

## SBE Social Media Survey - Twitter and LinkedIn edge ahead

By George Matlock, Social Media Manager

The Society of Business Economists is constantly looking at fresh ways to engage with its membership and to find out more about its members. To that end, the SBE conducted its first-ever social media survey in late 2016 and as we promised, here are some highlights from the responses.

First of all, we are pleased that nearly 40 members responded swiftly to the chairman's invitation to participate and used the tight window of time offered to give very honest responses. We are very grateful to all of you who took a few minutes out of your schedules to respond to the survey.

Some of our findings reinforced long-held views about social platforms, others raised an eyebrow. The first of six questions tackled the profile of our members' social media presence. Over 70% of respondents have a LinkedIn account – the online professional networking site - and 60% have a Twitter account, the “microblogging” site.

Facebook was a close third with 57%, but is often seen as a leisure pursuit for users and a way to keep in touch with friends and family rather than professional circles – this was confirmed by responses to a later question on how members want to hear from us.

Instagram and Google+ were each less than 20% of members polled. Perhaps most surprising was that Reddit, popular among professionals in the United States, didn't feature at all.

Only 14% of respondents said that they never used any form of social media.

Of those using Twitter, almost a third either have their feed always on or view it at least once daily, making it a continued “go to” for busy professionals.

5% said they view Twitter once a week, and a further 21% said they occasionally browse.

In spite of LinkedIn's slim lead over all other platforms in terms of SBE member ownership, when asked for their preferred channel through which to reach them via social media, 43% opted for Twitter and 40% for LinkedIn. The 11% showing for Facebook confirmed that many prefer it to be a social rather than professional tool. Some 30% said they don't want to be reached via social media.

One of the benefits of social media - even for members who are not signed up - is that the SBE can link to members' research via social media as a means of distributing it. Some 58% said they would welcome such an added benefit of SBE membership to disseminate research, while only 42% said that their research is strictly only for their clients.

It also appears that our membership is quite confident using social media. Only 38% said they would be interested in attending a SBE session on using social media while 62% said they would not.

Finally, we asked you to express yourselves more freely about social media. Several of the respondents were keen for the SBE to retweet content which could be of benefit to fellow members, although one respondent said “Re-tweeting seems to be indicative of confirmation bias and a lack of balanced debate.”

Another respondent said: “One issue which I wonder about is whether things like Twitter will end up trivializing the research debate as we seek to get the most catchy phrases inside the current character limit. LinkedIn is a more powerful tool but I see it more as a means of increasing individuals' brand than that of their employer.” Whether the SBE can and should support employers as well as members is a point for discussion.

Yet another opined: “Still find there is an uncomfortable conflict between the personal aspect of social media and its use for professional purposes e.g. I might want to engage in sport or politics, but don't want that to have anything to do with work.”

What is most interesting is how much thought respondents have put into the wider issues of social media.

Like everything, in moderation social media is a good thing. It is up to those who create content to make it engaging and stimulate the viewer to want to click on links to the research or landing pages to find out more. Experience suggests treating it like a headline in a newspaper. Most headlines tell you some of the story, but leave you wanting to discover more.

If you have comments about this article or wish to express your thoughts on the survey you missed the opportunity to complete, please feel free to write to me at [matlock.gm@gmail.com](mailto:matlock.gm@gmail.com). Or for those into the parlance of social media, you can DM @georgematlock. We aim to develop responses to the survey before the end of the year.

*Thanks too if you supplied your Twitter handle or other profiles with your responses. These will be added to our database in accordance with our policy of not sharing with third parties.*