respondents' comments indicate, HR professionals will need to consider a range of policy, cultural and technology issues as they think through the business case for using media within their respective institutions.



For more information about the survey or HR applications of social media on campus, contact one of the following Sibson experts:

- **Jennifer Schuster**
707.456.9359
jschuster@sibson.com
- **Kelly Jones**
216.687.4434
kjones@sibson.com

SIBSON CONSULTING
A DIVISION OF SEGAL

Atlanta	678.306.3100
Boston	617.424.7300
Calgary	403.692.2264
Chicago	312.984.8500
Cleveland	216.687.4400
Denver	303.714.9900
Hartford	860.678.3000
Houston	713.664.4654
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Princeton	609.520.2700
Raleigh	919.233.1220
San Francisco	415.263.8200
Toronto	416.969.3960
Washington	202.833.6400

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