FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT OR FLASH-IN-THE-PAN?

The Use of Social Networking Sites in Recruitment

EXECUTIVES ONLINE

"There is no constant but change, as the saying goes, so much of this will continue to evolve as social networking sites find their role amidst more traditional recruitment methods"

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Introduction

"...we undertook a survey ... to gauge the impact that social networking sites were having on the practice of recruitment."

Executives Online offers a unique, fast-track approach to executive resourcing and has been a pioneer in the recruitment field, driving and capitalising on key trends and tracking new developments as technology and the Internet begin to play an increasing role in job search and recruitment.

It was thus with great interest that we undertook a survey among both candidates and clients to gauge the impact that social networking sites were having on the practice of recruitment. We wanted to understand how candidates were using social networking sites to market themselves, and whether businesses were making use of social networking sites to find or research potential employees.

There is no constant but change, as the saying goes, so much of this will continue to evolve as social networking sites find their role amidst more traditional recruitment methods. In the meantime, it is fascinating to watch the process unfold.

Anne Beitel
Managing Director
Executives Online

Research Objectives and Methodology

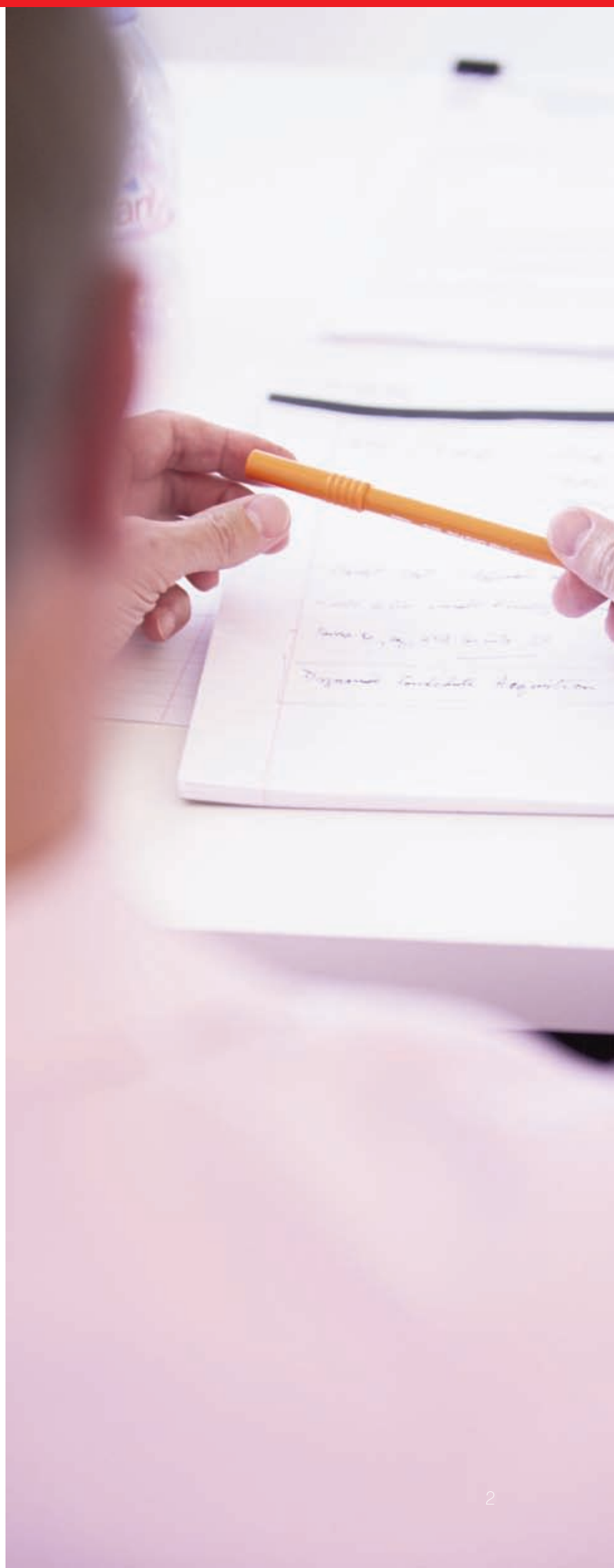
OBJECTIVES

Our goal was to understand how both individuals and companies were currently using social networking sites in their job search and/or recruiting efforts, and specifically which sites they were finding the most useful. Research questions included:

- Which of the following social networking sites do you use? (LinkedIn, Facebook, Xing, Bebo, Twitter)
- Please rate these sites in terms of their usefulness in your professional life/job search.
- Have you ever searched for a job via a social networking site?
- Have you ever actually found a job via a social networking site?
- Have you ever tried to recruit via a social networking site?
- Have you ever actually hired someone you recruited via a social networking site?
- How would you describe your view of the importance of social networking sites and technologies?

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND TIMINGS

Our survey was conducted online in September 2009 among 1,264 senior executives in the UK, who are either registered with us as candidates for interim or permanent roles, or who have used or enquired about our services.

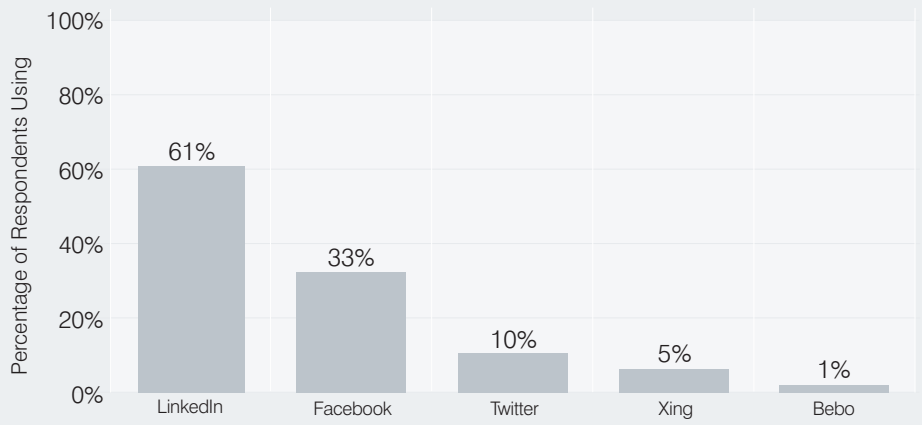


Current Usage of Social Networking Sites

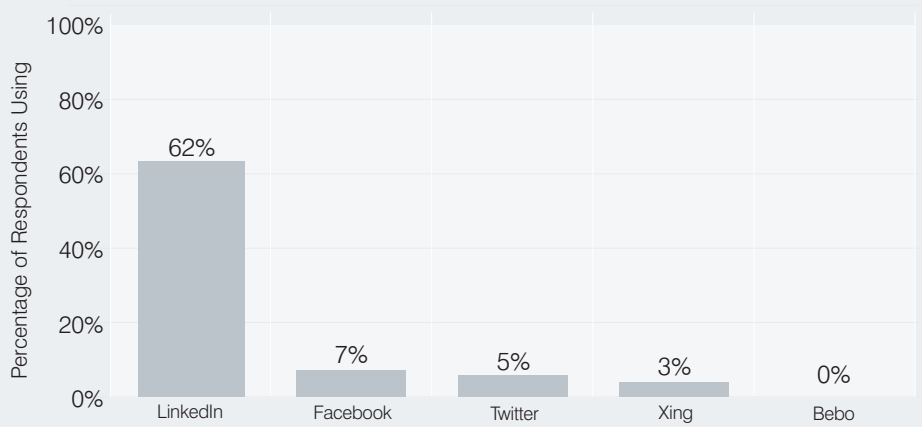
The most popular social networking site among our survey respondents was LinkedIn, cited by over 60% of those who responded. Facebook was the second most popular choice, with a third indicating that they used the site. Twitter followed with 10%, and Xing with 5%.

When we specified "in your professional life", usage remained similar for LinkedIn, but declined for the smaller, less business-oriented sites. Some respondents found the use of social networking sites to be a phenomenon more relevant in the personal realm than in the professional realm. As one respondent commented, "It's mixing social and professional lives, typically areas kept separate for most people."

Which of the following social networking sites do you use?



Which of the following social networking sites do you use IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL LIFE?



Usefulness Ratings of Social Networking Sites

When respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the various social networking sites, LinkedIn once again garnered the highest ratings for "usefulness." For sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Xing, even active users were far more likely to rate those sites as "useless."

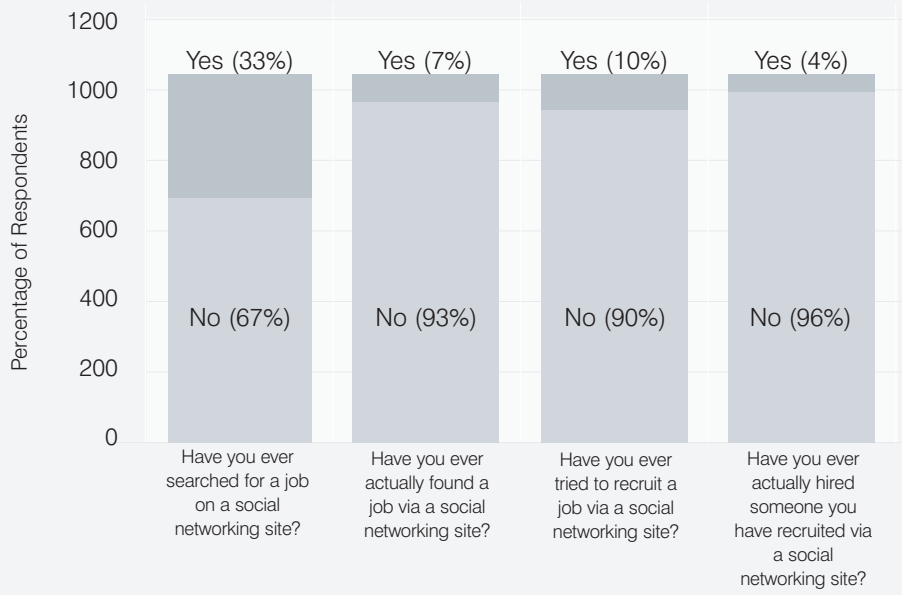
Please rate the following sites in terms of their usefulness in your professional life/job search:

"The most popular social networking site among our survey respondents was LinkedIn"

"Fully a third of respondents indicated that they had searched for a job using social networking sites"

More detailed survey questions sought to assess how useful the social networking sites were to the recruitment process itself. Fully a third of respondents indicated that they had searched for a job using social networking sites, but only 7% had ever found a job through such sites. From an employer perspective, 10% of respondents had tried using social networking sites to recruit someone for a job or position, and 4% had actually hired a candidate they'd found that way.

Usage and Success of Social Networking Sites in Job Searching and Hiring



Outlook on the Value of Social Networking Sites in Recruitment

Interestingly, despite the relatively low usage and success rates of social networking sites in the recruitment process to date, survey respondents were positive overall about their eventual role, with fully half believing "they will grow in importance and will someday be how everyone hires and finds work." Some saw the use of social networking sites as a way that companies could save on recruitment costs, but even more saw the benefit of social networking sites as creating more open access to information for everyone.

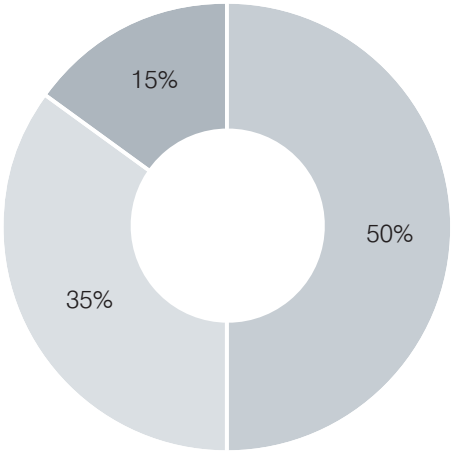
> *Communities of interest which span across companies, skill areas, and social groups will become stronger providing recruiters with networks of talent, and providing job hunters more candid, open and revealing information about employers' working conditions and management styles.*

> *The market is imperfect, so anything that rounds the square will help.*

> *The evidence is now overwhelming that recruiters refer to LinkedIn especially as a research and screening tool. Both LinkedIn and Xing are excellent for sales leads for interims and I am currently pursuing possible assignments as a result of using both sites.*

One caveat that found some consensus is at which "levels" the value of social networking sites will be most critical. Over a third saw social networking sites as "fine for more junior jobseekers and roles but not for executive recruitment."

What best describes your view of the importance of social networking sites and technologies?



- They will grow in importance and will someday be how everyone hires and finds work – 50%
- Fine for more junior jobseekers and roles but not for executive recruitment – 35%
- They're the lastest "flash in the pan," hot today but will be forgotten tomorrow – 15%

Despite the majority positive outlook, some respondents had a very negative view of social networking sites in the recruitment realm, fearing potential dishonesty and unsavoury business practices among both candidates and recruiters.

> *They are becoming trawling ground for shady recruiters. Had a number of bizarre communications on LinkedIn lately, and have blocked the view of my contacts and am not accepting any mail from people I don't know. Sad, but that's how it is.*

> *Social networking sites are potentially dangerous because they allow anyone from criminals to the security services to learn an enormous amount about us to the point where as individuals we will have no privacy and where many people will lose the art and skill of conversation and relationship building.*

> *Credibility is doubtful; I have seen recommendations being engineered.*

The "time consumption" factor was another fear:

> *[Social networking sites] can absorb colossal amounts of time and their effectiveness is questionable.*

Because social networking sites were a "newish phenomenon," many felt that "the jury was still out" on how really effective they were in recruitment.

> *Have only recently started to use social networking sites in my professional life and the early results have been positive. I have seen an increase in traffic to our website via referrals from the two networks subscribed to but, as yet, have not actively promoted my businesses beyond a simple presence so it is hard to judge how useful they will really be in winning contracts.*

Ultimately, though, while a majority of respondents concurred that social networking sites would have some role in recruitment,

many noted that they would never fully replace more traditional recruitment methods, or become the "exclusive channel." As one respondent wrote, social networking sites will become part of "a toolbox of methods of hiring or researching business opportunities."

> *Social networking sites have their place . . . they should be considered part of a balanced approach to job hunting, just another advertising medium.*

> *I think they will be useful to keep an online CV, profile and networking contacts. I don't think they will replace agencies completely. Everyone talks a lot on these sites but not sure how much is accurate and how much they deliver. I see my LinkedIn page as advertising space for my professional career.*

> *I don't think they'll ever replace the need to meet people. Culture, fit and values can't be assessed from a site.*

Respondents were quick to point out that the value of social networking sites was much like many things in life: "what you get out of them reflects the effort you put in." Noting the parallels between one's "real" social/professional network in the world and the one "online," one respondent pointed out that the same considerations would apply:

> *To work successfully online networks need to work in the same way as a traditional network: you include in your network people you genuinely know and trust and you are happy to recommend to others.*

Finally, it's important to note that most respondents considered LinkedIn to have far greater value in the recruitment realm than any of the other social networking sites. One respondent commented rather pointedly on the topic: "some like Twitter and Bebo are flash in the pans, but LinkedIn will become increasingly useful and survive."

About Executives Online

We offer a unique, full-service process with is a balanced blend of technology and personal service.

Executives Online delivers fast-track executive resourcing – interim management, project management, and permanent recruitment – leveraging our 100,000-strong Talent Bank of senior executives. We source talent globally, via the Talent Bank which is built and drawn upon by each of our growing network of offices around the world.

We offer a unique, full-service process which is a balanced blend of technology and personal service. Our approach attracts both the best candidates and the most challenging opportunities, and enables us to rapidly and effectively match then together in successful placements.

"Social networking sites have their place... they should be considered part of a balanced approach to job hunting"

“Communities of interest which span across companies, skill areas, and social groups will become stronger providing recruiters with networks of talent”

EXECUTIVES ONLINE

South of England
Staple House, 3rd Floor
Staple Gardens, Winchester
Hampshire, SO23 8SR
T: +44 (0) 1962 893 300

London
Capital Tower, 91 Waterloo Road
London, SE1 8RT
T: +44 (0) 845 053 1188

North of England
2 Victoria Street, Wetherby
West Yorkshire, LS22 6RE
T: +44 (0) 1937 581900

North East of England
Rotterdam House
Quayside
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 3DY
T: +44 (0) 191 2064113

North West of England
82 King Street
Manchester, M2 4WQ
T: +44 (0) 161 935 8246

Scotland
Dalgety Bay Business Centre
Ridgeway, Dalgety Bay, KY11 9JN
T: +44 (0) 1383 828920

Midlands
West Walk Building
110 Regent Road
Leicester, LE1 7LT
T: +44 (0) 845 328 2370

South West and Wales
1 Friary, Temple Quay
Bristol, BS1 6EA
T: +44 (0) 117 344 5128

Ireland
1st Floor, 43 Main Street
Rathfarnham, Dublin, D14
T: +353 (1) 492 5000

Belgium
Gentsesteenweg 1050, bus 12
1082 Brussels
T: +32 (0) 475 580 333

France
17 rue du Maréchal Lyautey
95620 Parmain
T: +33 (0)1 34 73 10 72

Germany
Dillenburger Strasse
51105 Cologne
T: +49 (0) 221-460 234 17

Italy
Via Senigallia 18/2 Torre A
20161 Milan
T: +39 (0) 2 6467 2632

The Netherlands
Atrium gebouw
Strawinskylaan 3051
1077 ZX Amsterdam
T: +31 (0)20 3012159

Australia
Level 4 / 90 Mount Street
North Sydney 2060
T: +61 (02) 9460 3824

South Africa
West Block, Dunkeld Crescent
Corner Jan Smuts and Albury Rd
Dunkeld West 2196
T: +27 (0)11 2432801