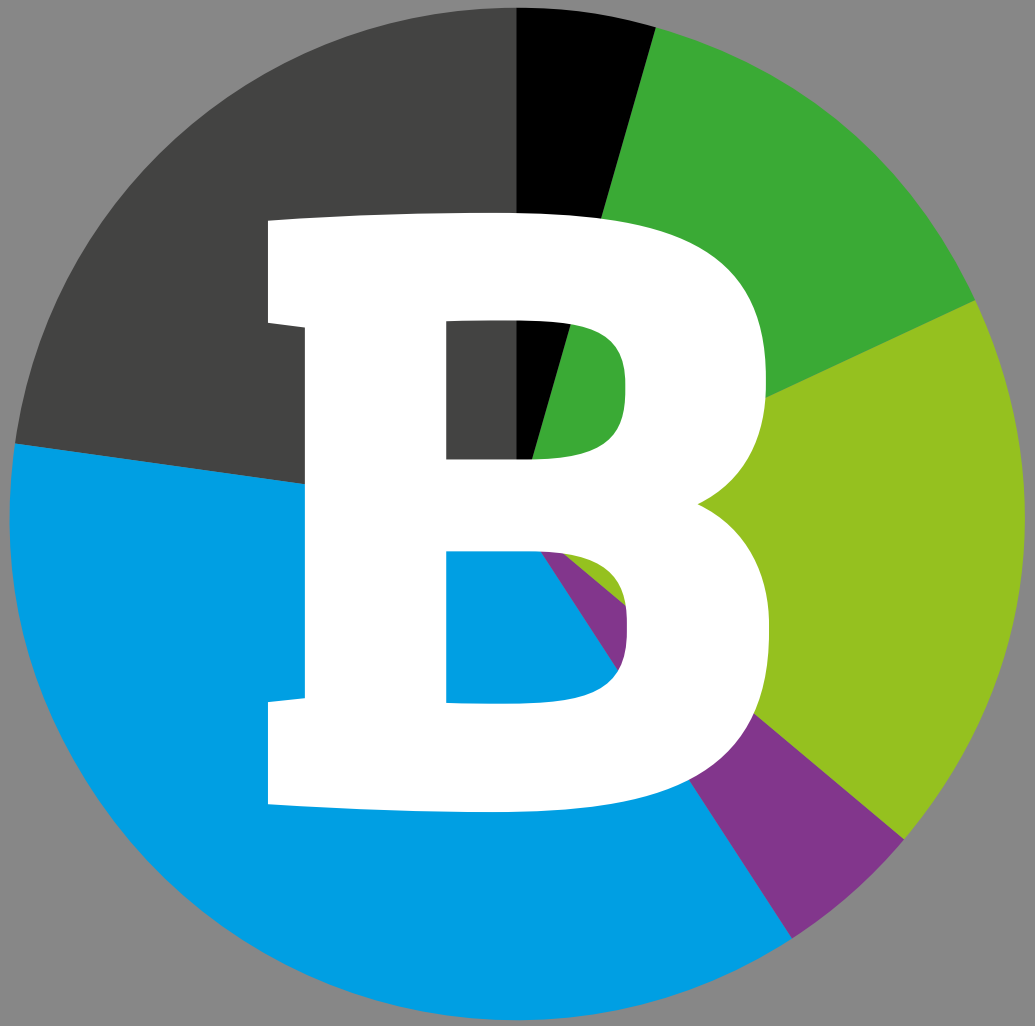


BUYERSPHERE

SOCIAL MEDIA: ARE B2B BUYERS REALLY USING IT?

A Buyersphere mini-report by Base One and B2B Marketing

Produced in association with McCallum Layton and Research Now

August 2013



Social Media: Are B2B Buyers Really Using It?

The first two sections of the Buyersphere Report have shown that B2B buyers are hungry for information. The more they know, the better purchase decisions they will make.

But one question that marketers have struggled to find a definitive answer to is whether to invest in social media - and if so, in what way.

This section of the Buyersphere asked for the attitudes of buyers towards social media in terms of:

- Which social media channels were most often used
- Which social media channels were found most useful
- How their use of social media in general compares to their use of it for this specific buying process.

Marketers will be able to use the findings to help form an opinion on whether social media really is a key part of the marketing mix - and what level of investment it justifies.

Survey Highlights

The importance of the B2B niche

B2B buyers are not generalists.
To find valuable information,
they ***prefer*** to use industry specific forums and sites.
This was both the most popular social media destination and the most useful -

1 in 5 B2B buyers said they used industry-specific forums ***during the buying process***.

Google Double Plus?

Of the more general social networks, ***Google+*** **is clearly performing well in B2B circles,** where it is used slightly more than the commercially more widespread ***Facebook***, and **twice as much** as ***Twitter***.

Twitter ye not

Only 5% of B2B buyers used Twitter during the buying process,

although the information gained via Twitter was seen as more useful than that found on LinkedIn.

Twitter users are, however, enthusiastic. Of those who used it,

15% rated it 10 out of 10 for 'influence'

– compared to just 8% for the generally more popular industry-specific forums.

B2B buyers: social media curmudgeons?

The findings revealed an ***interesting polarisation***.

Half of B2B buyers are distributed normally in terms of their use of social media: ***some more, some less enthusiastic about its value.***

47% of buyers,

however, declared themselves staunchly opposed to it.

When invited to offer advice to a colleague considering using social media to support the buying process, ***a third said "don't do it".***

The importance of general research

There appears to be a clear difference between using social media for a **specific purchase** and **general awareness** of industry issues. While

47%

of B2B buyers said social media was not at all useful in connection with this particular purchase, ***this figure falls to***

19%

when referring to general usage. Clearly, **general brand awareness** CAN be achieved through social media content…

Pinterest, spinterest...

It may be effective for consumer marketing campaigns, but ***Pinterest barely registers amongst B2B buyers.*** Only ***2%*** of B2B buyers used it to support their information search. But of those, ***22%*** rated it ***9 or 10 out of 10 for usefulness.*** Clearly a small but loyal following.

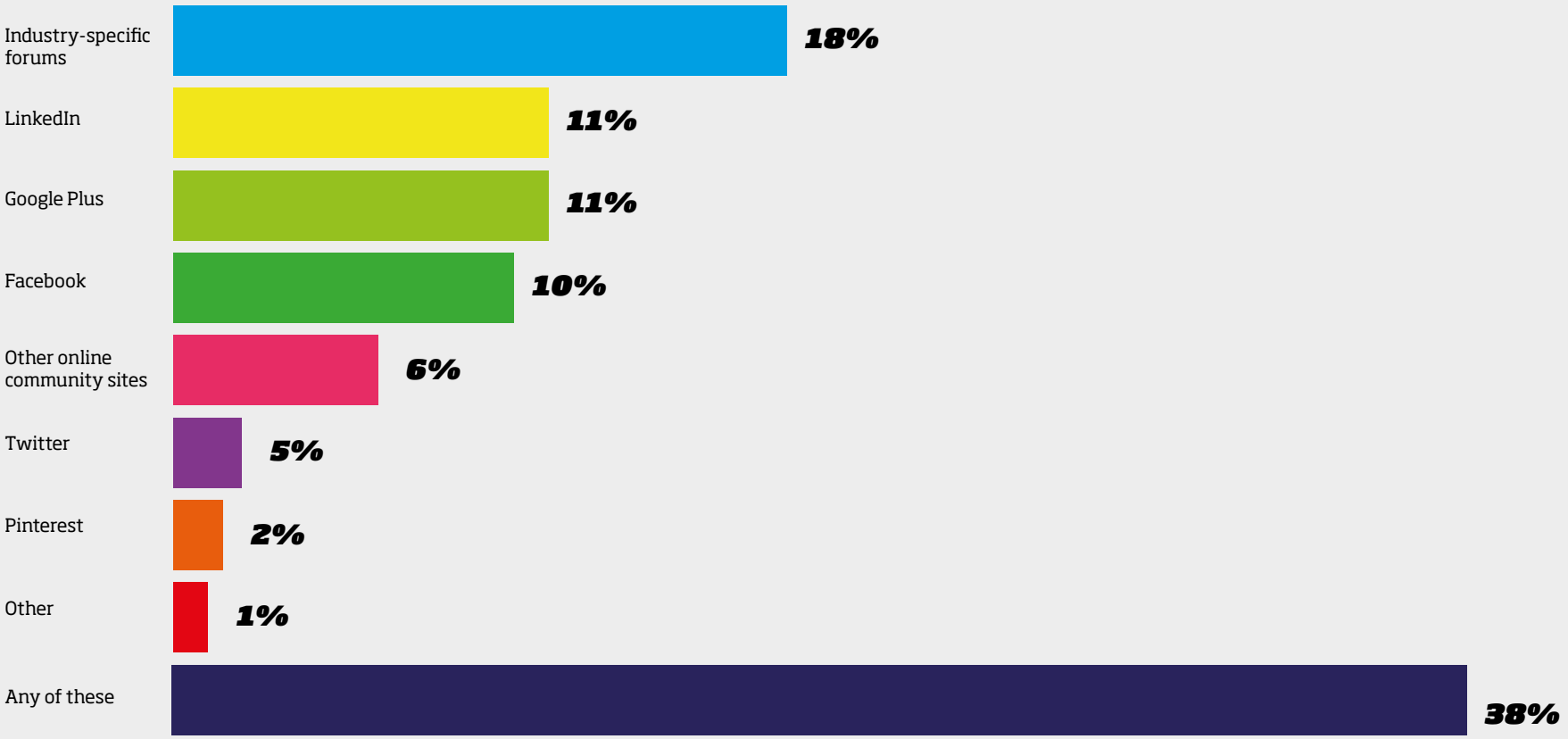
Full Survey Details

Social media usage

Channels used

Around two fifths of all respondents had used any of the following channels to help them find information or advice about their purchase:

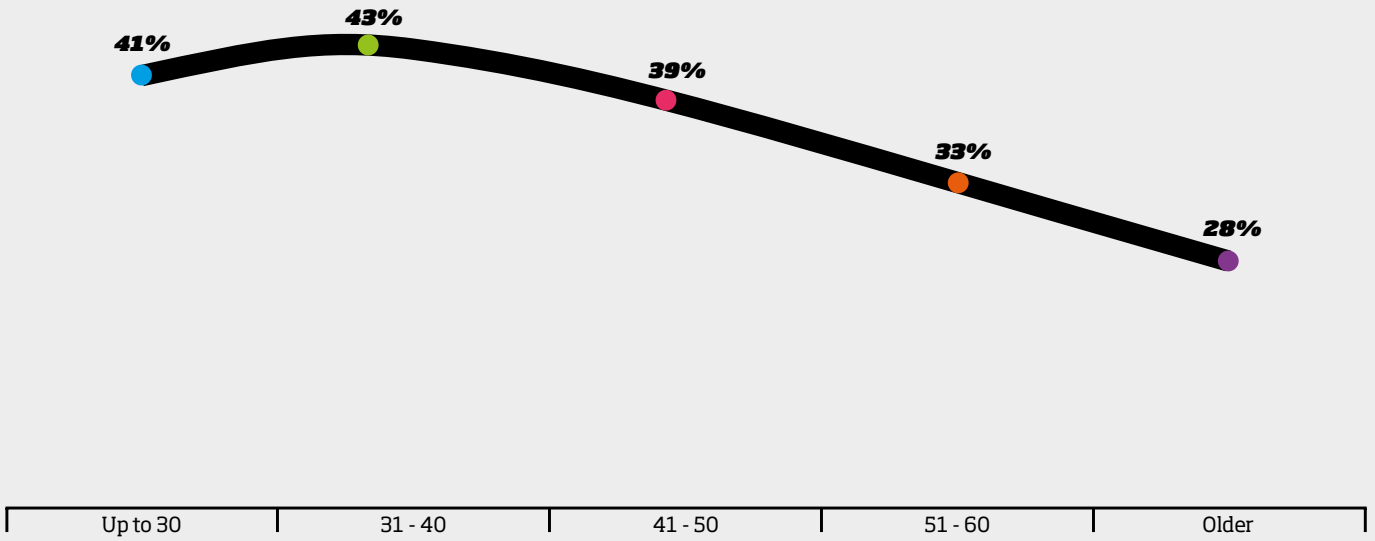
Social media channels used



Base: all respondents (516)

Likelihood of having used any of these decreased with age:

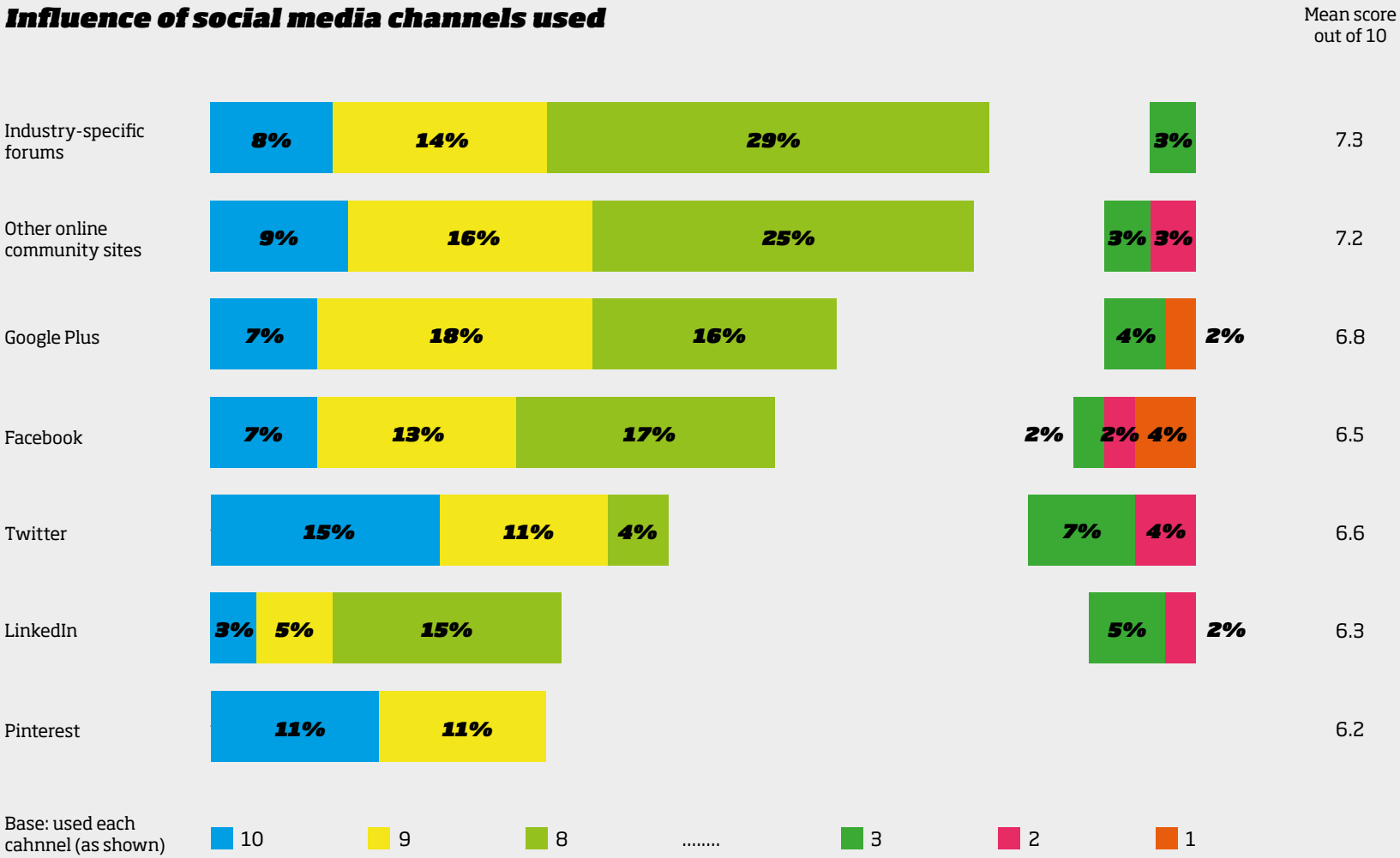
Used any social media channels, by age



Base: all respondents (516)

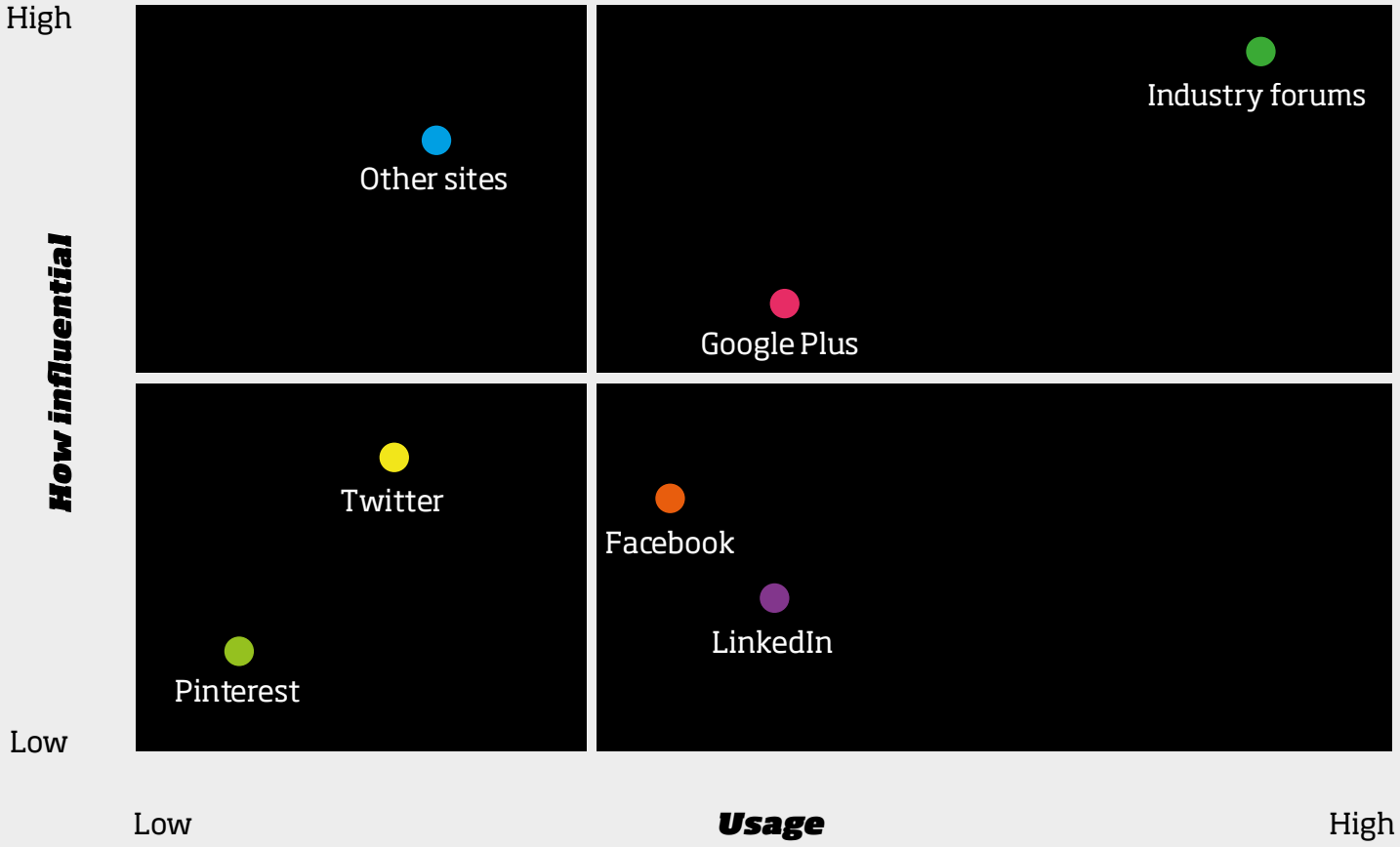
Among users of each channel, ratings were as follows according to how influential each had been in helping them find information:

Influence of social media channels used



Industry-specific forums stand out from the rest in terms of both usage and influence:

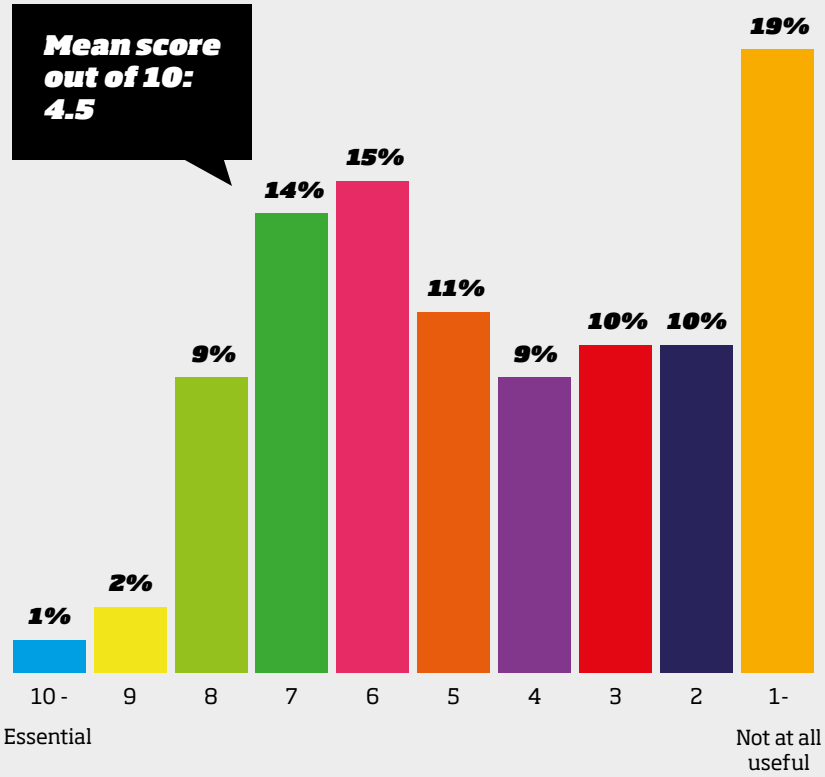
Social media channels - usage against influence



Usefulness of social media

Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 10-1 how useful they would say social media is to them, as professionals.

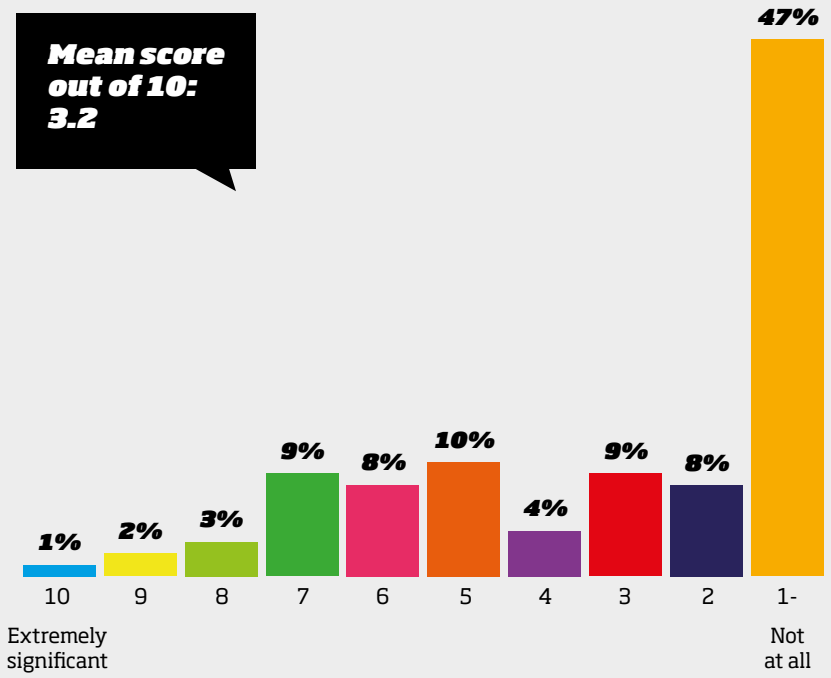
Usefulness of social media in general



Base: all respondents (516)

They were also asked how much influence they would say social media had had on their buying process and decision, in this particular case:

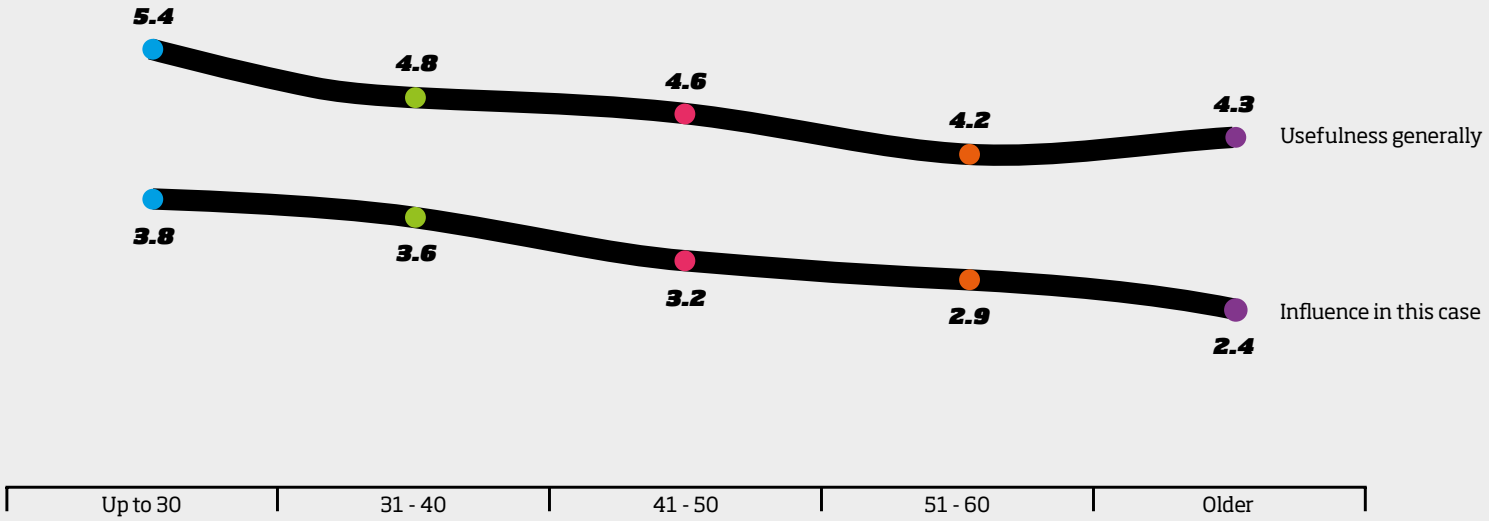
Influence of social media in this case



Base: all respondents (516)

Ratings on both measures decreased by age:

Usefulness and influence of social media, by age



Base: all respondents (516)

Using social media for maximum benefit

All respondents were asked how they would suggest using social media for maximum benefit, if they were advising a colleague who was going through a similar buying process to the one they had themselves recently completed. 24% had no comments to make here. Of the rest, a third said that their advice would be 'don't do it'.

Where suggestions were made to make best use of this medium, these often described using social media as part of an information mix, using it to pose questions then follow up the answers to check their validity and start conversations directly with people who help with more specific feedback.

The Buyersphere Report 2013

Now in its 4th year, the Buyersphere Report has become established as one of the most eagerly awaited and enlightening annual research projects in the B2B space. The reason is simple. It doesn't tell you what marketers think: it tells you what buyers do.

Since 2010, we have been aiming to find the motivations behind supplier choices and the behaviours that characterise the B2B buying process. We all know it can be a long and complex process affair: even smaller B2B purchases are subject to procedures and considerations that are alien to the world of consumer marketing. B2B buyers need more; whether it involves procuring consultancy services, telecoms contracts or manufacturing equipment, they demand higher levels of information, reassurance, social proof and support from their suppliers. But this is to be expected: each buyer featured in this report is accountable to many others and needs to justify purchase decisions to superiors, shareholders and fellow staff. It is not their money, after all.

This is why the Buyersphere Report you are holding in your hand (or viewing on your device) is unique. We asked direct questions of 500 seasoned B2B buyers in the UK, France and Germany and got some fascinating answers, all detailing what they actually did in preparing for a recent large business purchase (qualified as over £20,000). Why did they start the process? What information did they seek? From whom? And in what format? Did they use social media? And - revealingly - what were the marketing traits of the successful suppliers that made them ultimately preferable to the also-rans? To answer these questions, the Buyersphere research is divided into four sections, to be published in stages, and then consolidated into a final report:

1. 

The Touchpaper Question: How (and Why) B2B Buyers Start The Buying Process

2. 

Filling The Knowledge Gap: How B2B Buyers Seek Information To Make A Purchase

3. 

Social Media: Are B2B Buyers Really Using It?

4. 

The Winning Habits of Successful B2B Brands

The Buyersphere is not only essential reading for B2B marketers, it is a unique and fascinating journey into the minds of the people who hold the budgets. Whether it challenges your thinking, opens your eyes to new possibilities for customer engagement, or simply confirms what you thought (and gives you valuable ammunition for your budget planning), we hope you find it useful.

For more information or to get in contact please email Ann-Maria Guard at am@baseone.co.uk

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