

Can social networking expand your candidate pool?

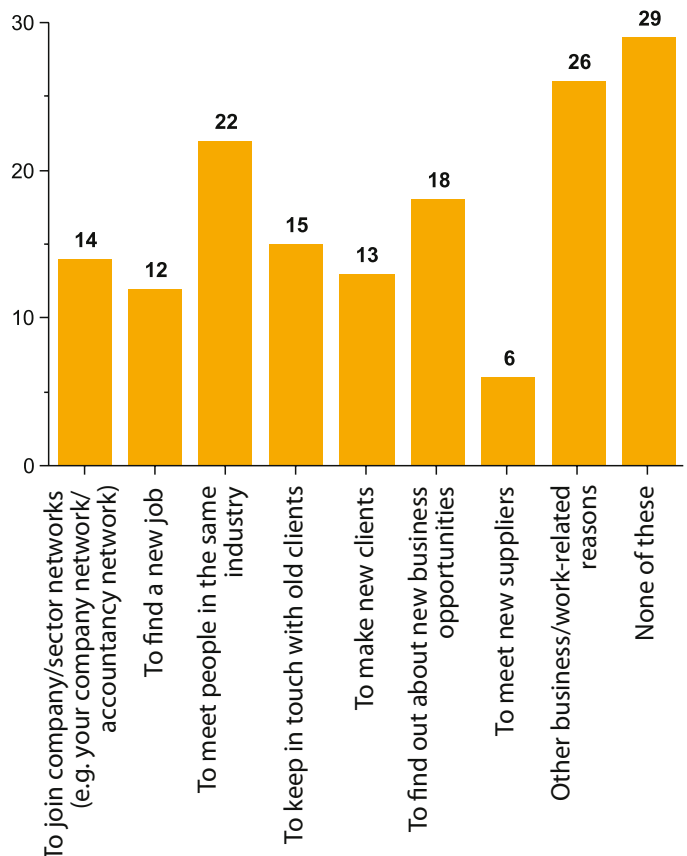
Overview

Few phenomena in recent years have spread so rapidly through the workplace as social networking. Fewer still have spurred so much debate among employers about the value and dangers they present. But as millions of employees update their Facebook pages across the country, what opportunities are there in this trend for the recruiter? Does it represent an exciting gallery of potential candidates? A spy-hole allowing employers to view the suitability of would-be staff? Or has the whirlwind of attention on Bebo et al, left us with a distorted view of its real potential?

According to a recent study by Jobsite*, recruiters would be wise to remain modest in their expectations of social networking in the medium term. Few individuals currently use the main sites for jobhunting, preferring to log-on to these sites to keep in touch with friends (72%), share photographs (40%) and have fun (51%).

Users are likely to be resistant to employer approaches while on social networking sites. Employers, in turn, run the risk of wasting effort, or worse, irritating the very people they are trying to attract. In truth, the overwhelming majority of the working population – 91 per cent – rarely use any networking site for professional reasons at present. Those that do, are commonly looking to meet others in the same field, rather than find a new role.

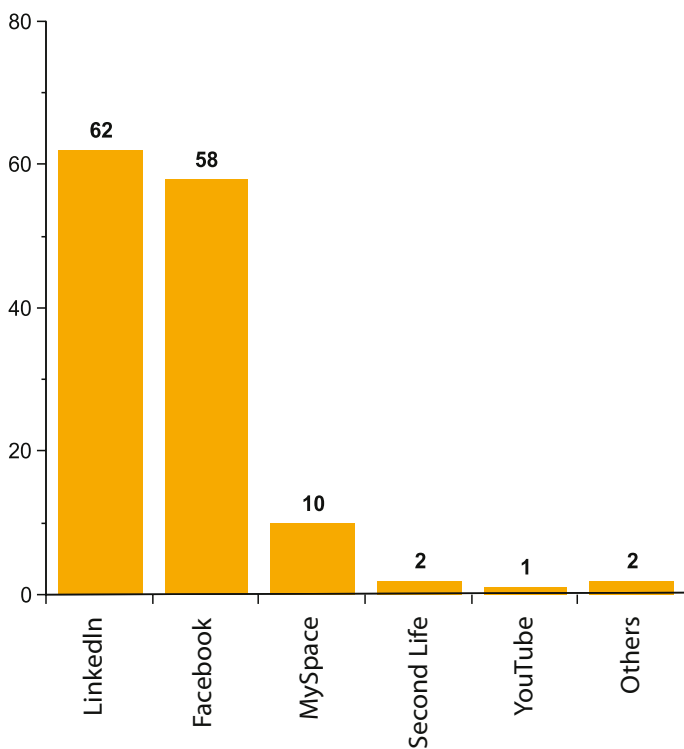
For which, if any, of the following WORK-RELATED reasons do you use social networking sites? [Please tick all that apply]



Source: Jobsite/YouGov

Nevertheless, dismissing social media out-of-hand would also be a mistake. Professional networks such as LinkedIn, have a tiny reach compared with Facebook, but the promise they offer the recruiter is arguably more significant. Their most likely advantage lies in discreet, targeted headhunting where the time spent on an individual search among a “passive” audience is justified. An annual CIPD report* found a handful of organisations (6%) are already using social networking sites to attract and recruit staff, with LinkedIn (62%) and Facebook (58%) the two sites of choice. The success of this practice however, is still in its infancy in terms of organisations understanding and effectively using the technology.

Social networking sites that organisations use to attract and recruit employees (%)

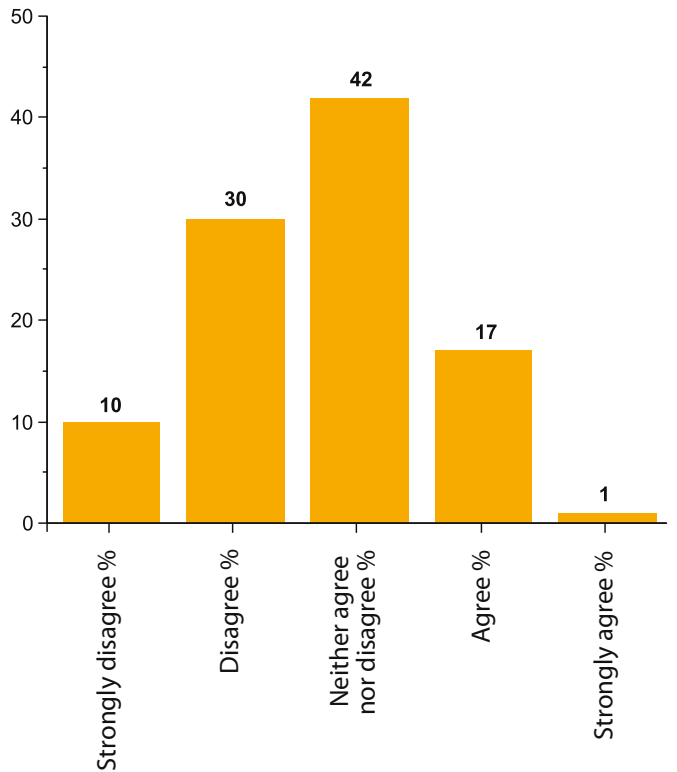


* Source: CIPD

For wider recruitment goals, traditional online methods are likely to offer a speedier route to a wider pool of active candidates, at least for the foreseeable future.

The window on an individual’s personal life afforded by Facebook, MySpace and Bebo, has also prompted a sixth (15 per cent) of recruiters to vet candidates during the recruitment process. However, the majority report that candidate information accessed online doesn’t influence their recruitment decision.

Organisations’ rating of Web 2.0’s value. Candidate information accessed online will influence our recruitment decision.



* Source: CIPD

While anyone publishing the details of their private lives on a public networking site should surely beware the fall-out of that decision, employers also need to consider whether the weekend behaviour of candidates really has a bearing on an individual’s professional suitability. In the end, that will be a matter of conscience for each business to weigh.

Even so, recruiters do need to tread warily, because cyber-vetting candidates could result in tribunal claims for discrimination. Lawyers representing failed candidates could ask to see your IT records in an attempt to prove a discrimination charge.

Key Findings:

Business or pleasure?

Social networking sites are not being used widely by jobhunters. Less than one in ten people have used them in the last month for any work-related reason. The most popular site among these was Facebook with 4% using the site for career or business purposes.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the younger you are, the more inclined you will be to use social networking and the more likely you are to use the channels for work. Twenty per cent of those aged 18-24 have logged on in the past month for career reasons, a hint that in future the channels may become a more useful route for recruiters.

For now, businesses need to think carefully about how much time and money they invest via these routes. While some great talent may be found among “passive” candidates on social networks, pursuing and converting them could prove time-consuming and inefficient.

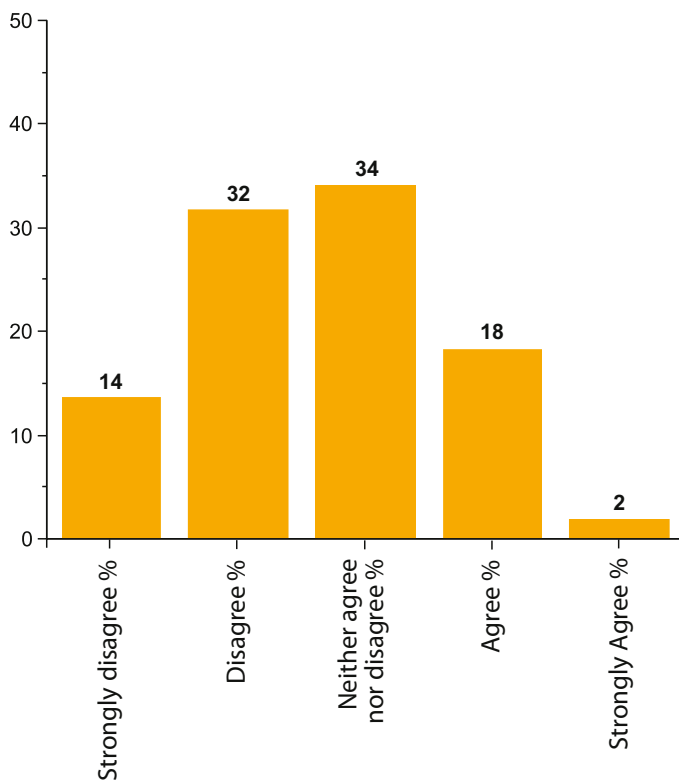
Community is king

Among the relatively small pool who do use social networking for work, the most popular activities on the sites are meeting people who work in the same industry and seeking new business opportunities – just 12% of these cite jobseeking as one of their activities. The research findings suggest that individuals who use the sites for work, are doing so to build and maintain relationships.

However, businesses should keep a close eye on the development of professional networks as these could become a more interesting proposition to the recruiter in the future. It is likely that these sites will become a quicker focus of recruitment activity.

More importantly, over six in 10 (62%) employers are worried about damaging comments posted on social networking sites and recognise the potential repercussions of this on retention and recruitment needs. To help reduce the risk of negative remarks, companies should ensure their online reputation is a positive one.

Organisations’ rating of Web 2.0’s value. We have effective mechanisms in place to monitor commentary about the organisation posted on blogs and social networking sites.



* Source: CIPD

Some companies are taking a proactive approach to building a positive online reputation, by creating their own Facebook profiles. The Ernst & Young network for example, has nearly 16,000 members across 140 countries, allowing past, present and potential candidates to network.

So, whether you do or don't decide to embrace the social networking phenomenon, demonstrating that your organisation is a great place to work – whether it's reaching The Sunday Times Best 100 companies to work for list or simply using happy staff as brand ambassadors – will help ensure candidate attraction both on and offline.

Sources

*Research was undertaken in 2008 for Jobsite by YouGov with 2,183 UK adults.

*Recruitment, retention and turnover, annual survey report 2008, CIPD.

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