

# SOCIAL NETWORKING:

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS CHANGING  
THE WORLD OF WORK

TODD WHEATLAND

# CONTENTS

PAGE 3	Introduction
PAGE 4	01. The Digital World of Work
PAGE 8	02. The Rise of Social Networking
PAGE 11	03. Public Versus Private: The Pitfalls of Social Media
PAGE 15	04. Work or Leisure: The Real Value of Social Media

## INTRODUCTION

The advent of social networking has fundamentally changed the way people search for work and exchange information about career opportunities. As in many sectors, the technology is re-shaping the job search landscape and throwing up intriguing challenges for employees and employers alike.

“I don’t believe society understands what happens when everything is available, knowable and recorded by everyone all the time.”

ERIC SCHMIDT, CEO GOOGLE

---



TODD WHEATLAND

# 01

## THE DIGITAL WORLD OF WORK

How did you find your most recent job? That's the question posed to over 97,000 global respondents in the 2011 Kelly Global Workforce Index.



It was once said that a prospective job-seeker had to wear through several pairs of shoes in the search for work.

While there are still some who will beat a path to an employer's door, the vast majority of activity is taking place in the digital neighborhood.

Online job boards have become the dominant way that people find work in virtually all parts of the world, outstripping other avenues such as direct hiring, referrals and traditional print advertising.

More than a quarter (26%) of global respondents gained their last job by using online job boards, the single largest source of jobs, followed by "word-of-mouth" referrals (22%), recruitment/staffing companies (17%), direct approach from employers (also 17%), "other" methods (10%), print advertisements (7%), and social media sites (1%).

Across each of the working-age generations - Gen Y (aged 18-29), Gen X (aged 30-47) and baby boomers (aged 48-65) - online job boards constituted the major means of securing work, or, in the case of the baby boomers, the second-most important. Overall, however, Gen Y is more likely to find a new position through online job boards than their older counterparts.

The contact center/customer service sector, together with the IT industry are at the fore when it comes to the use of online platforms for work. But employees across the board have largely embraced digital recruitment, for many of the same reasons behind the success of online real estate, auto listings and dating.



Online job boards enable people to search in their own time, to learn more about particular job choices, and to sort and filter according to personal preferences and career options. The convenience, accessibility and personalisation afforded by online recruitment remains as valid to jobseekers today as it did a decade ago.

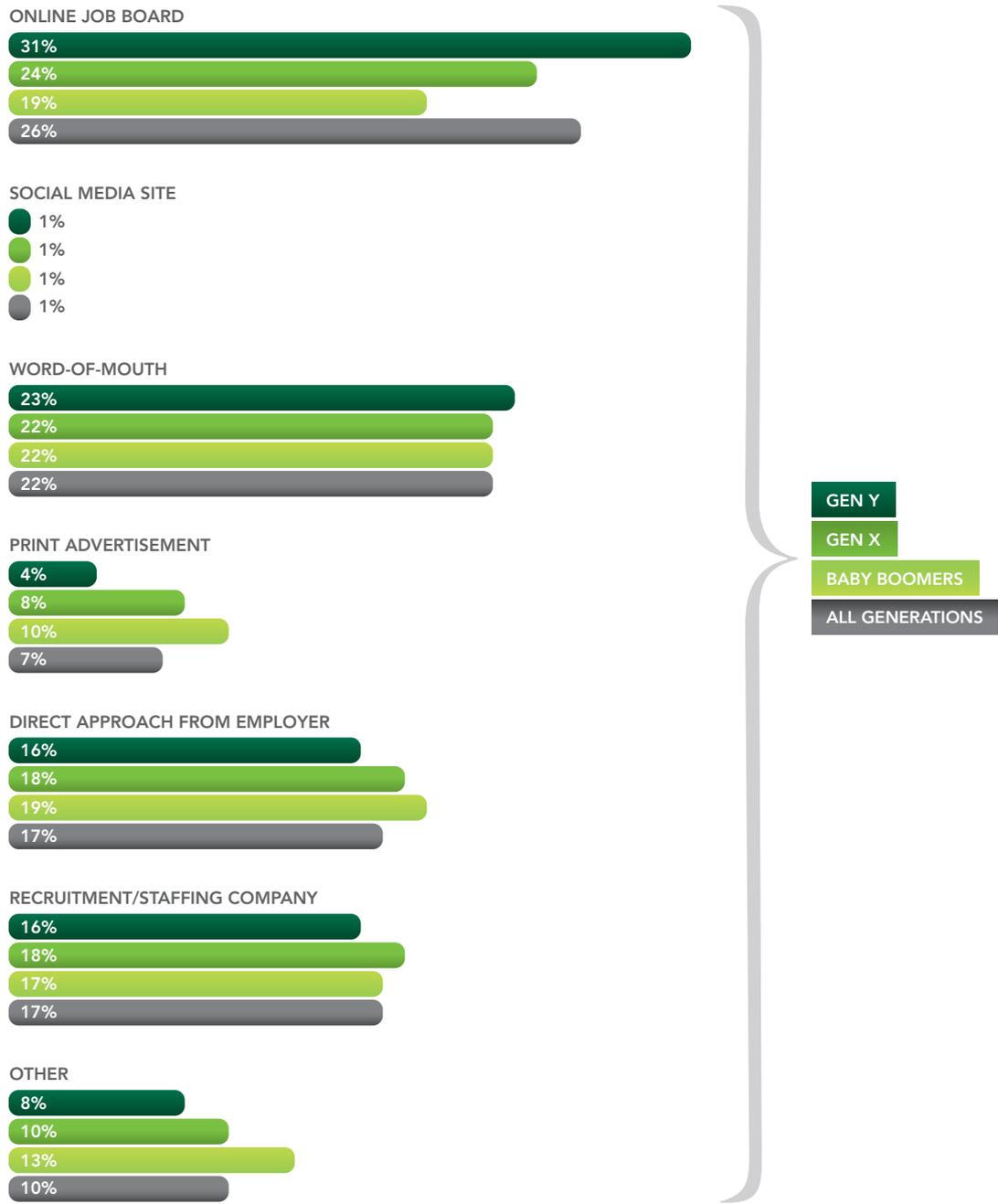
There is also a sense in which “searching” on an online job board is not necessarily seen as searching at all, because it is passive and non-committal. Individuals can browse and research job alternatives to an extent not possible with print advertisements, without having to signal any intention with a recruiter or a prospective employer.

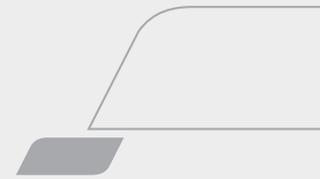
An employee who is considering a new position or a job switch now has the ability to tap into a large amount of information about a particular position, well before they need to make their first contact. They can even discuss the merits of an employer with others in online forums, and learn beforehand what others have to say about the position and the organisation.

The survey findings show how rapidly the world of jobseeking has shifted, from one which was largely based around advertising in newspapers, to one now dominated by the digital space. Employees now have a greater capacity to know more about particular jobs and employers; to understand exactly the skills needed; to learn what existing employees think; to determine how they would fit; and to assess their bargaining strength.

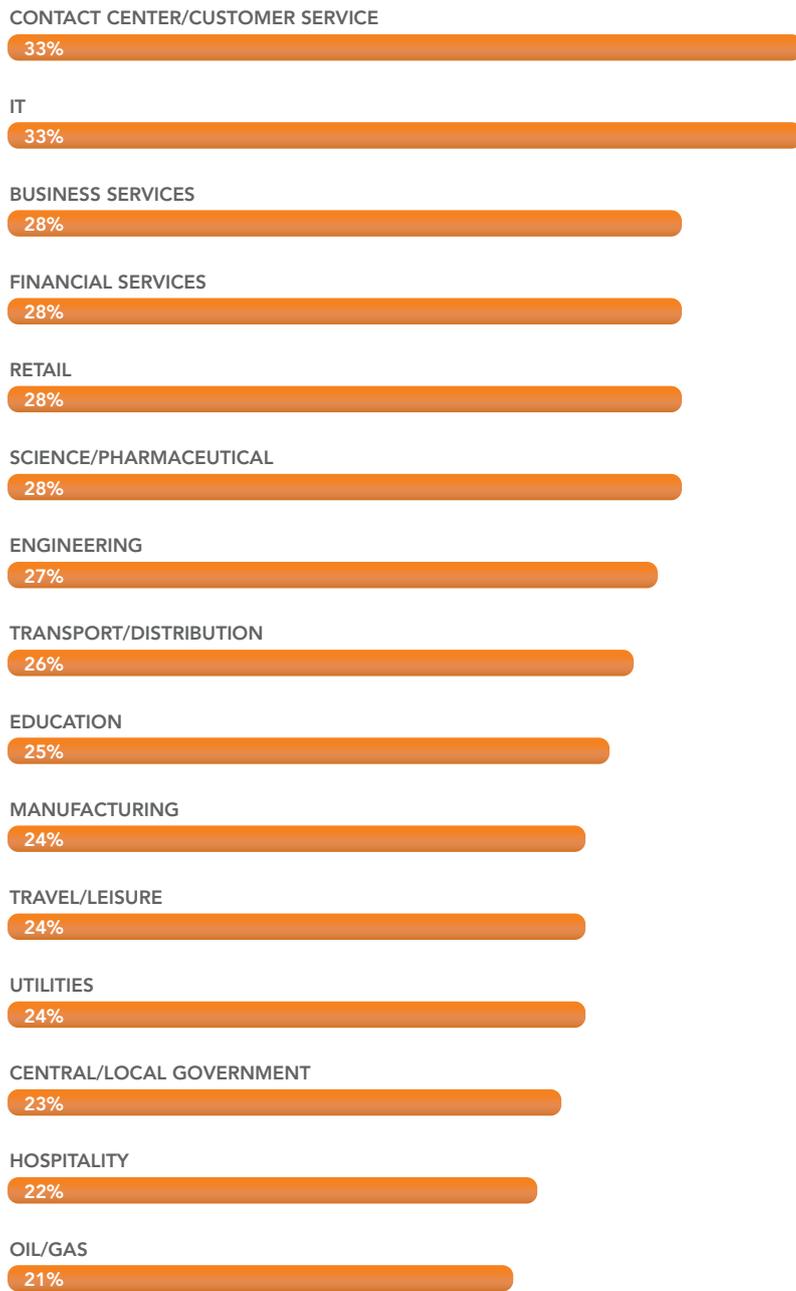
Much is made of the role of the internet in empowering companies to globalize their candidate sourcing. The virtual world of recruitment has not only changed the way that organisations locate talent, however, but at its best puts a good deal more knowledge into the hands of those looking for work.

**FIGURE 1:**  
How did you secure your most recent job? (% by generation)





**FIGURE 2:**  
How did you secure your most recent job? (% through online job board)



# 02

## THE RISE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking is occupying a growing place in the recruitment field. Sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and blogs are increasing in prominence for jobseekers as people discuss jobs, views and opinions about work, good (and bad) places to work, industry issues and career options.



With the relatively recent emergence of social media into the recruiting space, there is still a very small number of people who attribute their most recent job directly to social media. If it holds up to even a small part of its potential, however, this seems destined to change dramatically. Almost a quarter (24 percent) of respondents say that they search for work using blogs or social network sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Social media sites allow candidates to focus exactly on the job they want, even the company they want to work with. It's not just the younger generations who are active on these sites. Older workers are using social media and blogs to identify job openings.

The popularity of social networking sites to locate work is highest in Europe, where they are used by one quarter of respondents, slightly higher than for both North America (23 percent) and Asia Pacific (22 percent).

The most popular social networking sites for jobseekers are Facebook and LinkedIn, preferred by 33 percent and 32 percent respectively. A further 23 percent use "other" sites, 10 percent use blogs, and 3 percent use Twitter. Facebook is the overwhelming preference of Gen Y participants, while LinkedIn is favored by Gen X and baby boomers.

In essence, the digital revolution has given rise to a very active and robust set of conversations about work, occurring in a network of digital communities, based around particular businesses, industry sectors, and interest groups. These are not just about jobs in a narrow sense, but touch on satisfaction with work, work-life balance, and the strategies that organisations are using to attract and retain the best talent. For the most part, they are also discreet and "under the radar".

**FIGURE 3:**  
Do you search for jobs on social networking sites? (% yes)

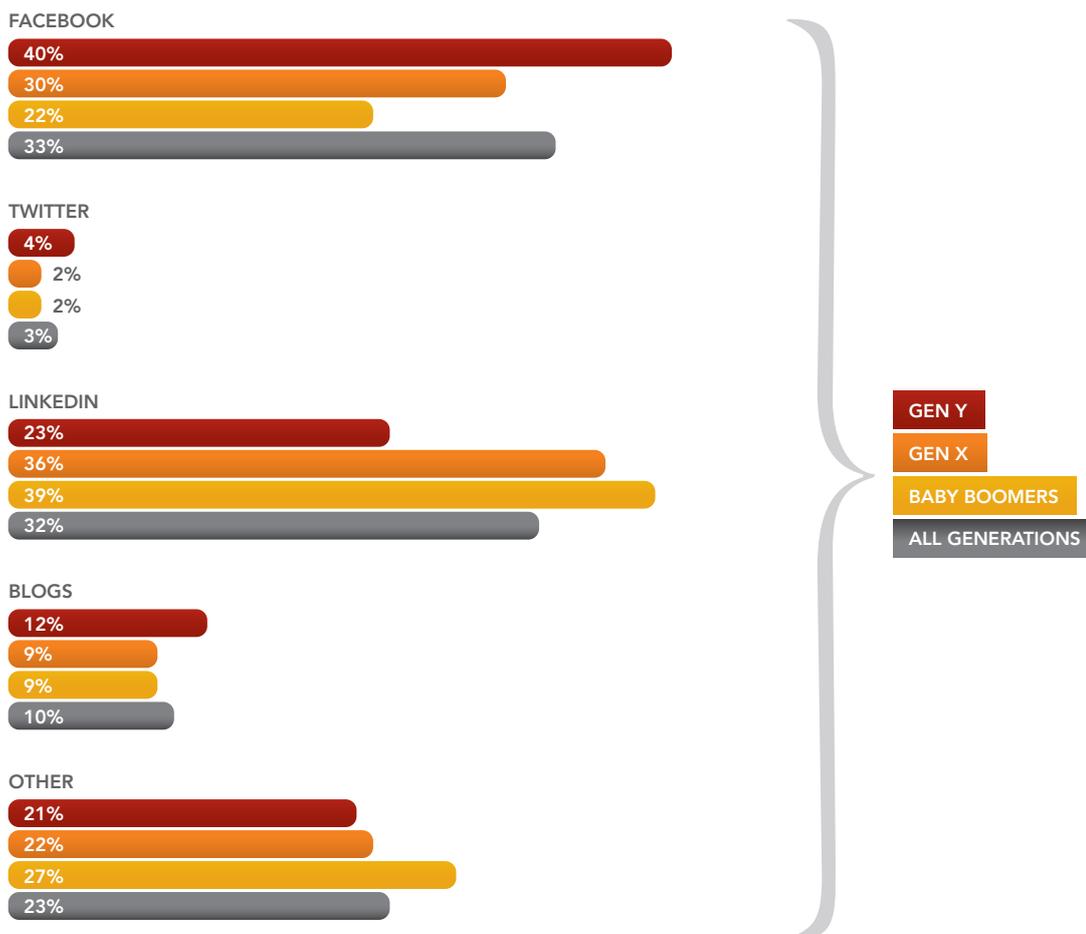


Just as the sounds of marine life are inaudible to the human ear, these discussions often don't penetrate the wider world, but they have meaning and resonance to those listening because they occur within a trusted inner circle.

Both positive and negative views about individual employers and jobs reverberate around this chamber, and have a high degree of credibility. It is rare for someone considering a work opportunity not to seek input or share comments or insight with others in their online network.

From an employer perspective, it makes sense to be attuned to what is being said in these communities because it can have a critical impact on how they are perceived in the market, and how attractive they are as preferred places to work.

**FIGURE 4:**  
Which social networking sites do you use to search for jobs?



### A TALE OF 2 PLATFORMS

Tell me where you hang out, and I'll tell you how old you are

With apologies to the many and varied online communities that are NOT Facebook or LinkedIn, I wanted to call out the very clear age gap that this research has shown between jobseeker behavior on those platforms. Whilst an almost-identical number of respondents preferred either LinkedIn (32%) or Twitter (33%), the real story lies along age fault lines.

If you're a baby-boomer, you're not looking for work on Facebook. But if you're a Gen Y, it seems, why would you be anywhere else?

# 03

## **PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE: THE PITFALLS OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

As people increasingly use social media sites to engage with friends and colleagues, there is an undercurrent of concern about how this newest form of interaction can adversely impact individuals and harm careers.



Many say they are worried about the negative consequences of personal content causing embarrassment and career fallout. There are just as many who are deliberately censoring or editing their personal profiles to avoid this content having career impacts.

More than a quarter of respondents (26 percent) are worried that material from their social networking page could adversely impact their career. All generations share concerns about the potential career fallout from social networking content, but – perhaps as a result of high social media adoption during school and college years - Generation Y is the most worried.

Respondents in the Asia Pacific region are significantly more sensitive about this material than their counterparts in North America and Europe.

The sensitivity around social networking content is understandable. TV and print media in particular seem to have a special ability to dig up stories about how embarrassing photos or comments on sites such as Facebook have hurt people's careers.

Who hasn't experienced that momentary pause of the finger before clicking 'submit' and posting something online? Material that can appear harmless fun to some can send an altogether different message to work colleagues and associates. It may also remain online for many years after being posted, and may be all but impossible to erase.

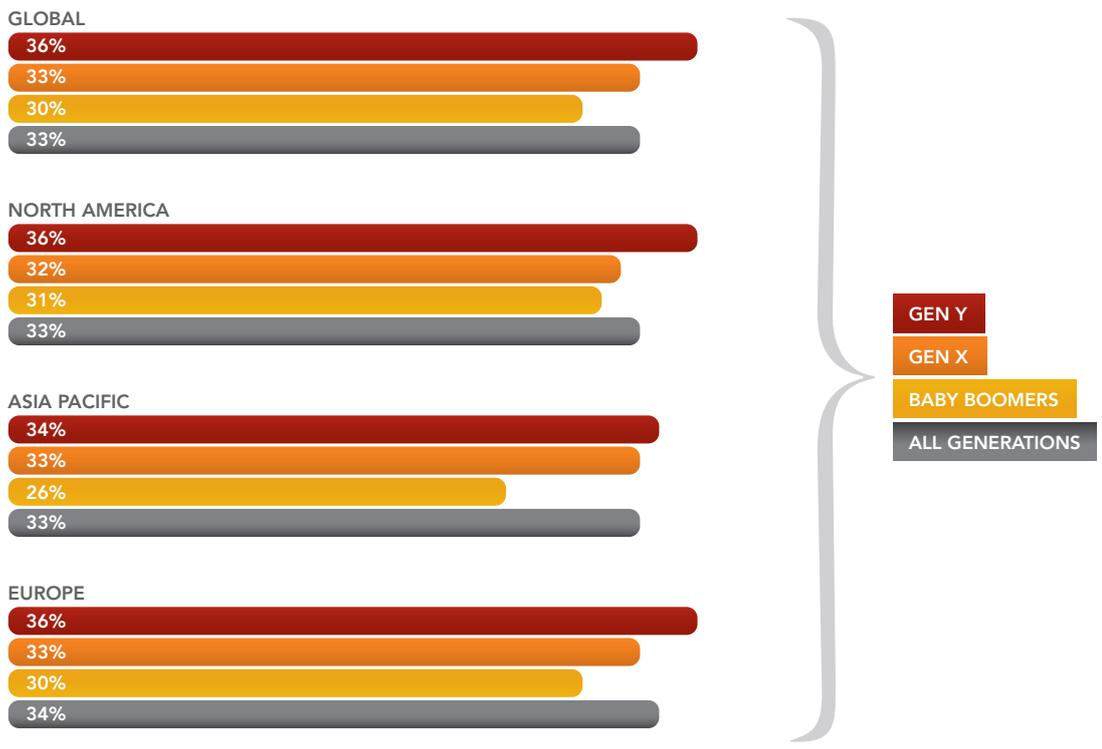
**FIGURE 5:**  
Do you worry that material from your social networking page could adversely impact your career? (% Yes)



One third of respondents admit to deliberately editing or censoring content on their social networking sites in order to avoid career problems. All generations are active in taking steps to control the content of their social networking pages, but Generation Y is the most likely to be taking deliberate steps to remove or edit potentially damaging content.

The real impact of this material on jobs and career prospects is still a grey area. Indeed, the use that can be actually made of such material is problematic. In many countries and jurisdictions, it is not permitted to deny a person a job or discriminate against them on the basis of personal content on their social networking site.

**FIGURE 6:**  
 Do you deliberately censor content on your social networking site in order to avoid career problems? (% Yes)



Even so, it would be a rare individual who was prepared to share their private, unguarded moments with their professional colleagues. For that reason, the standard recommendations tend to go along the lines of people remaining vigilant, keeping their social and business networks separate, and to use privacy and security settings to protect themselves.

What's clear is that many younger workers and even those not yet in the workforce are probably blissfully unaware of the problems that some content may cause many years into the future. No-one can be certain whether or not a future employer will delve into an individual's personal site to make work-related evaluations.



In a famous interview with the Wall Street Journal in mid-2010, Google CEO Eric Schmidt said "I don't believe society understands what happens when everything is available, knowable and recorded by everyone all the time," he says. The WSJ went on to say: 'He predicts, apparently seriously, that every young person one day will be entitled automatically to change his or her name on reaching adulthood in order to disown youthful hijinks stored on their friends' social media sites.'

It is not just an issue for employees and candidates. Employers also need to think carefully about the use of personal content of social media sites. Relying too heavily on information on Facebook or LinkedIn can be a trap. If it contains glowing recommendations from friends or relatives, it's hardly likely to be objective. Just like with any Curriculum Vitae, there may also be content that is exaggerated or just plain fabricated.

For all sides, the emergence of social media has opened up a new world of opportunity, but the ground rules are still a work-in-progress when it comes to making critical employment-related judgements.

# 04

## WORK OR LEISURE: THE REAL VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In an age where almost everyone has an online “profile”, it comes as no surprise that these identities are being put to use in the world of work.



The internet, and social media in particular, have provided the opportunity for individuals to stand out in a crowded marketplace, with their own personal profiles or “branding”. It is becoming accepted wisdom that an active online persona is critical to career advancement.

More than a quarter of respondents (28 percent) believe it is essential to be active on social media in order to advance their careers. Generation Y are the most likely to be active online for career development, with more than a third (34 percent) regarding it as a requisite.

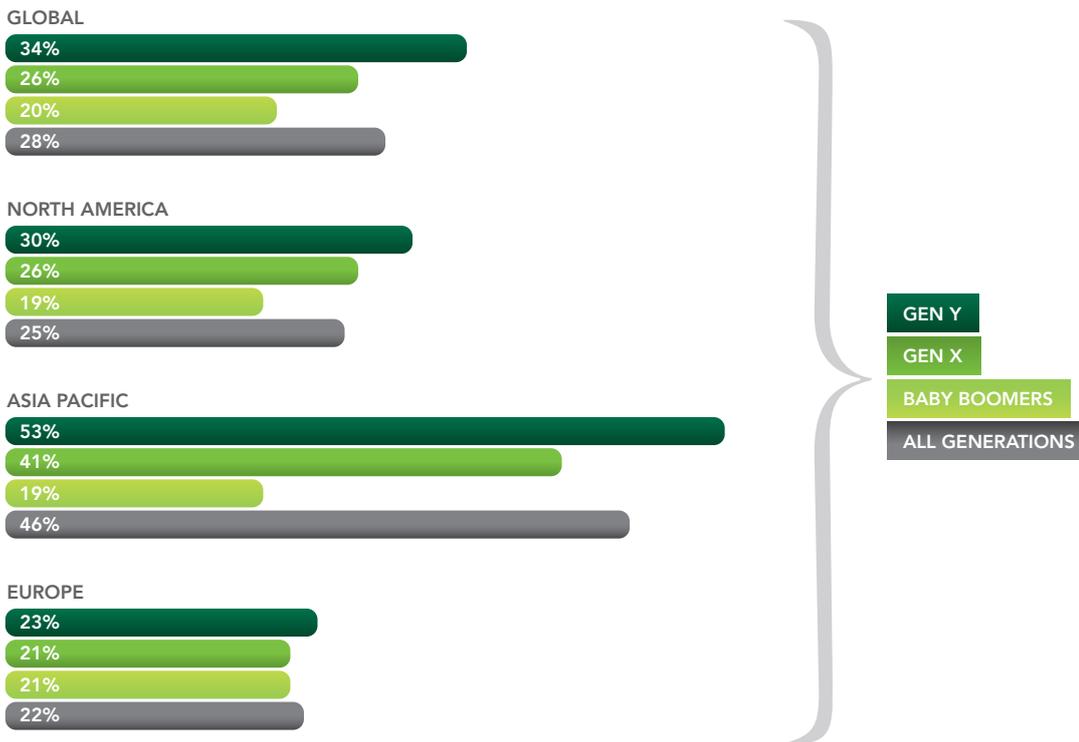
In Asia Pacific, there is an extremely high rate of online activity for career purposes, with 53 percent of Generation Y and 41 percent of Generation X regarding it as essential for career enhancement.

It’s a different story among baby boomers, who don’t share the same enthusiasm for social media as a career-enhancement tool.

It’s also clear that certain industries such as Information Technology and Business Services stand out, with approximately one third engaging in online discussions.

Maybe it should come as no surprise that social media is now a key part of career positioning and connecting for executives. It makes the task of engaging with professional colleagues more convenient - and perhaps avoids the need for those tiresome evening social engagements. Much better to demonstrate your networking prowess from the comfort of your home, at a time of your choosing.

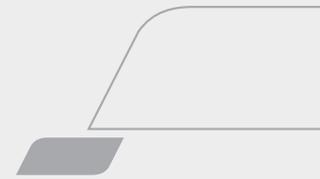
**FIGURE 7:**  
 Do you feel it is essential to be active on social media  
 in order to advance your career? (% Yes)



But should this same level of engagement be permitted while at work?

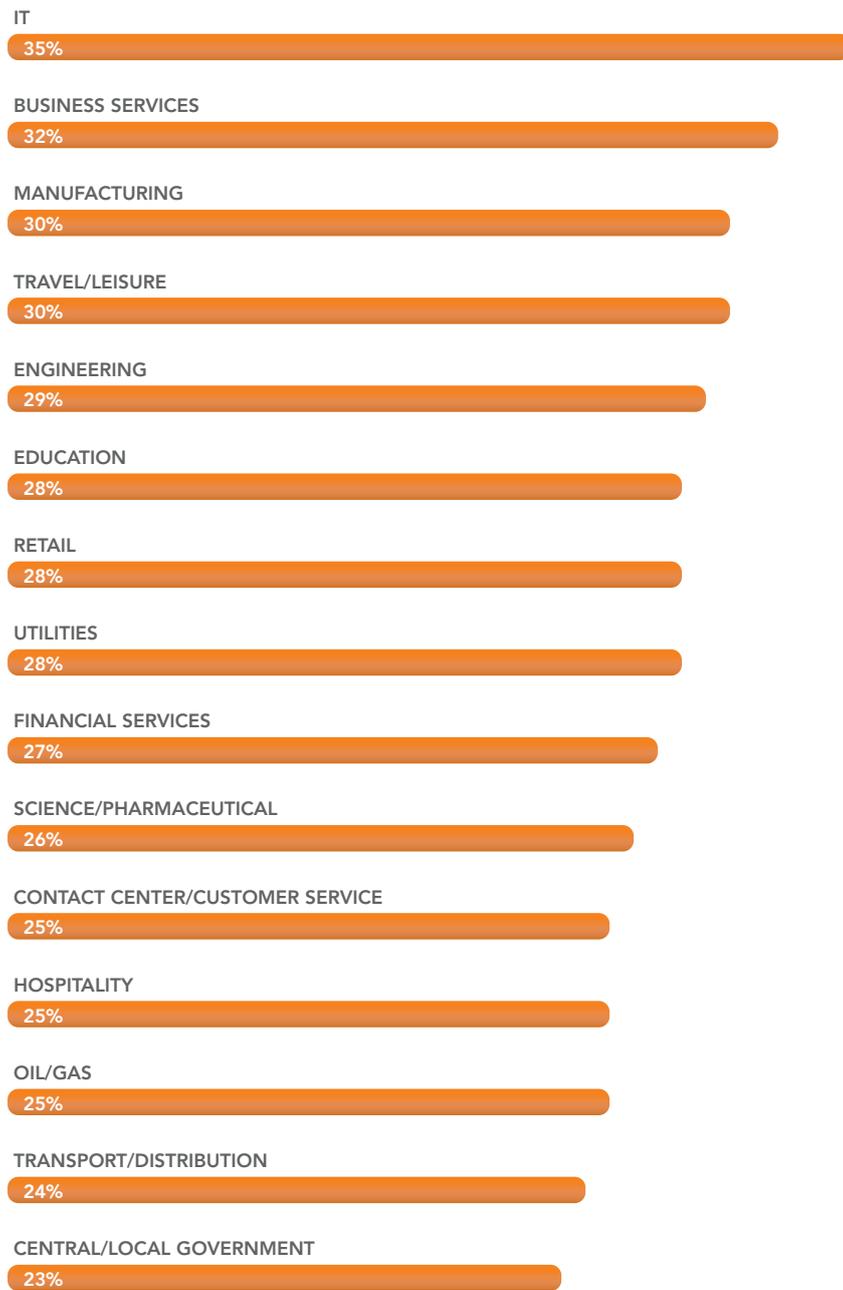
Many employers have introduced restrictions of social media in the workplace. Almost a third of respondents (30 percent) say that their employers have a social media or social networking policy that regulates use at work. Employer restrictions are more common in North America, affecting 33 percent of participants, compared with 31 percent in Asia Pacific and 27 percent in Europe.

The question of whether social media is a valid workplace tool will surely depend on the nature of the work and the purposes for which it is being used. Many businesses now have active social networking sites where they communicate with customers and stakeholders.

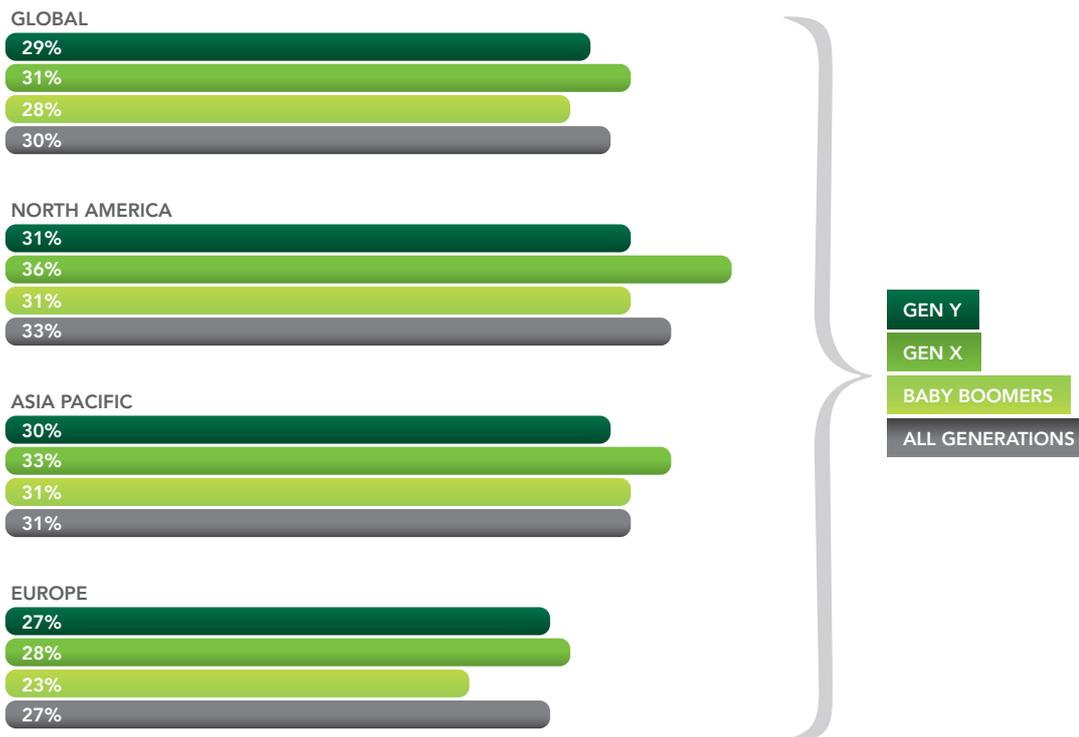


**FIGURE 8:**

**Do you feel it is essential to be active on social media in order to advance your career? (% Yes by industry sector)**



**FIGURE 9:**  
Does your employer have a social media policy that regulates use at work? (% Yes)

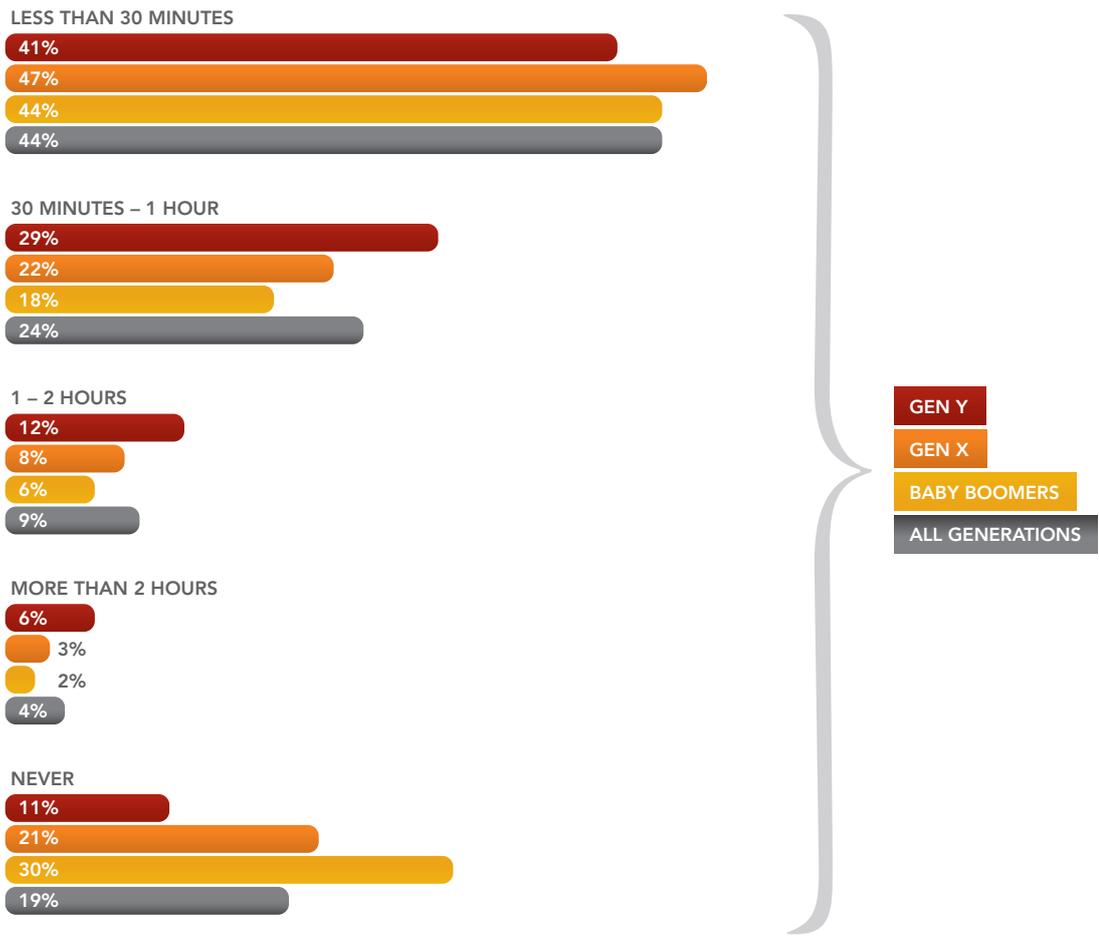


But in certain industries, social networking by employees will be hard to justify. This will throw up some hard questions for employers and employees alike: What is the difference between “tweeting” and a personal phone call? Is it permissible to chat with family or friends for legitimate reasons? What is a reasonable time to spend on personal social media while at work?

Some employers may see it as a legitimate form of employee engagement (particularly if they have a large Gen Y workforce), while others will view it as a waste of time.

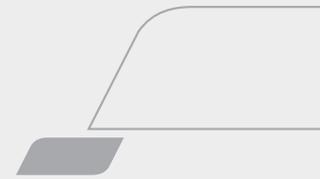
It’s probably worth recalling that restrictions on use of the Internet at work were once commonplace, but it’s hard to imagine many businesses doing so today. Social media may evolve the same way.

**FIGURE 10:**  
How much time do you spend on social media sites each day?



And despite the immense popularity of social networking, the vast majority of respondents (68 percent) spend an hour or less each day on social media sites, while 19 percent spend no time at all. Only 13 percent spend an hour or more each day.

Generation Y spend the largest amount of time engaged in social networking. Some 18 percent of Generation Y spend an hour or more each day, compared with 11 percent of Generation X and 8 percent of baby boomers.



There is no doubt that the Gen Y population is comfortable with social media. Arguably, Gen X is at least as comfortable, but perhaps more cautious, knowing the risks contained in an unguarded comment or photo.

Will people become more skilled at quarantining work from leisure? Or will an 'always on' blend of personal and work life be more the norm?

It's quite possible that obligations will fall on the operators of social media platforms. What rights will an employee who is sacked because of social media indiscretions have against the site's operator? We can be sure that lawyers will continue to try and find out.

These issues will spawn new rules, protocols and etiquette. Already the emergence of social media has indelibly changed the world of work. There's little doubt that it's just the beginning.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

TODD WHEATLAND is Head of Thought Leadership & Marketing, KellyOCG. With 15 years experience in the human resources and workforce consulting space, Todd has overall responsibility for thought leadership and global marketing initiatives. He has degrees in Commerce (Economics / Marketing) from UWA and Communication from Curtin University. LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/wheatland](http://www.linkedin.com/in/wheatland)  
Twitter: [www.twitter.com/toddwheatland](http://www.twitter.com/toddwheatland)



#### **ABOUT KELLY**

Kelly Services, Inc. (NASDAQ: KELYA, KELYB) is a leader in providing workforce solutions. Kelly® offers a comprehensive array of outsourcing and consulting services as well as world-class staffing on a temporary, temporary-to-hire, and direct-hire basis. Serving clients around the globe, Kelly provides employment to 480,000 employees annually. Revenue in 2010 was \$5 billion.