

EXPLORING THE USE OF BUSINESS SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS IN SALES: CURRENT PERCEPTIONS AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

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Business organizations are readily exploring how to incorporate social networking in their business models. Business social networking tools such as Facebook and LinkedIn are being used by organizations to connect with customers and otherwise help market their products in both b2c and b2b environments. Gartner Inc. indicates that expectations surrounding the benefits of business social networking tools may be exceeding the benefits those tools actually deliver. This exploratory study examines the extent to which salespeople use business social networking tools and their perceptions of the effectiveness of those tools. The findings indicate usage of business social networking tools by salespeople is limited, and that improvements to productivity are limited. Despite the perceived limitations, salespeople believe that these tools will at some point be critical to sales success. The findings support Gartner Inc.'s contention that expectations may exceed perceived benefits.

INTRODUCTION

The past decade brought significant technological changes to the methods and tools available to salespeople. For example – sales force automation (SFA) tools of the late 1990s evolved into much more powerful and robust Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools in the 2000s. Cell phones evolved into smartphones, capable of handling many of the tasks formerly requiring laptop computers. And, the growing acceptance of email as an appropriate method of communication has evolved to include as acceptable texting, tweeting, and social networking-based communication (Nail 2009). The evolution of these tools continues as we move to “cloud-based” computing and a tighter integration of social networking into “traditional” CRM tools (e.g., the integration of Facebook and LinkedIn with Salesforce.com; the development of Chatter for Salesforce.com).

As sales technology evolves (e.g., innovations in computer and communications technology), organizations seek to assess the strategic significance of the changes and, when appropriate, identify ways to incorporate the changes to remain competitive (Boujena et al. 2009). Because salespeople are still considered the primary relationship manager in most business-to-business buyer-seller relationships, they will need to adapt to these changes so that they may continue to play a strategic role in building and sustaining long-term customer relationships.

An area garnering the attention of the sales technology market is the incorporation of social networking into marketing (and sales). For purposes of the present study, business social networking (BSN) refers to the use of social networking for business purposes. One need only do a search of the web using the terms like “business social networking,” “social networking for business,” “social networking for marketing,” or “social networking in sales” to find a plethora of news, articles, blogs, advertisements, and related to BSN and its benefits. However, the Gartner Inc. (Gartner

Inc., www.gartner.com, is a highly respected and well established global information technology research company) indicates BSN can be characterized as technology for which expectations created by hype exceed the benefits actually realized by organizations employing these tools (Sarner, Drakos, and Prentice, 2008). The purpose of this exploratory study is to begin understanding if and how salespeople are employing BSN tools and the extent to which they are perceived as productive.

Background

It is not uncommon for adoption of new sales technology to be driven by "hype" rather than measures or evidence of results (let alone a positive R.O.I.) or met expectations (Duboff and Wilkerson, 2010; Fenn and Raskino, 2008). The Gartner Group refers to this phenomenon as the "Hype Cycle" (see Figure 01) and annually tracks emerging technology through the hype cycle. Generally speaking, the hype cycle "characterizes the typical progression of an emerging technology, from overenthusiasm through a period of disillusionment to an eventual understanding of the technology's relevance and role in a market or domain" (Fenn, Gammage, and Raskino, 2010; Fenn and Raskino, 2008). The length of the hype cycle varies depending upon the type of technology and the predisposition of the market to respond to hype.

The "Technology Trigger" refers to the development and initial deployment of the new technology (e.g., through R&D). As the new technology is market tested and gains financial support (e.g., venture capital funding), publicity surrounding the new technology begins to spread. As the new technology gains acceptance in the market, hype begins and expectations rise despite demonstrable evidence of the technology's ability to deliver as promised (i.e., as hyped). At the "Peak of Inflated Expectations," trial and adoption are driven by media hype. Organizations invest in the new technology based primarily on hype, believing not adopting the new technology

represents a lost opportunity or will otherwise put the organization at a competitive disadvantage. As questions surrounding the new technology's ability to deliver as promised begin to emerge, expectations and interest begin to fall. Publicity surrounding the new technology becomes less positive (sometimes negative) and expectations settle into the "Trough of Disillusionment." Slowly (relatively), organizations utilizing the new technology begin to identify areas of strategic fit for the technology. During this "Slope of Enlightenment" expectations begin to rise again, but this time are based on actual usage and experience with the new technology. During this phase publicity surrounding the technology focuses on best-practices, and adoption rate increase. As expectations begin rising at a decreasing rate, the new technology enters the "Plateau of Productivity." This final stage of the hype cycle reflects a more stable and realistic understanding of the new technology's fit and ability to deliver value. During this stage, adoption rates increase significantly, moving beyond the 20% - 30% of the market adoption already established.

Social Networking

Computer-based social interaction has been around for 20 years or more. Appendix 01 shows excerpts from a public bulletin board hosted by Gateway (the computer company) in 1994 (before the word-wide-web). The interactions illustrate people communicating with the company and with each other – resolving issues and providing assistance. Although "archaic" by today's web-based social networking technology standards, these early bulletin boards allowed people from around the world to communicate and share information. Social networking today is much more sophisticated, and includes rich interfaces, instant communication, audio, video, and a host of other capabilities.

Perhaps typified by Facebook, today's version of social networking began appearing and taking root in the early 2000s. Between 2005 and today, social networking growth has

exploded and includes social networking apps for smartphones and other portable computing devices. For example, Facebook launched in early 2004, and today it reports (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>, 2011) having more than 750 million active users with approximately half of its active user base logging-on to Facebook each day. Business Social Networking (BSN)

The potential for social networking to benefit business organizations did not go unnoticed. Emerging technologies and the usage of social networking sites continue to grow in the business environment. For example, according to its website, LinkedIn currently has over 120 million members across 200 countries (<http://press.linkedin.com/about> - 2011). Further, Salesforce.com and Netsuite.com (on-line CRM tools) both include social networking components (e.g., LinkedIn) in their respective CRM modules, and Microsoft Outlook integrates social networking sites into its desktop client, making it easy for people to see what their contacts are "up to."

Earlier technologies like sales force automation and customer relationships management required were expensive, required major changes information systems, and often failed to meet expectations (Ahearne, Srinivasan, and Weinstein, 2004; Inks and Morgan, 2001). New BSN technology is inexpensive (often free), integrates with existing information systems, and offers new ways of reaching markets and customers. For example, Facebook permits firms to create a business page that offers current or potential customers the opportunity to become "fans," receiving immediate communication from the organization through postings (events, updates, promotions, information, etc.). As a result, firms build relationships with prospective customers and continue to develop relationship with current customers.

A recent study on the usage of social media in business found 25% of Inc. 500 companies reported using social media in their marketing strategy in 2007, one year later that number

jumped to 44% (Fisher, 2009). Social networking provides an innovative way to share information with customers (Barnes, 2010). These new communication tools do not replace traditional sales activities, but rather offer potential to make sales activities more efficient. For example, Luke (2009) found financial planners using social networking sites were able to connect with clients more often and in a shorter period than traditional communication methods (e.g., meetings, calls, emails, etc.).

Although it's difficult to determine when b2c organizations began using social networking, *interest* in its use has increased dramatically. As the hype grew, social networking tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Plaxo, and others emerged to grab a share of the BSN market. The Gartner Group places BSN (during 2010 – 2011) in the "Peak of Inflated Expectations" portion of the hype cycle (Fenn, Gammage, and Raskino, 2010; Sarnier, Drakos, and Prentice, 2008). This suggest the full adoption of BSN is limited to a small portion (<20%) of the potential market, and that expectations exceed results (Fenn, Gammage, Raskino, 2010; Fenn and Raskino, 2008).

As one would expect at the peak of the hype cycle (if that is where BSN resides), there is a lot of hype promoting the value of BSN, but very little (if any) empirical evidence to support the hype of BSN in a sales context. While prospecting (e.g., lead generation) is one of the primary uses of social networking (in a sales context) hyped by providers and users, other uses for these tools may exist. Given the rapid growth of social networking integration into the selling effort, it is appropriate and necessary for marketing researchers to begin empirically studying the uses and effects of such integration. Research provides managers and scholars with a better understanding of the purpose and importance of business social networking in helping salespeople develop relationships with business customers. To attain advantages of social networking in a business context, we first need to understand the specific purpose of these applications. Through this understanding, researchers may play a pivotal

role in moving BSN through the hype cycle; specifically, helping to move it from the "Peak of Inflated Expectations" to and through the "Slope of Enlightenment."

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which salespeople adopt BSN tools. Specifically, we aim to identify BSN tools that sales professionals are using, if they are using these tools for common sales tasks (e.g., prospecting, types of networking, recruiting, marketing, customer communication, etc.), how often they are using these tools, and if they feel these tools are affecting their productivity. The result will be discussed in the context of the hype cycle, and used to develop a foundation for understanding the role and effectiveness of social networking in a sales context.

Method

Data was collected via paper-based and internet-based survey instruments. The survey instrument was developed to measure basic demographic information along with social networking usage, basic attitudes toward social networking, and extent to which these tools were used in a business context. The paper-based survey was collected during a sales symposium attended by approximately 200 sales professionals. Of the 153 questionnaires distributed at the event, 96 questionnaires were collected. Since the focus of this study is on how salespeople and sales managers use social networking, respondents not identifying themselves in sales were eliminated from further consideration. As a result, only 66 usable questionnaires were retained, for a response rate of 43 percent. An additional 200 paper-based surveys were distributed through local business connections. From that group 93 usable surveys were collected, representing a 47% response rate.

The internet-based survey was distributed to 140 salespeople and sales managers. An invitation email was sent out through the organization asking salespeople and sales managers to participate. Of those requests, 94

questionnaires were collected. Incomplete questionnaires were eliminated. This elimination resulted in 78 usable questionnaires, representing a 56% response rate for internet-based surveys. The overall response rate for the exploratory study was 48% (45% paper-based, 56% internet-based). Tables 1 and 2 present the basic demographic data from the usable surveys. Table 1 includes a breakdown of the type of position for which the respondent is employed ("Combination" refers to individuals who have both selling and sales management responsibilities) and the sex of the respondents. Table 2 shows the income and education distribution. Approximately 65 percent of the respondents earned \$60,000 per year or more and just over 60% had earned at least a bachelor's degree.

To control for the potential effects of "position," specifically use of BSN by sales managers being different than salespeople, five separate subsets of the data were created – each containing the 30 sales manager respondents and a random selection of 30 salespeople. The means of each group (position) on the variables of interest were compared for each of the five subsets. With the exception of Income and Years of Sales Experience, the difference in means between sales managers and salespeople on the variables of interest were not statistically significant. As a result, sales managers were retained in the total set of respondents analyzed. To gauge the extent to which respondents (salespeople and sales managers) were using BSN tools, respondents were asked to indicate how often they use one or more of the following BSN tools: LinkedIn, Xing, ecademy, Ryze, Facebook, Plaxo, Netwrkprof, Twitter, and Jigsaw. The response choices were: multiple times per day, 1-2 per day, 1-2 per week, 1-2 per month, and less than once per month. Of those, Xing, ecademy, and Ryze were used by fewer than 5% of respondents. Netwrkprof was used by roughly 18% of respondents, but less than 10% reported using it more than once per month. Given the relatively low usage of these particular BSN tool by the respondents, they were dropped from additional consideration.

TABLE 1: Frequency of Type of Position and Sex of Respondents						
Position	Frequency	Percent		Sex	Frequency	Percent
Salesperson	167	70.5		Male	170	71.7
Sales Manager	30	12.7		Female	66	27.8
Combination	40	16.9				
Non-Response	0	0.0		Non-Response	1	0.4
Total	237	100		Total	237	100

TABLE 2: Frequency of Income and Education of Respondents						
Income	Frequency	Percent		Education	Frequency	Percent
Rather Not Say (RNS)	25	10.5		High School	22	9.3
Under 20k	8	3.4		Vocational (2yr)	19	8.0
20k – 59k	51	21.5		Some College	50	21.1
60k – 99k	70	29.5		College Degree	132	55.7
100k – 149k	45	19.0		Master’s Degree	12	5.1
150k – 199k	26	11.0		Prof./Doct. Degree	0	0
200k and Over	10	4.2				
Non-Response	2	0.8		Non-Response	2	0.8
Total	237	100		Total	237	100

Table 3 below shows respondents' usage rate of the remaining BSN tools. Respondents used Facebook and LinkedIn substantially more often than the Plaxo or Twitter. Indeed, over three-quarters of the respondents indicated they "never" used either Plaxo or Twitter. However, over 10% reported using Plaxo (18%) and Twitter (13%) at least 1-2 times per month. In contrast, respondents reported using LinkedIn (35.2%) and Facebook (51%) at least 1 – 2 *per week*.

One of the objectives of this study is to explore the extent to which BSN tools are being used in sales. Since we are interested in the use of BSN tools in general, and not simply one type of tool (e.g., LinkedIn), we classified each of the respondents into one of three groups based on combined LinkedIn, Facebook, Plaxo, and

Twitter usage. For each of those four BSN tools, respondents using the respective BSN tool 1-2 times per week or more were classified as "Frequent Users" and coded as a "1". The remaining respondents were classified as "Infrequent Users" and coded as a "0". A new variable called BSN Usage was created based on the summation of the coded scores. The distribution of those groups is presented in Table 7.

Cut-points for three equal groups were calculated based on the distribution of usage scores, and each respondent was categorized based on those cut-points. The resulting variable allowed each respondent to be classified as "Low Users" (summed scores of 0 to 1), "Moderate Users" (summed score of 2 to 4), or "Heavy Users" (summed score of 5 to 8).

TABLE 3: LinkedIn Usage Rate		
Usage Rate	Frequency	Valid Percent
Multiple Times per Day	8	2.9
1-2 per Day	21	7.7
1-2 per Week	67	24.6
1-2 per Month	41	15.1
< 1 per Month	38	14
Never	97	35.7
Total (21 non-responses)	272	100

TABLE 4: Facebook Usage Rate		
Usage Rate	Frequency	Valid Percent
Multiple Times per Day	32.0	11.7
1-2 per Day	46.0	16.8
1-2 per Week	62.0	22.6
1-2 per Month	21.0	7.7
< 1 per Month	17.0	6.2
Never	96.0	35.0
Total (19 non-responses)	274.0	100.0

TABLE 5; Plaxo Usage Rate		
Usage Rate	Frequency	Valid Percent
Multiple Times per Day	1.0	0.4
1-2 per Day	4.0	1.6
1-2 per Week	18.0	7.3
1-2 per Month	23.0	9.3
< 1 per Month	16.0	6.5
Never	186.0	75.0
Total (45 non-responses)	248.0	100

TABLE 6: Twitter Usage Rate		
Usage Rate	Frequency	Valid Percent
Multiple Times per Day	3.0	1.2
1-2 per Day	4.0	1.6
1-2 per Week	16.0	6.4
1-2 per Month	10.0	4.0
< 1 per Month	22.0	8.8
Never	195.0	78.0
Total (43 non-responses)	250.0	100.0

TABLE 7: BSN Usage (the higher the summed score, the more frequent the usage)			
Summed Score	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
0.00	54.0	26.6	26.6
1.00	22.0	10.8	37.4
2.00	28.0	13.8	51.2
3.00	28.0	13.8	65.0
4.00	24.0	11.8	76.8
5.00	20.0	9.9	86.7
6.00	16.0	7.9	94.6
7.00	8.0	3.9	98.5
8.00	3.0	1.5	100.0
Total	203.0	100.0	
System	34.0		
Total	237.0		

Table 8 shows the number of respondents in each category.

To gain insight into differences among the three BSN Usage groups (other than usage rate), the means of each group on several independent variables were compared using a One-Way ANOVA. The independent variables include:

Three demographic variables (sales experience, income, and education),

Ease of use (In general, how easy is it to use business social networking sites . . . very easy, easy, neutral, difficult, very difficult),

Effectiveness of BSN for nine sales-related tasks (generating leads, qualifying leads, sales call planning, generating testimonials, establishing credibility, communicating with customers, communicating with the company, promoting products/services, and reconnecting with old contacts),

Impact of BSN on productivity (As a result of using business social networking sites, my productivity has: increased significantly, increased somewhat, not changed, decreased somewhat, decreased significantly), and

TABLE 8: BSN Usage Classification			
Category	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Low Users	76.0	37.4	37.4
Moderate Users	80.0	39.4	76.8
Heavy Users	47.0	23.2	100.0

Future importance of BSN to sales success (I believe the use of business social networking is currently or will one day soon be critical to the success of most salespeople: Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Unsure, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

The results of the One-Way ANOVA are presented in Table 9. The table includes the means for each usage group on each item, along with the differences in means between Low and Moderate, Low and Heavy, and Moderate and Heavy. Differences that are statistically significant are noted (* $<.05$, ** $<.01$).

Years in Sales

The mean Years in Sales for Low Users is 10 (9.95) years greater than that of Moderate Users and just over seven years greater than that of Heavy Users. Both of these differences are statistically significant at the .01 level. For this set of respondents, the mean Years in Sales for Moderate Users is 2.70 years fewer than for Heavy Users. However, the difference is not statistically significant which increases the risk associated with generalizing this result to the population.

Education

Respondents were asked to report the highest level of education they have completed. The response options included High School/GED, Vocational/Technical School (2yr), Some College, College Degree (4yr), Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree, and Professional Degree (JD, MD). Although this data is ordinal, for purposes of this analysis they were coded such that larger numbers indicated more

formal education (e.g., High School = 1, Vocational School = 2, and so forth). Differences on Education mean scores between the groups were not statistically significant.

Income

As part of the basic demographic data collected, respondents were asked to indicate their annual income by selecting one of six salary ranges, or they could opt to select "Rather Not Say (RSN)." The salary ranges options were Under 20k, 20k-59k, 60k-99k, 100k-149k, 150k-199k, and 200k or Greater. Twenty-five (13 from Low Users, 9 from Moderate Users, and 3 from Heavy Users) of the respondents replied "Rather Not Say" on the question of Income. Those cases were removed when the mean scores on Income (larger numbers indicating greater income) were compared across the three groups. The overall distribution of the Income responses (see Table 10) suggests incomes for Low Users are greater than that of Moderate Users, and that Income for Heavy Users is greater than that of Moderate Users. For example, the data shows 64.20% of the Low Users 17.1% of the Moderate Users, and 39.1% of Heavy Users earned \$100,000 or more. The One-Way ANOVA analysis also indicates Income for Low Users is greater than Income for Moderate Users (i.e., the difference in means is statistically significant). In addition, the Income for Moderate Users is lower than the Income of Heavy Users.

Ease of Use

Respondents were asked to how easy it is to use business social networking sites (such as the ones presented in the survey) using a 5-point

TABLE 9:
Summary of One-Way ANOVA Results

		Mean	Diff. from Low Users	Diff. from Moderate Users
Years in Sales	Low Users	20.53		
	Moderate Users	10.58	9.95**	
	Heavy Users	13.28	7.24**	-2.70
Income	Low Users	4.43		
	Moderate Users	3.39	1.04**	
	Heavy Users	4.23	0.20	-0.84**
Education	Low Users	3.36		
	Moderate Users	3.38	-0.02	
	Heavy Users	3.36	0.00	0.02
Ease of Use	Low Users	3.02		
	Moderate Users	2.27	0.75**	
	Heavy Users	2.13	0.89**	0.14
Generating Leads	Low Users	2.95		
	Moderate Users	2.91	0.04	
	Heavy Users	2.62	0.34	0.29
Qualifying Leads	Low Users	2.92		
	Moderate Users	2.97	-0.05	
	Heavy Users	2.66	0.26	0.32
Sales Call Planning	Low Users	2.95		
	Moderate Users	2.85	0.11	
	Heavy Users	2.49	0.46*	0.36
Testimonials	Low Users	2.94		
	Moderate Users	2.99	-0.05	
	Heavy Users	3.34	-0.40	-0.35
Credibility	Low Users	2.91		
	Moderate Users	2.95	-0.04	
	Heavy Users	2.76	0.15	0.19
Comm. w/Customers	Low Users	3.00		
	Moderate Users	3.00	0.00	
	Heavy Users	2.45	0.55**	0.55*
Comm. w/Company	Low Users	2.98		
	Moderate Users	3.13	-0.14	
	Heavy Users	2.96	0.03	0.17
Promoting	Low Users	3.00		
	Moderate Users	2.99	-0.13	
	Heavy Users	2.72	0.27	0.26
Reconnecting	Low Users	2.81		
	Moderate Users	2.37	0.44*	
	Heavy Users	2.55	0.26	-0.18

TABLE 10:
Income Distribution

BSU Usage Group	Income Range	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low Users	Under 20k	1.0	1.5	1.5
	20k-59k	11.0	16.4	17.9
	60k-99k	12.0	17.9	35.8
	100k-149k	21.0	31.3	67.2
	150k-199k	14.0	20.9	88.1
	200k & Over	8.0	11.9	100.0
	Total	67.0	100.0	
Moderate Users	Under 20k	7.0	10.0	10.0
	20k-59k	25.0	35.7	45.7
	60k-99k	26.0	37.1	82.9
	100k-149k	7.0	10.0	92.9
	150k-199k	4.0	5.7	98.6
	200k & Over	1.0	1.4	100.0
	Total	70.0	100.0	
Heavy Users	Under 20k	0.0	0.00	0.0
	20k-59k	9.0	19.6	19.6
	60k-99k	19.0	41.3	60.9
	100k-149k	13.0	28.3	89.1
	150k-199k	5.0	10.9	100.0
	200k & Over	0.0	0.0	100.0
	Total	46.0	100.0	

Likert scale anchored by Very Easy (1) and Very Difficult (5). The mean on the Ease of Use item for Low Users is greater (the difference is statistically significant) than the respective means of both Moderate and Heavy Users. The difference between mean scores of Moderate and Heavy Users is not statistically significant. This suggests Moderate and Heavy Users perceived BSN tools as easier to use than did Low Users. However, the mean score for the Low Users is 3.02 (Neutral) indicating that most of members of this group (70.8%) do not perceive the use of BSN as either easy or difficult.

Sales-Related Task

Using a six-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to report the extent to which BSN tools are effective at Generating Leads, Qualifying Prospects, Sales Call Planning, Generating Testimonials, Establishing Credibility, Communicating with Customers, Communicating the Company (respondent's company), Promoting Products/Services, and Reconnecting with old contacts. The scale response options included Very Effective, Effective, Ineffective, Very Ineffective, Indifferent, and Not Sure. For purposes of the present study, the Indifferent and Not Sure

responses were collapsed because both indicated a lack of either perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness. Of the nine sales-related tasks, the difference between means is statistically significant for Sales Call Planning, Communication with Customers, and Reconnecting with Old Contacts. The results indicate Heavy Users found BSN more effective for Sales Call Planning and Communicating with Customers than did Low Users (i.e., the difference between means is statistically significant (at the .05 level). In addition, Heavy Users found BSN more effective for Communicating with Customers than did Moderate Users (the difference between means is statistically significant at the .01 level). Finally, Moderate Users perceived BSN tools as more effective at Reconnecting with Old Contacts than did Lower Users (.05 level).

Table 11 shows the frequency with which respondents, broken down by BSN Usage group, chose "Not Sure" or "Indifferent" to reflect their perception of BSN tools at the respective task. These results indicate roughly

90% of the Low Users are not Low Users because they perceive BSN as ineffective, rather they are uncertain as to the effectiveness of BSN. As usage increases from Low to Moderate to Heavy, uncertainty about relative effectiveness decreases.

Perceived effectiveness may not always translate into productivity. To assess usefulness of BSN, respondents were asked how the use of BSN has affected their productivity. A five-point Likert scale item was used with the following scale points: Increased Significantly, Increased Somewhat, Not Changed, Decreased Somewhat, and Decreased Significantly. Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of the importance of BSN (currently or in the future) to sales success. The item used was "I believe that BSN is currently or will one day soon be critical to the success of most salespeople," and respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Unsure, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

TABLE 11:
Perceived Uncertainty as to the Benefits of Using BSN for Sales Related Tasks

	Leads	Qualify	Planning	Testimoni- al	Credibility	Comm. w/Cust.	Comm. w/Comp	Promoting	Reconnecting
Low Users	89.1	90.6	89.1	90.6	90.6	90.5	92.1	90.5	84.1
Moderate Users	46.8	45.6	41.8	49.4	46.8	38.5	41.8	48.1	26.6
Heavy Users	12.8	12.8	14.9	19.1	15.2	8.5	17	14.9	12.8

TABLE 12:
Perceived Productivity Gain and Importance of BSN

		Mean	Diff. from Low Users	Diff. from Mod- erate Users
SN Productivity	Low Users	2.98		
	Moderate Users	2.81	0.17*	
	Heavy Users	2.41	0.57**	0.40*
SN Critical	Low Users	2.43		
	Moderate Users	2.28	0.15	
	Heavy Users	1.79	0.63*	0.48

Again, a One-Way ANOVA was used to assess difference in means on Productivity and Criticalness among the three BSN Usage groups. The results are presented in Table 12.

The differences between the BSN Productivity mean scores of Low Users and Moderate Users, Low Users and Heavy Users, and Moderate Users and Heavy Users are statistically significant. These results indicate more frequent users are more likely to perceive productivity improvements from using BSN. The distribution of the scores on these two items is presented in Tables 13 and 14.

As one would expect, the distribution of scores shows that nearly all of the Low User respondents indicated their productivity hasn't changed. Just over 75% of the Moderate Users indicated their productivity has not changed, and only 20.7% indicated some productivity improvement. Approximately 56% of the Heavy User group indicated their productivity has increased (7.7% Significantly, 48.7% Somewhat). Interestingly, in the Heavy User group, just over 43% indicated no change in productivity (38.5%) or a decrease in productivity (5.1%).

TABLE 13:
Distribution of Perceived Productivity Changes from BSN

Group	Rating	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low Users	Increased Significantly	0.0	0.0
	Increased Somewhat	2.1	2.1
	Not Changed	97.9	100.0
	Decreased Somewhat	0.0	
	Decreased Significantly	0.0	
	Total	100.0	
Moderate Users	Increased Significantly	0.0	0.0
	Increased Somewhat	20.7	20.7
	Not Changed	77.6	98.3
	Decreased Somewhat	1.7	100.0
	Decreased Significantly		
	Total		
Heavy Users	Increased Significantly	7.7	7.7
	Increase Somewhat	48.7	56.4
	Not Changed	38.5	94.9
	Decreased Somewhat	5.1	100.0
	Decreased Significantly		
	Total	100.0	

The distribution of responses presented in Table 14 shows over 60% of the Low User and Moderate User respondents believe BSN is or will be critical to the success of most salespeople. This is particularly interesting given the perceptions of how BSN is impacting their productivity currently. Nearly 80% of the Heavy User group believes BSN is or will be critical to the success of most salespeople. This result isn't unexpected given the extent to which these respondents use BSN.

Discussion

The results from this exploratory study provide insight into the extent to which BSN tools are

being used in sales. First, the results suggest salespeople with approximately 20 years of experience (or more) are less likely to use BSN tools than salespeople with fewer years of experience. While they are less likely to use BSN tools, they tend to have higher incomes than salespeople with roughly half as much experience (not an unexpected finding). What is interesting about these results is the lack of a statistically significant difference in incomes between Low Users and Heavy Users despite the Low User group having an average of seven years (the mean difference is statistically significant) more sales experience than Heavy Users. This result supports the idea that the use of BSN tools, or other factors associated with

TABLE 14:
BSN Critical to Success Now or in the Future

Group	Rating	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low Users	Strongly Agree	21.4	21.4
	Somewhat Agree	42.9	64.3
	Unsure	17.9	82.1
	Somewhat Disagree	7.1	89.3
	Strongly Agree	10.7	100.0
	Total	100.0	
Moderate Users	Strongly Agree	32.8	32.8
	Somewhat Agree	27.6	60.3
	Unsure	27.6	87.9
	Somewhat Disagree	3.4	91.4
	Strongly Agree	8.6	100
	Total	100	
Heavy Users	Strongly Agree	43.6	43.6
	Somewhat Agree	35.9	79.5
	Unsure	17.9	97.4
	Somewhat Disagree	2.6	100.0
	Strongly Agree	0.0	
	Total	100.0	

the use of BSN tools (e.g., use of other technology like CRM and so forth), affects income. Additional research investigating the relationship between BSN usage and income is needed.

With respect to the hype cycle, these results are consistent with the Gartner group's placement of BSN as in the "Peak of Inflated Expectations" stage. First, overall adoption/incorporation of BSN tools is low. Roughly 28% of respondents reported using Facebook 1 – 2 times per day or more. If you add to that the 23% who use Facebook 1 – 2 times per week, the total is still just over half of respondents. And, while the context of the Facebook usage questions was business, it's difficult to know how much of the reported usage is for business vs. personal use. Usage of LinkedIn, a purely business oriented BSN tool, is substantially lower. Just over 10% of respondents reported using LinkedIn daily and another 25% reported using it weekly. While LinkedIn is arguably the most popular pure business BSN tool, only 35% of respondents use the tool regularly. That is the same percentage of respondents indicating they *never* use LinkedIn. The findings regarding perceived "ease of use" suggest that lack of usage is not a function of perceived difficulty with using the BSN tools. The means for all three groups on this item were 3.02 (neutral) or less, meaning respondents did not find BSN tools difficult to use.

Additional evidence of BSN's fit in the "Peak of Inflated Expectations" stage is the difference between expectation and performance. Specifically, with the exception of the Heavy User group, most of the respondents perceived no productivity gains resulting from using BSN tools. In the Heavy User group, 39% perceived no gain in productivity and 5% perceived a decrease in productivity. Despite the lack of perceived productivity improvements, an overwhelming majority of respondents (64% Low Users, 60% Moderate Users, and 80% Heavy Users group) expect BSN to be critical to the success of salespeople.

Effectiveness

Comparing user groups, Heavy Users found BSN more effective than the other user groups at Sales Call Planning and Communicating with Customers. Moderate Users found BSN more effective than Low Users for Reconnecting with Old Contacts. However, with few exceptions, the means for perceived effectiveness of BSN tools for common sales related tasks are 3 (uncertain) or less (some degree of effectiveness). What is striking about these findings is that even among Heavy Users there appears to be substantial uncertainty as to whether BSN is effective. The means for Generating and Qualifying Leads (often hyped the most as being improved by using BSN) are above 2.5 (2 = effective, 3 = Uncertain) across each user group, suggesting a lack of conviction that BSN is effective in these tasks.

Managerial Implications

This study provides additional empirical support for the notion that the hype surrounding the benefit of BSN may exceed the actual value being realized from BSN. If BSN continues through the hype cycle, managers should anticipate a period of deflated expectations before BSN's true value, if any, will be realized.

Given the rapid growth of BSN and its integration into contact management, CRM, and smartphone applications, it is likely BSN tools will be an integral part of sales technology moving forward. The objective of management should be to work with its sales force to 1) determine how BSN should be used and 2) develop performance metrics to gauge its effectiveness. Managers should resist the temptation to invest resources in BSN technology without a clear and demonstrable value-added use for these tools.

Limitations

The generalizability and otherwise usefulness of the study results should be tempered with the limitations associated with the research

methods utilized to conduct the study. First, the while taken from different sources, the samples for this study were convenience samples. As such, they may not be truly representative of the population of interest. Second, most of the measures used in this study were not previously tested. Third, some of the variables used were ordinal (e.g., those measuring effectiveness of BSN on sales tasks) and to the extent that gaps between scale points are different, drawing conclusions from a One-way ANOVA analysis can be problematic.

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Appendix 01 – Early Days of Social Networking: Selected Transcripts from Gateway's Bulletin Board in 1994

Issues Posted

"041" "94-10-04 21:17:17 EST"

"America Online I also hate Gateway's technical support and customer service The only response I get from Gateway is that "they are doing their best". Anyone knows how to get prompt response from them?"

Author Comment: This posting supports notion that people read the messages

"043" "94-11-26 22:17:35 EST"

"America Online I now have two Gateway 2000 Computer products I'm particularly unhappy that new customers are having the same problems I had with your technical service a year ago! Steven Goldstein (SGoldst293)"

Author Comment: Third party vouching for Gateway's good service and providing advice to other customer.

"063" "94-08-17 11:15:07 EST"

America Online Dear Mr. Imrey; I have four Gateway systems . . . I have been using computer since CPM systems were the only personal systems. I am quite confident that

they will fix your system. You may have to first send it in and let them try again to fix it not replace it. I do wish you luck Lee. Your fellow Gateway owner. PS Remember to always backup your drive, as you see you never know what will happen. Shipping could have even damaged the data on it."

be bought with a three warranty. I never had this option when I bought mysystem. Any chance of being able to get it now??Doug Van TolNemesisVTRD #3 Box 1750Bristol, VT 05443(802) 453-3904O/N 1768336"

Author Comment: This post demonstrates people read and get ideas from the postings. This person wanted a 3 year warranty apparently after reading message "76"

"078" "94-07-31 15:20:54 EST"

"America Online would like to reg for warranty too... purchased myp5-60...march 1,1994...order no 2940187,also since i have your attention...my hard drive is buzzing a lot lately..didn't do it til recently, and nothing new has been added recently either..also when im not using pc and screen saver is on..sometimes ill see ablank screen..no screncsaver ...no c prompt.. no windows program manager and the 3 lits are on all at the same time...it does not respond to clicking or return, not response to alt -ctrl-del only reset seems to do anything whats wrong with it?"

Author Comment: Shows bulletin board being used by one user to help another.

"113" "94-11-29 17:55:41 EST"

"America OnlineI have the exact same question. I posted a message today for them. I hope to receive an answer soon. But if you do first I would appreciate your contacting me. I will do the same. My name is Marchem. Thanks"

"129" "94-07-28 14:10:45 EST"

"America OnlineThis is none of my business but, if by any chance you used a credit card for your purchase and that card is a Gold whatever card, you may have an automatic warranty extension through the card company. Good Luck!Beete82"

"173" "94-07-30 05:02:19 EST"

"America OnlineTeri,Hello it's me again. Any chance of me being able to purchase an extended warranty after the original 1 year expired. I've seen that new G2K systems can