

# Association Social Technologies

Exploring the Present, Preparing for the Future Executive Summary

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A project of [Principled Innovation LLC](#) in partnership with [Omnipress](#)



# INTRODUCTION

By Jeff De Cagna, Executive Producer

The conversation about social technologies is gaining serious momentum in the association world, and it is crucial for leaders in the community to deepen their understanding of why and how our organizations are using social tools. For this reason, [Principled Innovation LLC](#), in partnership with [Omnipress](#), decided to launch a groundbreaking Association Social Technologies Survey in June 2008, the first survey of its kind for associations. The purpose of the survey was to capture as much information as possible about how associations are actually using social technologies today. More than 280 associations responded to the survey, and this executive summary shares some of the top-level results. The full report on the survey will be available in October 2008, and will include case studies of how various associations from around the country are applying social technologies to their work in creative ways.

This project would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of co-authors [Ben Martin, CAE](#) and [Lindy Dreyer](#), as well as the invaluable assistance of [Jovan Hackley](#) and [Stephanie Patterson](#). Principled Innovation LLC is enormously grateful for the support of its partner in this project, Omnipress, and in particular, [David McKnight](#), Chief Executive Officer and [Paul Wehking](#), Vice President of Sales. Of course, we also appreciate all of the association leaders who invested their time and attention into responding to the survey so that we can provide this information to our community. Thank you one and all!

We welcome your feedback on this executive summary. Your ideas and suggestions will help us maximize the value of the full report. Please send your e-mails to [socialtechsurvey@principledinnovation.com](mailto:socialtechsurvey@principledinnovation.com). You can download additional copies of this executive summary, as well as find out how you can reserve your copy of the final report, at [www.socialtechsurveysummary.org](http://www.socialtechsurveysummary.org).

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## How many associations have adopted social technologies?

Social technologies are still in a stage of infancy in the association community. Although awareness of social technologies is widespread, only a small minority of associations are actively deploying them. About one-half of associations are actively monitoring or commenting in the blogosphere, while only a quarter author their own blogs. One-third of associations have rolled out social networking initiatives, while just 14% are using a wiki.

## Why are associations using social technologies?

Connecting members with one another appears to be the primary motivation for associations using social technologies. Of all the reasons for using social networking and blogs, a desire to increase engagement is chief among them. Associations deploying wikis respond that facilitating collaboration is their most important goal.

## Who within the association heads up social technology efforts?

Our analysis reveals that marketing and communications staffs are most likely to be responsible for the deployment of social technologies. An examination of "other" responses, however, reveals that responsibility for social technology initiatives is widely distributed in many associations. We find a surprisingly high level of volunteer involvement in social media efforts, including the statistic that members are the most likely to contribute to association blogs, ahead of communications staff and the chief staff executive.

# RESPONDENT PROFILE

### Organization type:

- 32% Professional society
- 28% Trade association
- 25% Individual membership organization
- 2% Philanthropic
- 13% Other

### Membership size:

- 31% have 1,000 or fewer
- 18% have 1,001 to 2,500
- 13% have 2,501 to 5,000
- 10% have 5,001 to 10,000
- 12% have 10,001 to 25,000
- 9% have 25,001 to 50,000
- 7% have more than 50,000

### Annual budget:

- 14% Up to \$250,000
- 22% \$250,001 to \$1,000,000
- 18% \$1,000,001 to \$2,500,000
- 13% \$2,500,001 to \$5,000,000
- 13% \$5,000,001 to \$10,000,000
- 11% \$10,000,001 to \$20,000,000
- 8% Over \$20,000,000

### Tax status:

- 59% c3
- 36% c6
- 5% other

# BLOGGING

Overall, 24% of survey respondents report that their association has a blog.  
Of those that are blogging, 45% are publishing more than one blog.  
Of those that are blogging, the average number of blogs per association is 4.5.  
The median number of monthly posts made to an association blog is 19.  
92% of association blogs allow reader comments.  
All association blogs received an average of 13.62 and a median of 3 comments for the month.  
All association blogs received an average of .89 comments per post for the month.

## How do associations moderate their comments?

- 37% moderate all comments before they publish to the site
- 32% do not moderate before comments publish to the site, but delete inappropriate comments
- 11% only allow registered users to comment
- 12% use another method
- 8% do not allow comments

## What are associations' top priorities with blogs?

- 26% say their most important priority is to increase engagement with blogs.
- 16% say their most important priority is to provide thought leadership
- 10% say their most important priority is to appeal to a certain member demographic
- 9% say their most important priority is to attract prospects

The average number of RSS subscribers was 58.6 and the median was 15.  
The average number of e-mail subscribers was 539.83 and the median was 24.  
The average unique visitors per month was 5338.5 and the median was 349.

## The average percentage of traffic to an association blog was as follows:

- Referring sites 53%
- Direct 33%
- Search engines 14%

## Who in the association is most likely to write for a blog?

- 43% Rank & file member
- 30% Communications staff
- 26% Chief staff executive

*Association blogs posted an average 14.48 posts per month and a median of 6 posts per month.*

## What kinds of syndication options do association blogs offer?

- 75% offer a full text RSS feed
- 22% offer a partial text RSS feed
- 39% offer syndication by email
- 25% offer a comments RSS feed

## Association blogs use of blogging platforms is as follows:

- Blogger 47%
- Wordpress 31%
- TypePad/MovableType: 16%
- Sharepoint 3%
- HigherLogic 3%

### Blog hosting arrangements:

- 59% are hosted
- 29% are self-hosted on the association's primary domain
- 12% are self-hosted on a separate domain

### Social bookmarking services used:

- 20% ShareThis
- 10% AddThis
- 5% Del.icio.us
- 5% Facebook, Digg & StumbleUpon
- 60% None or Don't know

### Site analytics packages used:

- 71% Google Analytics
- 7% StatCounter
- 7% Provided by blog platform
- 15% None or Don't know

*Only six respondents provided their technorati ranking.*

**51% of associations are doing some monitoring or have some level of involvement in the blogosphere. Of that number:**

- 97% have staff or member volunteers monitoring blogs that mention their association or who blog about the trade, profession or cause the association represents.
- 37% have staff or member volunteers who comment on blogs that mention their association or write about the trade, profession or cause the association represents.
- 14% pitch stories to bloggers for coverage of news and events
- 12% provide access to information or badges to supportive bloggers

## SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

31% of associations have an official presence on a social networking site.  
10% plan to have an official presence soon.  
31% are exploring the idea.  
28% do not and have no plans to enter social networking sites.

**Of those associations that do have an official presence on social networking sites, they list the following reasons as being most important for their involvement:**

- 38% to increase engagement
- 21% to appeal to a certain segment of membership
- 17% to attract prospective members
- 12% to facilitate collaboration
- 3% to provide thought leadership

**34% of associations that have an official presence on a social networking site are using LinkedIn. Of that number...**

- 90% report that they are using the free group membership at LinkedIn. The other 10% didn't know the answer to this question.
- 32% are using LinkedIn's pre-approved membership feature.
- 100% have just one LinkedIn group.
- The average membership size of an association LinkedIn group is 264 and the median is 35.
- 52% only allow members to join the LinkedIn group
- 31% allow all industry professionals to join the LinkedIn group
- 17% have some other membership criteria

55% of associations that have an official presence on a social networking site are using Facebook. Of that number:

- 86% are using the Facebook Groups feature
- 20% are using a Facebook individual profile
- 16% are using a Facebook event page
- 12% are using the Facebook Fan Page feature
  
- 64% report having just one Facebook Group or Fan Page
- 25% report having two
- 21% report having three or more
  
- The average number of users on a Group/Fan page is 347 and the median is 50
- 52% allow all industry professionals to join the Facebook group
- 13% only allow members to join the Facebook group
- 11% allow conference attendees and prospects to join the Facebook group
- 4% allow only special interest groups within the association to join the Facebook group
- 20% have some other membership criteria

## WIKIS

14% of associations report using a wiki

- 51% say they want to facilitate collaboration
- 21% say they want to increase engagement with a wiki
- 8% say they want to appeal to a certain demographic
- A significant minority of open-ended "other" responses indicate that wikis are used for staff information sharing
  
- 71% of associations maintaining wikis have only one wiki
- 16% of associations maintain two wikis
- 13% of associations maintain three or more wikis

When asked how associations approach third party wikis in their association's realm:

- 51% say they do not monitor third party wikis.
- 35% say staff or volunteers monitor third party wikis.
- 20% say staff or volunteers edit third party wikis

Associations that have an official presence on other social networking sites break out as follows:

- 17% on MySpace
- 13% on Flickr
- 10% on Twitter
- 6% on YouTube
- 3% on Plaxo

26% of associations that have an official presence on social networking sites are using customized portals. Of that number:

- 25% are using Ning
- 13% are using MyAmphi
- 13% are using HigherLogic
- 8% are using Communities of Practice from Fusion Productions
- 8% are running proprietary systems
- 33% are running other systems
  
- 55% of custom sites are intended exclusively for members
- 29% are open to any industry professional
- 6% are open to Special Interest Groups within the industry
- 10% are open to other types of constituencies

22% of associations have a presence on a third party wiki, like Wikipedia. 51% have no plans to willingly enter into third party wiki projects. 6% plan to start soon, and 21% are exploring the idea. Of those with a presence on a third party wiki:

- 49% have created an entry about their association in Wikipedia.
- 16% do not engage in editing Wikipedia.
- 30% have a Wikipedia entry that was first developed by someone outside the organization
- 30% have staff or volunteers who monitor the association's entry in Wikipedia
- 21% have staff or volunteers who contribute to the association's Wikipedia entry
- 8% have staff or volunteers who monitor topics aligned with the association's interests
- 8% have staff or volunteers who edit topics aligned with the association's interests

# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES

11% of associations have policies covering social media in place. Of this number:

- 58% define use of employer resources for participating in social media
- 42% define permissible employee use of the association's name on the internet
- 42% define what information can be shared on the internet
- 39% define permissible employee behavior on social networking sites
- 18% define who is permitted to comment on industry blogs

# CLOSING QUESTIONS

When asked which social technologies their association had abandoned, association executives responded as follows:

- 2% stopped using wikis
- 4% stopped using Facebook
- 2% stopped using LinkedIn
- 4% stopped using a custom social networking site
- 3% stopped using a blog

Who oversees social media:

- 41% Marketing/Communications
- 13% Membership
- 9% Conferences/Education
- 3% Advocacy/Government Relations
- 34% Other

# CONCLUSION

Even though the use of social technologies in the association community is still in its early stages, it is increasingly clear that these tools are already changing many of our traditional ways of doing business. Going forward, the strategic and operational implications of social technologies are profound, and all association leaders must act to understand these new realities right away.

As much as we are still learning from this project about how associations are using social technologies, there remains much more to learn. Principled Innovation LLC will continue to investigate how associations are using social technologies, and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with our colleagues from across the community in this effort. If you're interested in collaborating with us, please contact **Jeff De Cagna** of Principled Innovation LLC at [jeff@principledinnovation.com](mailto:jeff@principledinnovation.com).

Remember to reserve your copy of the final report (October 2008 release) at [www.socialtechsurveysummary.org](http://www.socialtechsurveysummary.org)



The mission of Principled Innovation LLC ([www.principledinnovation.com](http://www.principledinnovation.com)) is to make innovation possible in the association community. Founded in 2002 by association community thought leader, **Jeff De Cagna**, Principled Innovation LLC helps boards, CEOs and senior executives think differently about the future, with a specific emphasis on strategy, innovation, knowledge, leadership and the impact of the Web and social technologies on all aspects of association work.

Through keynote conference presentations, facilitated client conversations and focused consulting engagements, Principled Innovation LLC challenges the existing assumptions and orthodox beliefs of association leaders, with the goal of inspiring them to imagine brand new possibilities for their organizations!



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We are excited to be exploring the social technology realm with you. These exciting technologies will continue to impact the creation, validation, production and distribution of content into the future!

To download additional copies of the executive summary, and reserve your copy of the full survey report, please visit [www.socialtechsurveysummary.org](http://www.socialtechsurveysummary.org).