

■ THE
■ COGNITIVE
■ HIGHER
■ EDUCATION
■ SURVEY

**Use of Web-based Technology to Support Communications
and Marketing at Educational Institutions**

Report of Findings of a Survey
Conducted in Preparation for the
CASE Communications, Marketing &
Technology Workshop

Survey Conducted in March 2009
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Summary of Findings

In preparation for the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) Communications, Marketing & Technology Workshop, Cognitive Marketing developed a survey to gauge the level at which Internet-based technologies are incorporated into the marketing practices of educational institutions. The range of technologies, from basic websites through to fully integrated social networking programs, was explored.

Overall, findings indicate that the utilization of websites and social media tools to build brand presence is high, although most respondents expressed frustration at limitations in resources and the de-centralized nature of the approach at their institution.

A full 88% of respondents felt their institution was committed to maintaining a dynamic on-line presence, and 69% of those reported that they were measuring the effectiveness of their website. Their comments indicated that the level of commitment varied widely.

Social networking sites are embraced and maintained by 64% of respondents, yet only 26% are measuring the effectiveness of that effort.

The development process from maintaining a basic web site (Level 1) through to a coordinated strategic online presence deployed across multiple Internet channels (Level 5) is challenging for many. One-third of respondents are at Level 1 and only a small percentage (7%) are at Level 5. The majority of all respondents are actively increasing their engagement and recognize that prospective students in particular will look to these sources first for information about the institution.

Although the terms “institutional identity” or “brand management” did not show up at all in the titles provided by the respondents, 91% of them described their work as affecting the brand-building and institutional identity efforts at their institution.

Survey Methodology

The information presented in this report was gathered from March 30th through April 6th, 2009 via an online survey. Invitations to participate were emailed to registrants for the CASE conference and were posted on Cognitive Marketing’s Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn pages, and on various higher education list serves and blogs. During this timeframe, 137 higher education professionals participated in the survey to evaluate their institutions’ current online and social networking presence.

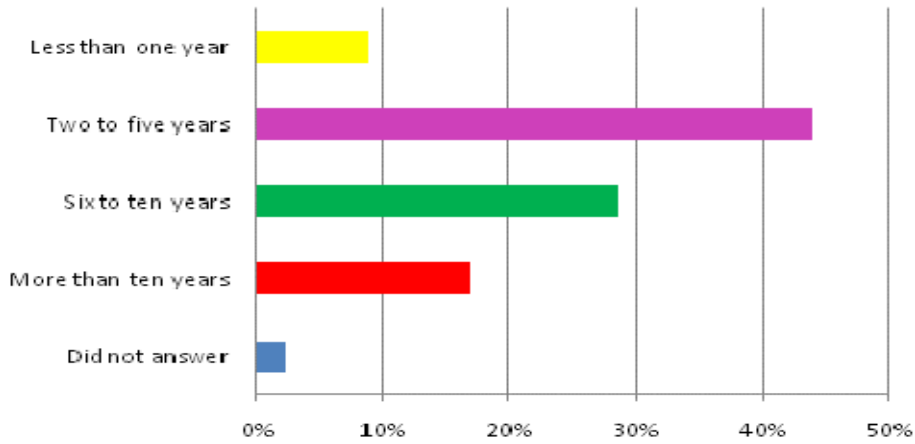
Demographics

Job Title

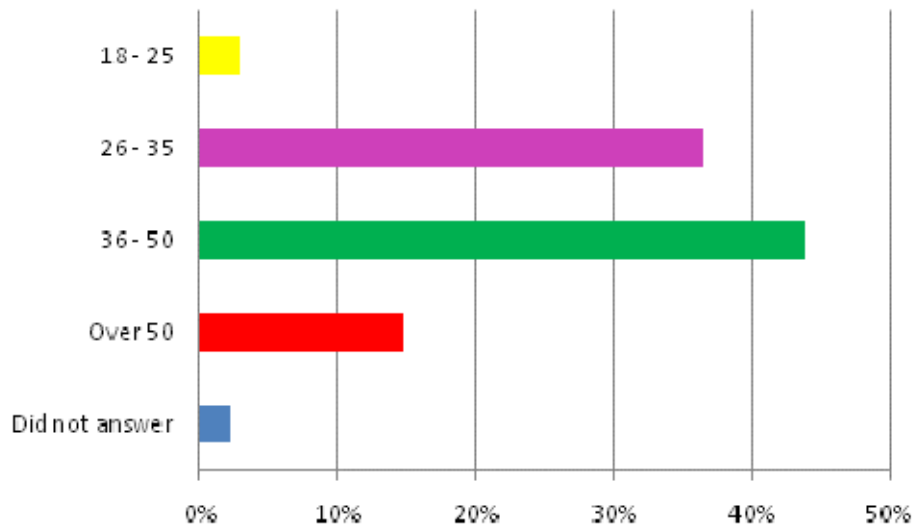
The word cloud below was developed using the job titles provided by the respondents. The size of each word corresponds to the number of times it appeared in the entries. Note that job titles provide information about functional area and level only. This is to be expected, however, we found it curious that no title supported institutional brand or identity despite the fact that 91% of respondents felt their work directly supported brand building. This tracks with comments having to do with frustration over a lack of strategic coordination regarding marketing.



Tenure at current institution

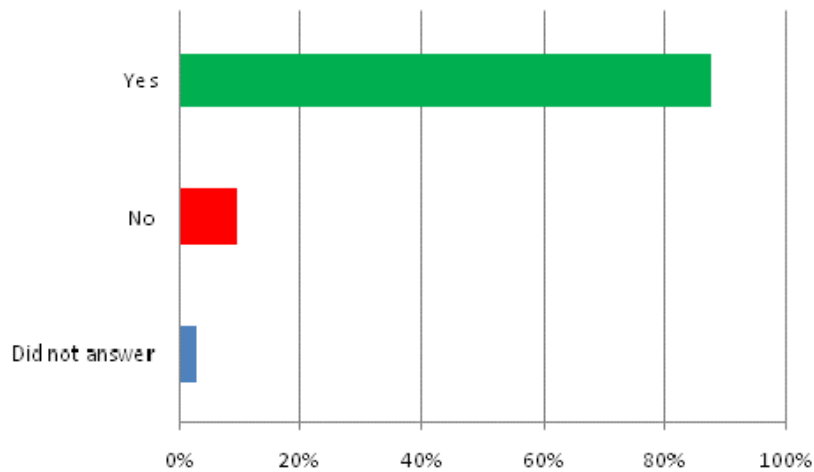


Age of respondents



Survey Findings

Is your institution committed to maintaining a dynamic online presence?



Of those respondents who commented, 83% felt their institution recognized the importance of an engaging online presence. Most were in the early stages of their efforts as indicated by this remark,

"I would say that we are exploring ways to maintain a dynamic online presence but are only starting to get our feet wet."

Although many have the necessary buy-in from their institution, their efforts are hampered by limited resources (both budgetary and staffing.)

"The will is certainly there by those who are directly involved, but the resources to achieve this dynamic presence are not..."

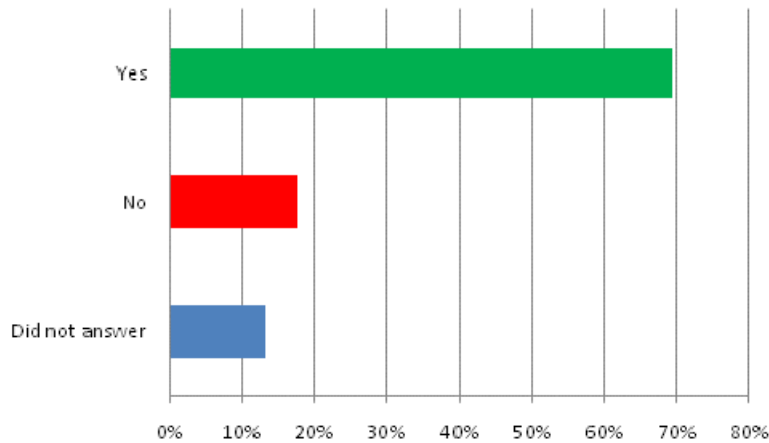
and

"We have been under-funded and short-staffed a very long time; have no actual marketing staff, and no strong institutional branding. ..."

A small percentage (16%) felt the commitment to a dynamic online presence was not or was not yet a priority for their institution.

"Campus doesn't see the value of using such tool, [a] limited number of people [are] willing to learn to use new tools, old mind-set here."

Do you measure the effectiveness of your website?



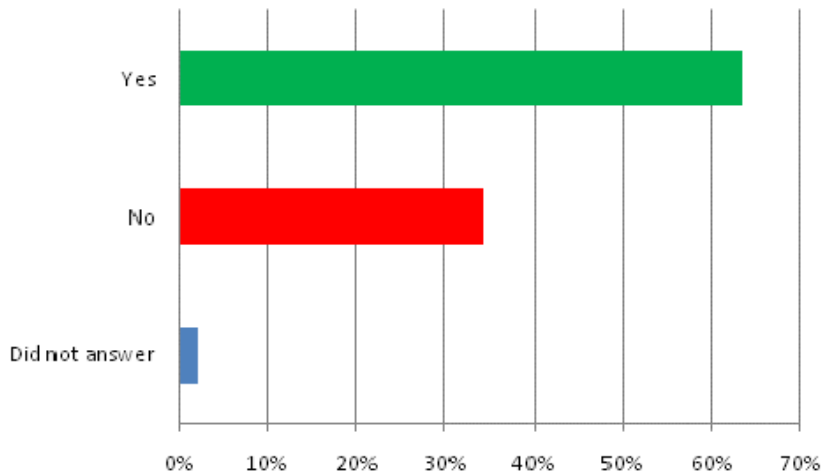
Of those who commented, 41% use Google Analytics or related tools to measure the traffic and hits to their websites.

“We use Google analytics to measure number of hits, unique page views, amount of time spent per page, etc.”

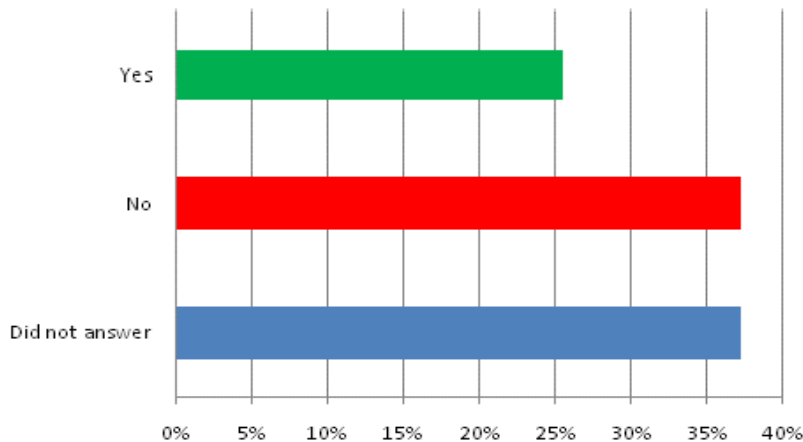
Another 40% commented they were still in the early stages of developing a system to track usage data and metrics. They recognized the importance of collecting this data, but found the consistent availability of resources to be a challenge. About one-third of the comments indicated that they were actively monitoring traffic patterns, monitoring website usage statistics, gathering qualitative input based on user trends, soliciting professional feedback and conducting web audits.

*“We do not monitor viewership trends, although we should.
We do regularly monitor websites of similar faculties
of other universities for content, organization, etc.
When implementing wide-spread changes, or reviewing navigation, etc.
of our websites there is wide consultation
with all stakeholders in a structured way...”*

Does your institution actively plan and maintain social networking sites?



Do you measure the effectiveness of your presence on social networking sites?



Approximately 86% of those who commented said they are currently measuring analytics of their social networking site, including the number of friends/followers; number of visitors; participation and activity of specific sites; responses to surveys, conduct of focus groups, and the viewership numbers on YouTube and similar sites. In addition, they track the amount of interactivity triggered by the call-to-action.

“Use the metrics provided by the social networking sites, create specific landing pages for users to go to from the social networking sites, have specific contests users can enter from the social networking sites.”

In addition, analytics gathered on various social networking sites are also consulted to track activity and referral sites.

“YouTube, Facebook, and some other sites have “insight” areas that provide analytics. We also create referral pages from our own domain so we can both create an easy URL (for example, iue.edu/Facebook) and also track metrics on how much traffic they get.”

The remaining 14% do not have a formal process for tracking activity as indicated by comments like:

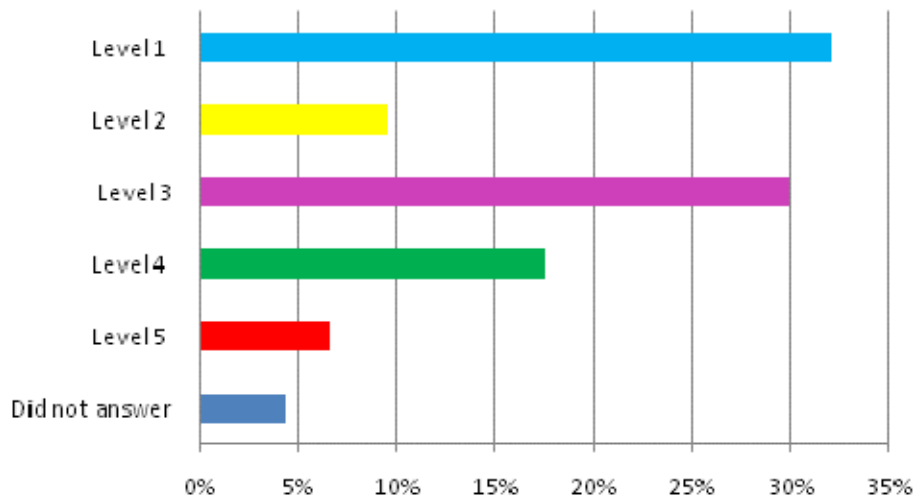
“in the early stages,”

“not under their jurisdiction,”

and

“just beginning to create a presence on social networking sites.”

What level best describes your institution's current online presence?



Level 1 - Basic Website - Website content updated regularly and allows for email and forms submissions.

Level 2 - Interactive Website - Website incl. blog postings and the ability to accept visitor comments.

Level 3 - Interactive Website and a Social Network Presence - Institution maintains an official page on at least one and up to three social networking sites.

Level 4 - Interactive Online Community Management - Website and social media sites frequently updated and coordinated with campus events and news. Visitor postings are monitored and responded regularly.

Level 5 - Fully Integrated Online Community Management - Website and more than three social networking sites are frequently updated. Multiple pages on each social networking site are used to support other marketing efforts across the campus including overall brand identity, student recruitment, alumni engagement, etc.

Of those who commented, several indicated that they maintained a presence on social networking sites such as Facebook, Linked In, YouTube, Twitter and Ning. Many mentioned that the alumni and admissions originally set-up the sites and they have grown from there,

“We link to the larger Facebook group and LinkedIn group that were started by alumni.”

Departments are maintaining varying levels of presence on social networking sites, making the question above difficult to answer since a centralized process for managing the institution's presence is not often in place,

“While we are level one, our admissions office has a limited blog presence”

“It is difficult to categorize our university wide presence because it is very decentralized. Multiple depts. have varying levels of online participation. We do not coordinate or synchronize our efforts as we should.”

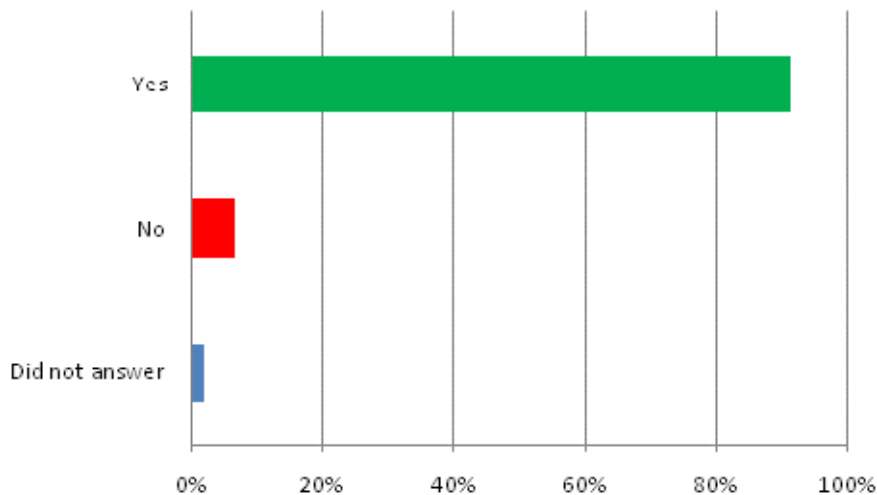
Also, the existing sites are often closed sites (limited only to invited participants, such as newly admitted students or alumni communities.) There is momentum towards achieving a higher level on online presence; those who commented were working on the appropriate strategy to centralize efforts and promote the university and university events. As in the previous question, a lack of resources (time and money) was stated as the obstacle to a fully-supported effort in social networking activities.

“We do as much as staffing will allow”.

Also, there are varying levels of interest or enthusiasm toward social networking which presents an obstacle as well.

“An attitude of ‘build it ourselves’ seems to permeate our computer services staff, making it hard for us to reach out and purchase products that would assist us.”

Do you feel your work for the institution affects its brand-building/institutional identity efforts?



A total of 93% of respondents felt their work was vital to their institution's brand-building efforts,

"A college's website undoubtedly serves as a vehicle for its branding efforts. Anything that is present or absent is indicative of what the college values and to what degree."

"...the web site IS the school and it's important to always put our best face forward."

Additionally, respondents recognized that coordination and consistency are an important to building and reinforcing the institution's brand presence.

"Any outreach as an "official" channel for the university will impact its overall branding. It should be consistent..."

"Expanding our presence using Web 2.0 spreads our name, our mission, and an authentic message of "what we are all about."

Respondents recognize that staying abreast of new technologies enhances the image of the institution and helps connect the institution with both current and future students.

“I think that our presence on social networks helps our students and alumnae feel they are part of a cutting edge institution.”

*“It has branded us in a place where are students are familiar.
We're able to play on their turf.”*

This allows the institution to

“extend (into) a younger market of prospective and potential students.”

Although most respondents recognized the importance of their work, a small percentage felt that they had limited involvement in brand-building efforts. Main reasons cited were lack of support from administration and decentralized brand building (individual departments such marketing, admissions or athletics build brand),

*“...our grant writers have noticed that the website overhaul has helped in influencing decision makers for grant funding.
The website is tremendously important for brand building,
but you need a web savvy person to deal with it.”*

cognitive marketing

Cognitive Marketing Inc. works with leaders of colleges, universities and schools to design and build stronger brands that reveal the identity, character and promise of their institutions and the unique communities they represent.

The Cognitive Higher Education Survey provides quantitative market research and constituent survey work for client colleges and universities. Cognitive Marketing Inc. is a member of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and participated in the 2009 Communications, Marketing, and Technology Workshop held in Boston, Massachusetts in April, 2009. We have prepared these findings, *Use of Web-based Technology to Support Communications and Marketing at Educational Institutions*, as a service to workshop attendees; the survey is not otherwise affiliated with or supported by CASE.

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