Realign and Redefine

Sprout Social Index

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Introduction

The days of social as an optional marketing channel are over. Now that social has its rightful place at the table, it is vital to understand where in the funnel social efforts should be targeted.

As marketers, we hear about ROI every single day—and social marketers remain anxious about it. To truly understand what ROI means in the social marketing industry, and how social marketers are aligning with consumer preferences, we asked more than 2,000 social marketers how they approach structure, goals and content. We asked about their priorities and what they need to do their best work. Then we cross-referenced their efforts against what consumers actually want.

We found that social is still very much a personal platform. People spend time on social, first and foremost, to interact with family and friends. As brands put together campaigns and messaging, they must remember that they are guests at dinner, not members of the nuclear family: their role in user feeds is delicate, valuable and should be treated with great care.

So how can brands disrupt the user experience in the least intrusive and most relevant way? Our data shows the answer: with awareness and consideration stage content. Think long-term, not quick fix. Think relationships, not attribution.

Our latest and most comprehensive Sprout Social Index shows how marketers should realign and redefine their social strategies and how serving audiences contributes to the bottom line.

Key Findings

Consumers want brand awareness and consideration stage content from brands on social. But 80% of social marketers are hyper-focused on awareness activities, leaving out the consideration piece of the puzzle.

The social marketer's No. 1 challenge is still ROI. Return on investment is the top concern for 55% of social marketers. This makes sense for two reasons: They aren't meeting the full needs of their social audience with both brand awareness and consideration content; and they're defining ROI incorrectly to begin with.

Where there is alignment: customer service. On the front lines with customers and prospects everyday, an overwhelming majority (88%) of social marketers understand the importance of customer service on social; nearly half (45%) of consumer respondents have reached out to a company on social.

Employee advocacy is the new influencer marketing. Social marketers in 2018 see the value in employee advocacy as a cost-effective, scalable alternative to influencer marketing. Seventy-one percent of social marketers use employees as influencers or advocates today or want to in the future, while only 19% of marketers surveyed had the budget for an influencer program. This shift reflects consumer tastes: 61% of consumers said they would be more likely to research a product or service recommended on social by a friend vs. 36% for influencers/celebrities.

Social marketing departments are under-resourced. More than half of social marketers don't have access to all the software they need, and 65% of social marketers indicate needing a dedicated resource for content development.
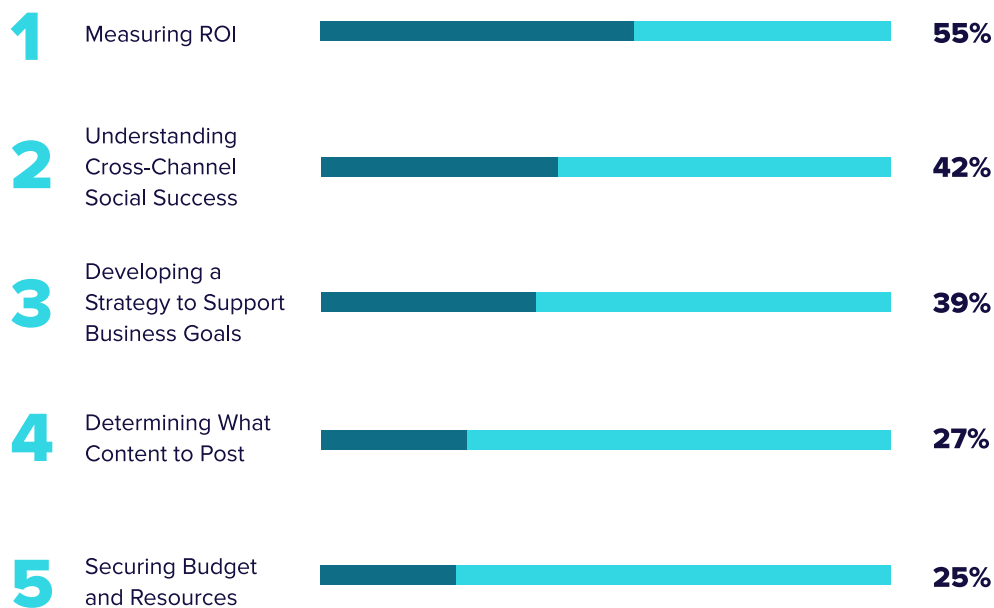
Facebook remains a dominant force in marketing strategies and consumer behavior. A whopping 97% of social marketers list Facebook as their most used and useful social network, and Instagram blows Snapchat out of the water by social marketer usership and consumer adoption. In fact, 83% of marketers use Instagram and 13% use Snapchat; 51% of consumers use Instagram and 30% use Snapchat.

Redefining ROI

Social marketers have been racking their brains and utilizing a lot of resources to tie social directly to sales–reflecting what they think or have been told social ROI should be. However, after surveying more than 3,000 marketers and consumers, it is clear that the "return" in ROI needs to be redefined.

Before we can redefine ROI, we need to understand how big a challenge ROI is for social marketers today. More than half of social marketers (55%) say that measuring ROI is a top challenge for them.

Challenges for Social Marketers

1 Measuring ROI — **55%**

2 Understanding Cross-Channel Social Success — **42%**

3 Developing a Strategy to Support Business Goals — **39%**

4 Determining What Content to Post — **27%**

5 Securing Budget and Resources — **25%**
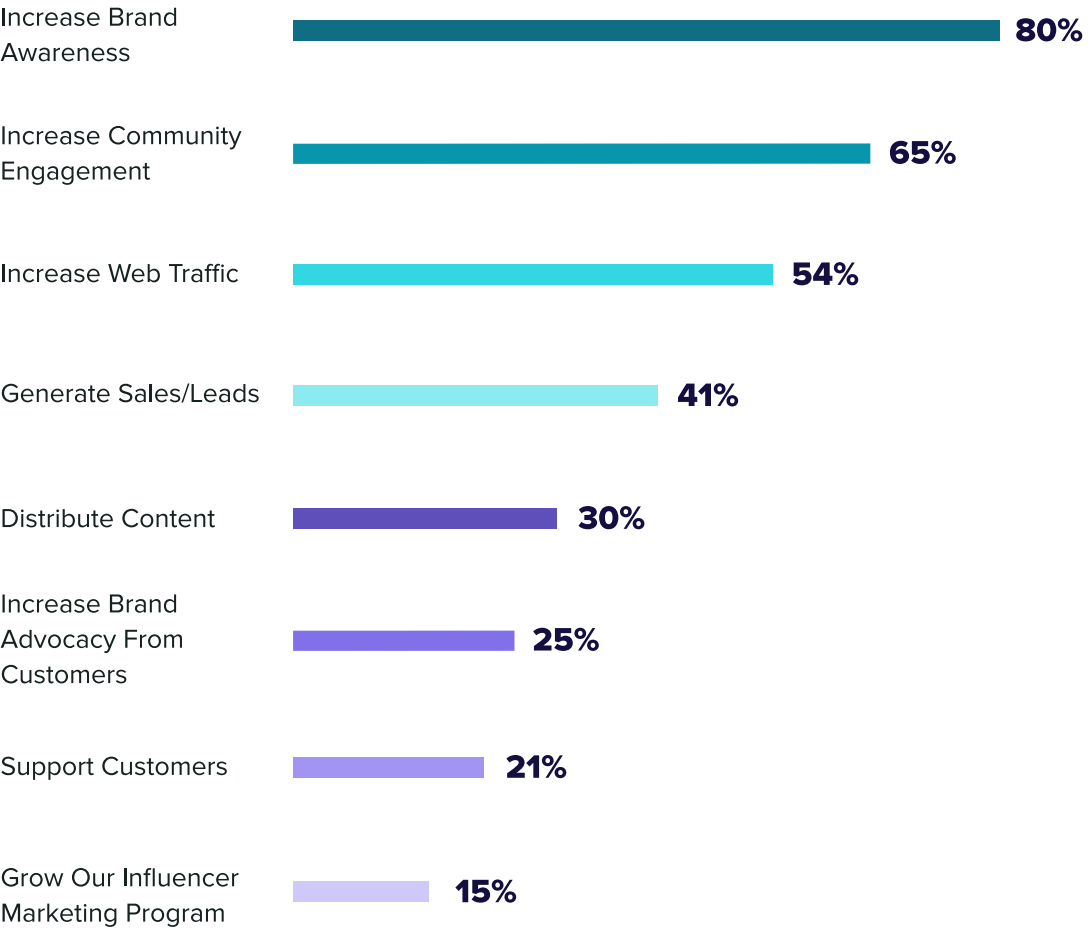
Traditionally ROI for social has been focused on direct attribution to sales—how is your Facebook campaign driving people to the checkout line? However, that model doesn't actually reflect where social marketers are focused. Eighty percent of social marketers say increasing brand awareness is their primary goal on social, and another 80% say their key strategy is increasing engagement across their social channels.

In fact, only 14% of marketers say they are able to quantify the revenue from social. Looking at social primarily through the sales lens breeds an overly microscopic perspective.

📈 Social Marketers' Biggest Goals

Increase Brand
Awareness — **80%**

Increase Community
Engagement — **65%**

Increase Web Traffic — **54%**

Generate Sales/Leads — **41%**

Distribute Content — **30%**

Increase Brand
Advocacy From
Customers — **25%**

Support Customers — **21%**

Grow Our Influencer
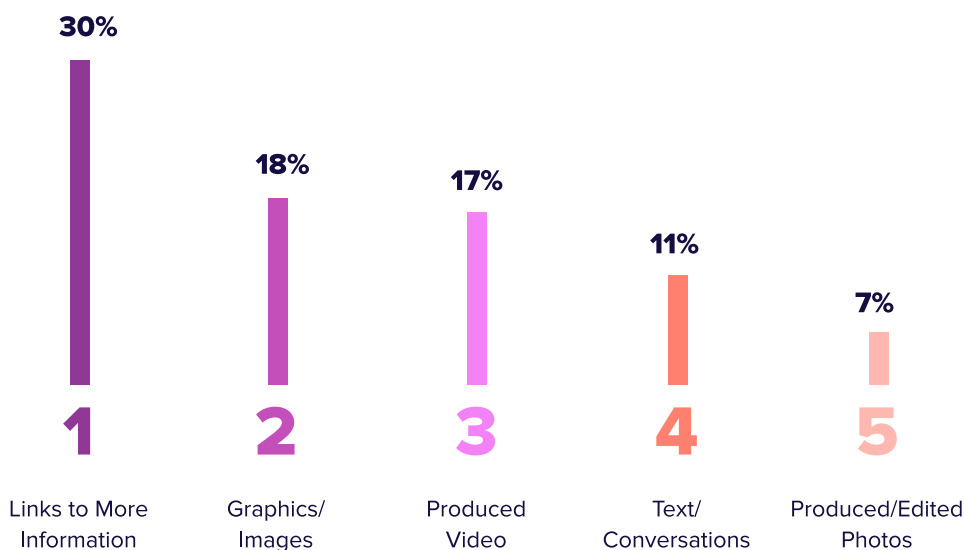Marketing Program — **15%**

That's not because social marketers aren't sophisticated enough to focus on conversions. It's because social's true value isn't in direct attribution—it's in the awareness and consideration stages of the funnel. It's in expanding the net of people who know about your brand and offerings, and then nudging them down the funnel with quality content and customer service — topics we'll cover later in the Index.

But true ROI isn't based on marketers' goals and best practices; it is defined by what consumers want and what they take action on. When asked what they want from brands on social, consumers say they prefer content that aids in awareness and consideration, not the end sale.

Consumers' top preference for social content falls into the consideration category, with 30% of consumers surveyed wanting links to more information from brands on social, and most preferring discounts, sales and educational posts (more on that later). This validates social media a strong distribution channel for web content that supports the consideration phase, when your audience wants to learn more about your brand and/or topic area.

Second comes awareness stage content, with nearly one in five respondents preferring graphics and images, and 17% preferring produced videos. This is where entertaining posts, inspiring posts and posts that tell a story are more useful.

📈 Content Types Consumers Want From Brands on Social

| 30%				
	18%	17%		
			11%	
				7%
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Links to More Information	Graphics/ Images	Produced Video	Text/ Conversations	Produced/Edited Photos

Sprout Stance

> Expanded awareness is ROI. Increased consideration is ROI. To build strong, long-term relationships on social that go beyond click-and-buy, you must expose people to your brand in a visually satisfying way, link them to more information and make authentic engagement a primary focus. This is the content that consumers, who use social primarily to interact with friends and family, are most interested in from brands.
>
> Make sure that your performance metrics ladder up, too. Track progress towards increased awareness with KPIs like impressions, reach, engagement, audience growth and video views; track progress towards increased consideration with metrics like engagement, link clicks and, again, video views.

For as much as marketers are thinking and worrying about ROI, they certainly aren't having those conversations with their leadership: 60% of social marketers aren't having frequent conversations about ROI with their bosses.

3 in 5 Social Marketers Aren't Having Regular Conversations About ROI With Their Boss
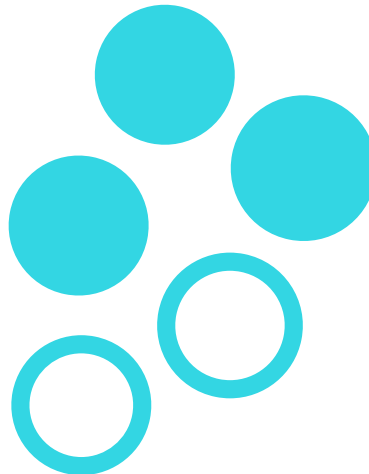
This is major missed opportunity to get aligned with leadership on what ROI is and how social affects the entire business. It prevents social marketers from having the conversations they need to shift organizational perception of social ROI, so that all members recognize the incredible value social brings to driving authentic awareness and sustainable consideration.

Social Content Strategy in 2018

If social marketers redefine ROI from the top and underscore the true value of social among leadership, CEO included, they can stop wasting time and resources on content and campaigns that don't resonate. In this section, we'll review missed opportunities for reaching consumers today and discuss how to realign with what consumers actually want to see from brands on social.

Missed Opportunities for Reaching Consumers

Our data shows that the top three content priorities for social marketers are misaligned with consumer preferences. Marketers are focused on posts that teach (61%), tell a story (58%) and inspire (53%), while consumers are looking for discounts and sales (73%), posts that showcase new products and services (60%) and posts that teach them something (59%).

📈 What Marketers Post vs. What Consumers Want on Social

Marketers		Consumers	
Posts That Teach Something	**61%**	Discounts or Sales	**72%**
Posts That Tell a Story	**58%**	Posts That Showcase New Products or Services	**60%**
Posts That Inspire	**53%**	Posts That Teach Something	**59%**
Posts That Announce What Is Happening at a Company	**51%**	Posts That Entertain	**56%**
Posts That Entertain	**47%**	Posts That Inspire	**49%**
Posts That Showcase New Products or Services	**46%**	Posts That Announce What Is Happening at a Company	**41%**
Posts That Showcase a Company's Personality	**44%**	Posts That Tell a Story	**37%**
Posts That Showcase a Company's Employees	**24%**	Posts That Showcase a Company's Personality	**23%**
Discounts or Sales	**18%**	Posts That Showcase a Company's Employees	**13%**
Posts That Are Partnerships With Influencers	**16%**	Posts That Are Partnerships With Influencers	**12%**

Sprout Stance

The sole overlap between top marketing priorities and consumer preferences is "posts that teach." If you aren't already, meet consumers in this sweet spot in the consideration stage. This content takes consumers a step beyond knowing who you are, to knowing what you do and what space you are a part of or an expert in.

Remember, too, that educational content covers a wide range of topics, from how to use a product, to how to make a recipe, to how to do a workout move, to how to travel well and beyond. It does not necessarily have to put your product at the forefront to create educational value for your audience, but it should relate to your industry and expertise.

It's important to note here that everyone loves a deal, but social marketers can't build strategies solely around deals and promotions. This content, while it leads to conversions, does not build long-term relationships with target audiences.
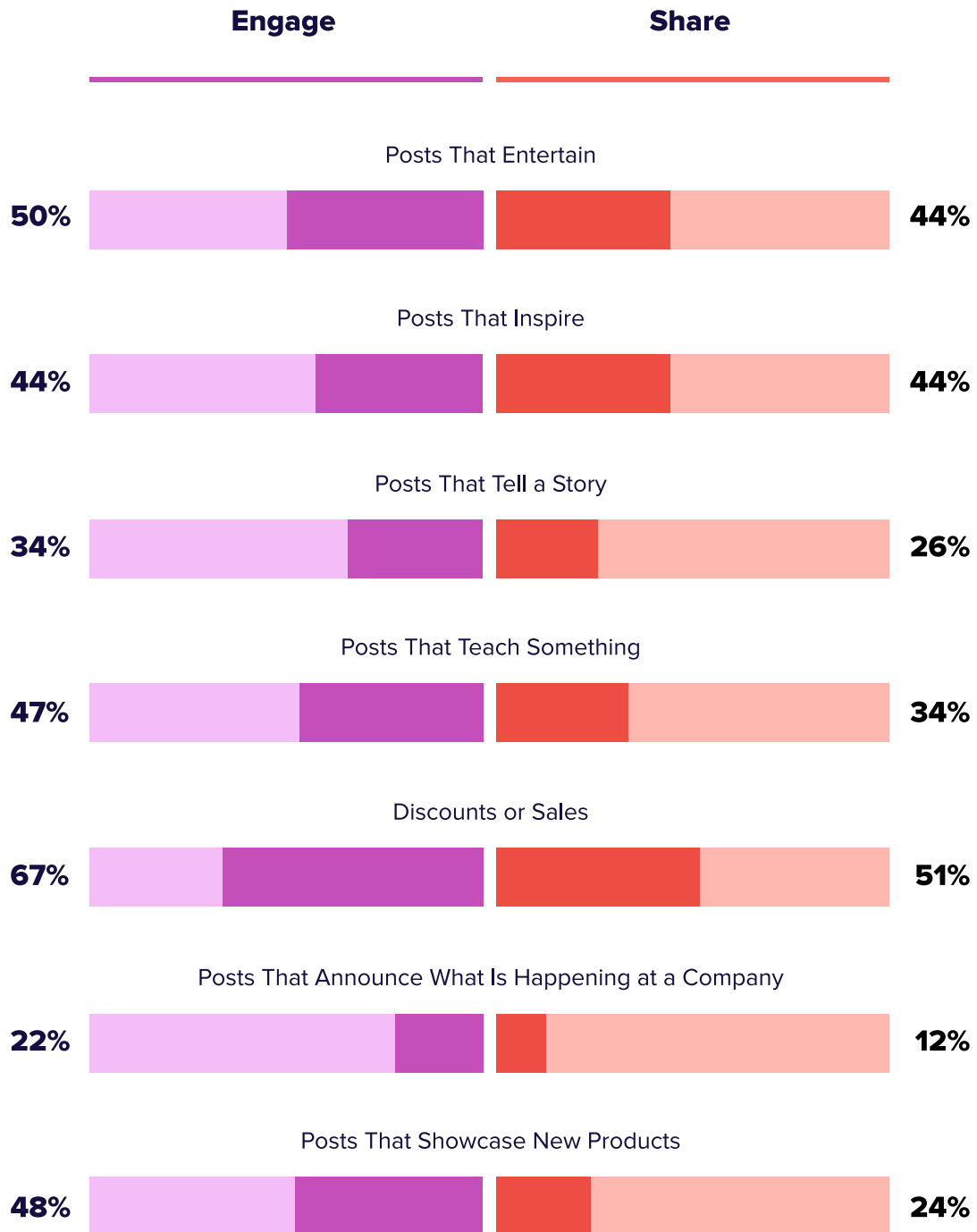
The most enlightened social marketing strategy integrates awareness and consideration stage content — opening the door with entertainment and inspiration, then carrying audiences across the threshold with education, information about new product offerings and discounts and sales.

Brands want their campaigns to resonate. To do this, they need to develop content that is tailored to their audience and designed to engage. When consumers were asked which brand content they are mostly likely to engage with vs. which they were most likely to share with their audiences on social, there several key takeaways. Most notably, the threshold for sharing content was higher than for engaging with content across almost all content types. The one exception was inspirational content, which consumers were equally likely to engage with and share with their audiences.

- Consumers are **13% more likely** to engage with entertaining brand content than share it with their audiences.
- Consumers are **equally likely** to engage with and share inspirational content.
- Consumers are **31% more likely** to engage with storytelling content than share it.
- Consumers are **24% more likely** to engage with promotions and deals than share them.
- Consumers are **150% more likely** to engage with employee advocacy posts than share them.
- Consumers are **90% more likely** to engage with posts that showcase company personality and announce company happenings than they are to share with friends on social.
- Consumers are **50% more likely** to engage with posts showcasing new products and offerings than share them.

Social marketers who want to expand brand awareness and content reach, as opposed to generating engagement on their owned accounts, should make inspirational and entertaining content a focus—especially since consumers are more likely to digest brand content when it comes from people they know, care about and trust. But they should also be offering up posts that showcase new products or services to increase web traffic and drive consideration.

📈 Brand Content Consumers Engage With vs. Share on Social

Engage	Share

Posts That Entertain

50% ▮▮▮ 44%

Posts That Inspire

44% ▮▮▮ 44%

Posts That Tell a Story

34% ▮▮▮ 26%

Posts That Teach Something

47% ▮▮▮ 34%

Discounts or Sales

67% ▮▮▮ 51%

Posts That Announce What Is Happening at a Company

22% ▮▮▮ 12%

Posts That Showcase New Products

48% ▮▮▮ 24%

Sprout Stance

If you want consumers to share your content, head for their hearts (and funny bones, as you'll learn more about in the next section) with content that inspires and entertains. To inspire and entertain your audience effectively, you need to understand what they care about and are entertained by today. Use a social listening solution to keep a pulse on what your target audience is talking passionately about right now.

If you want to make consumers aware of or consider your new products or services, showcase them but don't set primary goals around amplification.

Finally, remember that your success metrics need to be tailored for the content you're planning and promoting. You don't need a singular goal to be successful, but you do need to be clear about the results you want and can reasonably expect from each goal and subsequent strategy. Your educational content might not get shares—instead you should be looking at reach, engagement and link clicks.

Entertainment, Inspiration & the Growing Power of Social Video

Consumers are interested in a wide variety of content formats from brands on social. Sixty percent of consumers want to see posts that showcase new products or services, 59% want to see educational posts, 56% want to be entertained and 49% want to be inspired by brands on social. The common thread here is that consumers prefer content to be strongly visual. Over half (58%) prefer visual-first content, with graphics and images and produced video taking the lead in this category.

Social marketers agree, listing "more video content" as the key ingredient to success on social in 2018 on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube.

📈 What Social Marketers Need to Succeed, by Network

	Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn	Snapchat	Twitter
1	Video	Video	Audience Insights	Video	Data-Driven Strategy
2	Budget for Ads	Data-Driven Strategy	Data-Driven Strategy	Audience Insights	Audience Insights
3	Data-Driven Strategy	Audience Insights	Video	Data-Driven Strategy	Video
4	Audience Insights	Budget for Ads	Budget for Ads	Budget for Ads	Budget for Ads

This also fits with social marketers' acknowledgement that a dedicated video producer or graphic designer is exactly what they would need to do their best work, closely followed by social analytics software.

📈 Additional Resources Social Marketers Need to Succeed

Dedicated Resource for Content Development

65%

Analytics Software

53%

More Staff

47%

Publishing Software

28%

But what kind of videos should social marketers be delivering to their audiences? Surprisingly, consumers surveyed want brands to stay "produced" rather than unedited, preferring produced video four times more than unproduced videos.

Given the transparent and immediate nature of social, this defies the general expectation that social users want raw videos from brands. In fact, people want brands to share produced and edited videos that showcase beauty and deliver a clear message. This is yet another reason that professional video production resources and distribution plans are key investments for social marketers in 2018.

Brands can produce all the video content they want—but what if no one's watching? What truly impacts whether someone watches a video or clicks away? The top factors that impact whether or not a consumer watches a video on social are length of video (61%), caption or description of video (51%) and whether the video is an ad or not (40%).

This tells us that consumers won't watch a video that is going to take up too much of their time, they want to know what they are about to watch before they press play and they care about the "authenticity" of the video—if consumers feel like they are being directly sold to, they are less likely to watch that video content.

📈 Technical & Emotional Reasons Consumers Watch Social Videos

Top Technical Reasons Consumers Watch Videos

Consumable Length

Captions or Description

Ad vs. Organic Feel

Top Emotional Reasons Consumers Watch Videos

To Laugh

To See a Good Story

To Feel Inspired

Sprout Stance

> Just because consumers dislike an "ad-like" approach from brands doesn't mean social marketers can't feature or link to product in videos. What it does mean, however, is that your video must also entertain, inspire and/or provide some other value besides "buy this now." Tactics that work include behind-the-scenes content featuring an inside look at a beloved brand (Instagram Stories is a great channel for this), content that helps your viewers in a way that overlaps with their interest in your brand and content that is, simply put, beautiful.

When it comes to maximum watch time, consumers responded with a wide range of watch times, but the most common was between 1-2 minutes. This suggests that your video content doesn't have to be long to succeed with your social audience.

Now that you know the technical factors that impact if your audience will watch a video, let's dive into the emotional factors. How do your consumers want your videos to make them feel? The top reasons that consumers watch videos on social are to laugh (71%), to see a good story (59%) and to feel inspired (51%). Consumers watch the most videos on Facebook (40%) and YouTube (49%).

A majority of social marketers (76%) are focused on engagement and amplification metrics, so we asked consumers if they share brand video content on social and what prompts them to do so. The good news: A majority of consumers (74%) share brand video content on social. The videos they share are most likely to be entertaining, inspiring or convey knowledge to friends.

Sprout Stance

> Video may be king, but ensuring that content reflects what consumers are looking for in their feed is queen. Remember that your brand is competing with friends and family for attention in user feeds, so it has to create real, unique value for users. As brands work to incorporate more video into their strategy, creating content that is quick, easy to digest and well-produced will ensure resources are being used most effectively.

Influencers & Advocates

We know video is what people want, but what about that other industry buzzword, influencers? Influencer marketing is a huge focus in the social marketing industry right now, but what is it actually doing? Does it resonate with audiences in the way social marketers want it to?

There is an almost even split between marketers who are using influencer marketing as a part of their strategies (46%) and those who are not (54%). Marketers who do use influencers are looking for reach (21%) and quality of content (20%) in influencer partnerships about equally, and more than half (56%) state that they use influencers to extend brand reach.

But what about the consumer perspective? When asked what their reaction would be if a friend posted about a company, product or service on social media, 61% of consumer respondents said they'd be more likely to research that product/service, compared to 36% if a product or service were mentioned by an influencer or celebrity. This shows that the best influencers are those who are perceived as "regular people" with relatable experiences and opinions.

Sprout Stance

Your audience is the most effective marketing tool you have at your disposal. If you are investing in influencer marketing, make sure amplification metrics like shares on Facebook and tags on Instagram are key success metrics for that influencer relationship. If a friend shares influencer content featuring your brand, you are more likely to achieve high-value reach, meaning reach which activates social users to want to learn more about you.

Consumers absorb influencer content across the major social networks at a surprisingly low level, between 1-11%, and prefer seeing posts that announce what is happening at a company 3x more than company posts that feature influencers or celebrities. And while 46% of marketers surveyed believe leveraging influencers is vital, less than half of that, only 19%, have a budget for it. This begs the question, should social marketers be focusing their efforts elsewhere?

📈 Percentage of Social Marketers With Influencer Marketing Budget

71%   No

19%   Yes

10%   I Don't Know
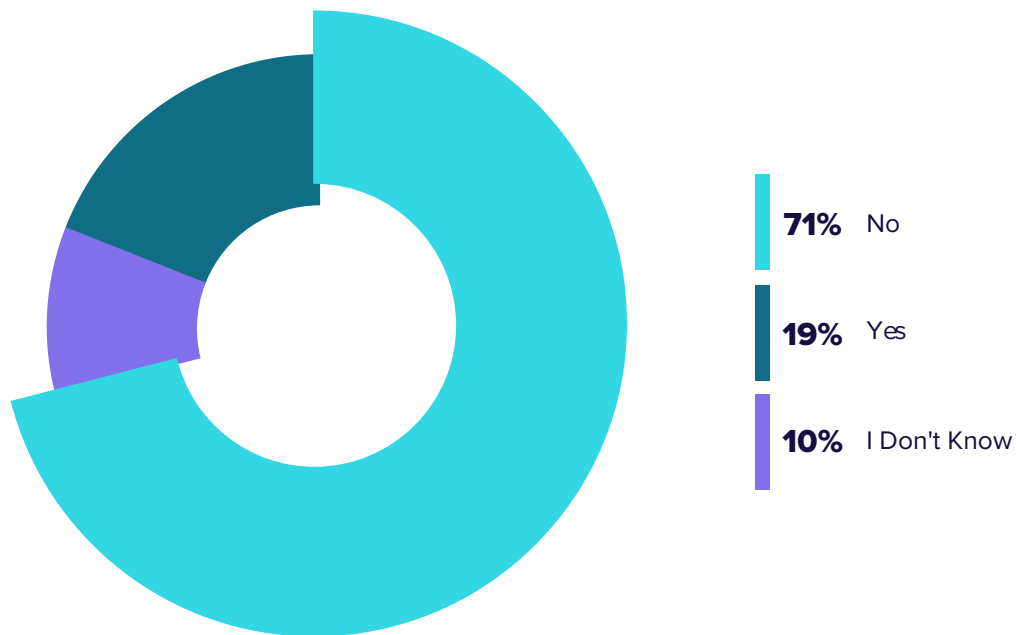
The answer may lie in employee advocacy, which delivers the authenticity people are seeking from one another and brands on social today. Seventy percent of social marketers see the value of employee advocacy, either using employees as advocates on social today, or seeking to in the future.

Employee advocacy, meaning empowering employees to spread your content on their own social channels, is a cost-efficient and scalable alternative to influencer marketing for brands. By enabling high-reach employees with high-quality content and messaging, you can achieve the expanded reach and consideration you are looking for.

📈 Percentage of Social Marketers Using Employee Advocacy

69% Use or Plan to Use
Employees as Advocates

31% Don't Use Employees
as Advocates
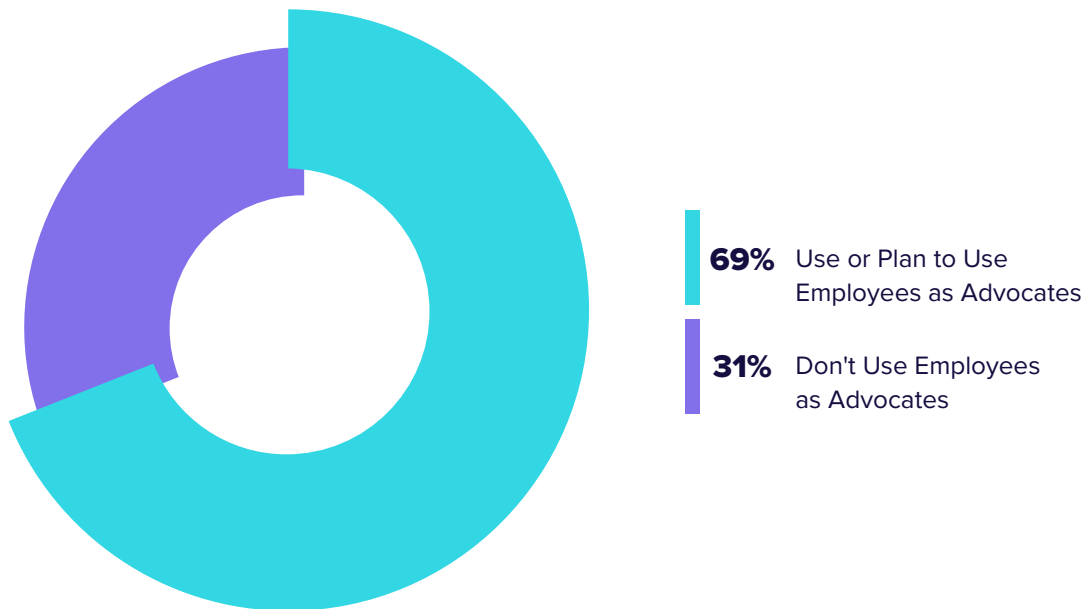
Engagement & Customer Service

Awareness and consideration content aside, there is one thing that marketers and consumers agree cannot be left out of a successful social strategy: customer service. Social is one of the first channels consumers head to when they have a question or an issue. In fact, 45% of consumers have done this.

Social is a unique channel in that the same individual or team is often expected to wear the customer service hat, in addition to the marketer's hat. This makes the social media manager the biggest expert at understanding their brand's audience in the entire marketing organization.

Social marketers understand the responsibility they have to customers. Eighty-eight percent of those surveyed view customer service on social as important to their brand, which makes sense considering that nearly half of consumers have reached out to a company on social.
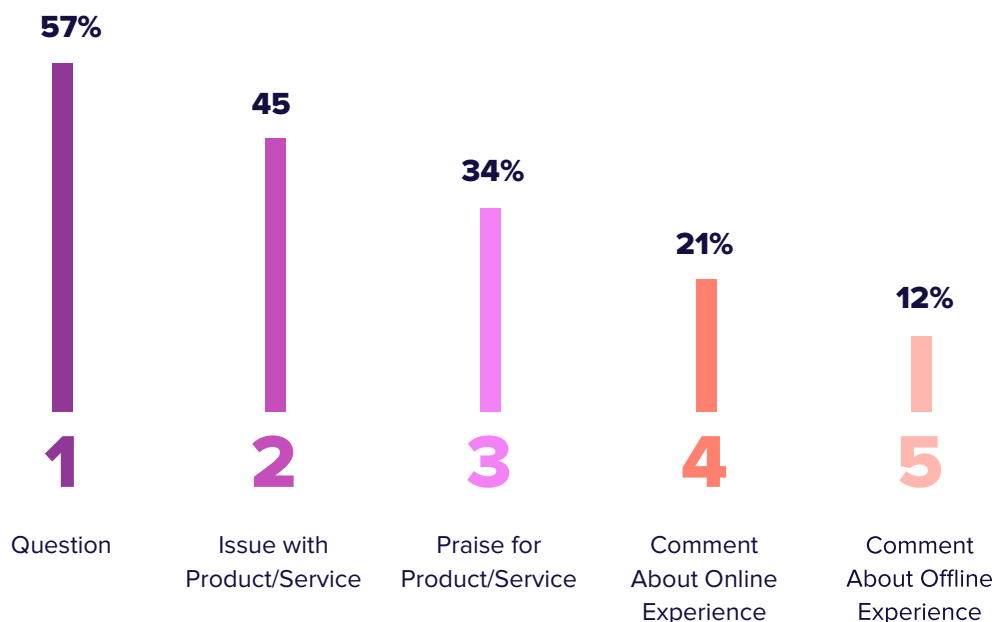
88%

of Marketers Say Customer
Service on Social Is Important
to Their Brands
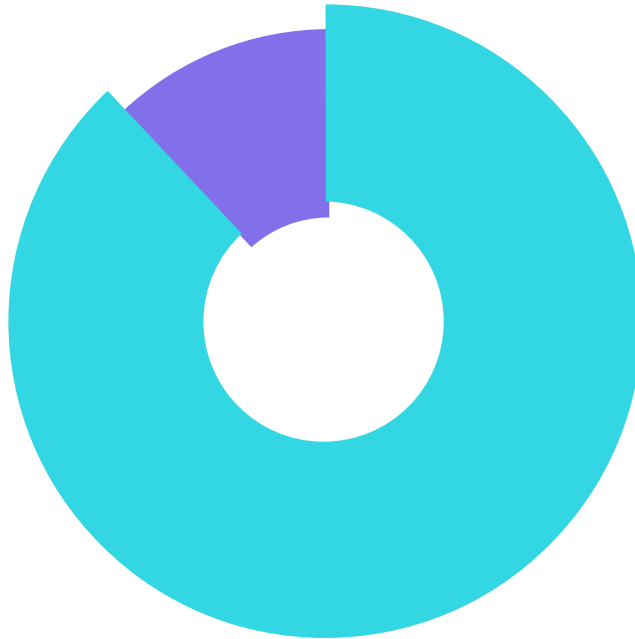
The top reasons that consumers reach out to brands on social are that they had a question (57%), they had an issue with a product or service (45%) or they wanted to commend a company on their product or service (34%). When a customer reaches out with a question, their No. 1 reason for reaching out on social, use this as an opportunity to form a relationship—not just resolve an issue.

▲ Reasons People Reach Out to Brands on Social

57%

45

34%

21%

12%

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Question   Issue with Product/Service   Praise for Product/Service   Comment About Online Experience   Comment About Offline Experience

There is a wide range for how many customer service requests a brand receives via social, though 58% of marketers surveyed receive between 1-50 requests in a week. There is also a wide range in response times, though the majority (78%) respond to a customer request within 12 hours. Finally, there is a 50/50 split between those looking to decrease their response times on social and those for whom this is not a focus, probably because they're managing customer service requests well today.
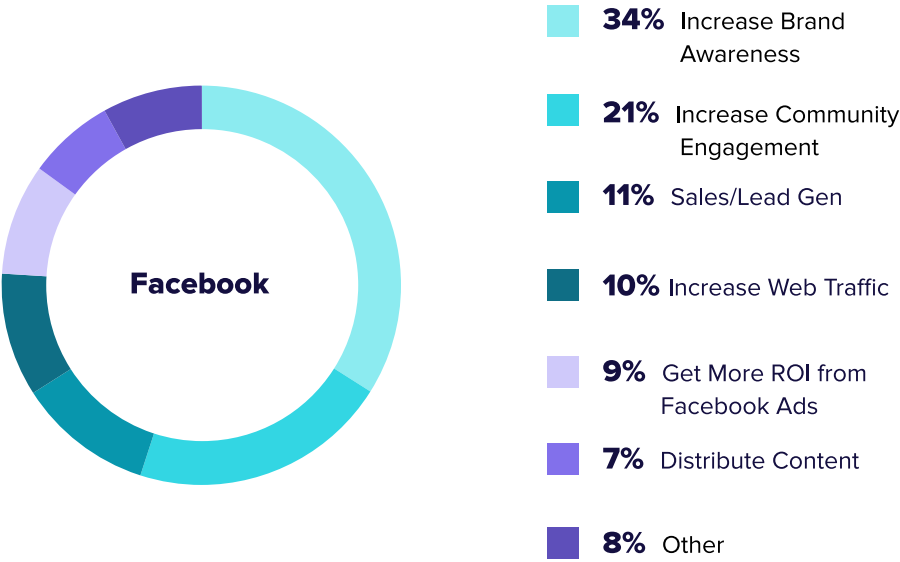
Social customer care doesn't just contribute to brand perception, it impacts your bottom line: 21% of consumers are more likely to buy from brands they can reach on social. The same percentage would rather message a brand on social media than call customer service. This tells us that social customer service has a financial impact and is swiftly becoming the consumer's preferred care channel.

All this data makes it crystal clear how important social customer care is to your social and overall business strategy. How can brands and social marketers actually improve their efficiency and strategy in the area? More than half of social marketers say the answer is a bigger team. We'll delve further into the resources that social marketers have and are missing later in the Index.
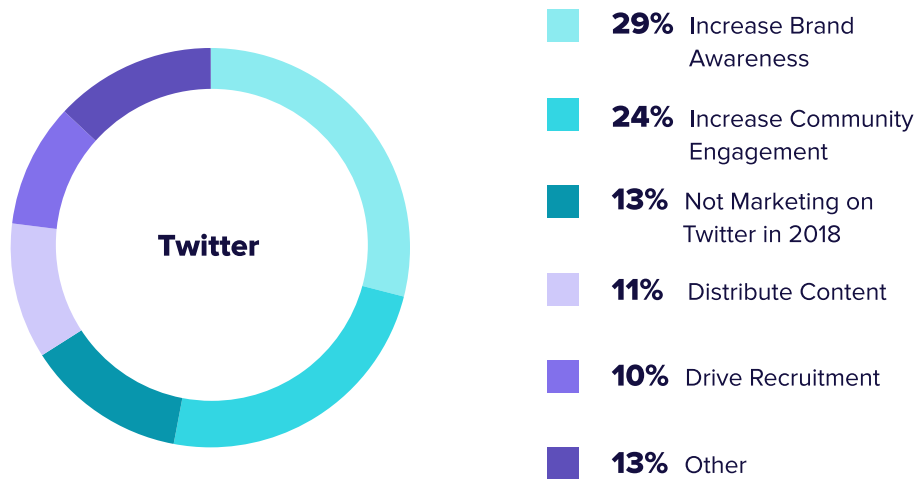
Network Trends: Marketer Perspective, Consumer Perspective

Now that we've reviewed general trends and perspectives, let's review individual social network trends, from both the marketer and consumer viewpoint. Every business has its own challenges and opportunities on social, and every social network is a unique and ever-evolving ecosystem. Here's what you need to know about how marketers and consumers approach the major social networks today.
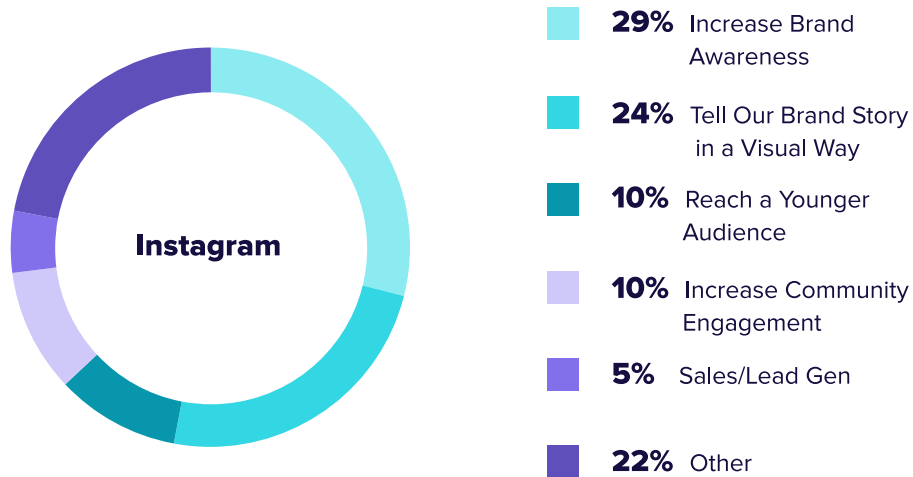
📉 Primary Goals for Marketers on Facebook

Facebook

34% Increase Brand Awareness

21% Increase Community Engagement

11% Sales/Lead Gen

10% Increase Web Traffic

9% Get More ROI from Facebook Ads

7% Distribute Content

8% Other

📈 Primary Goals for Marketers on Twitter

Twitter

29% Increase Brand Awareness

24% Increase Community Engagement

13% Not Marketing on Twitter in 2018

11% Distribute Content

10% Drive Recruitment

13% Other

📈 Primary Goals for Marketers on Instagram

Instagram

29% Increase Brand Awareness

24% Tell Our Brand Story in a Visual Way

10% Reach a Younger Audience

10% Increase Community Engagement

5% Sales/Lead Gen

22% Other

Facebook plays a vital role for social marketers and is the most used channel by consumers. Seventy percent of social marketers find Facebook ads the most useful for achieving their goals, probably due to the network's enormous audience, robust Business Manager and targeting features. Facebook is the top channel for social ad spend.

⛰ Most Used Channels for Ads by Social Marketers
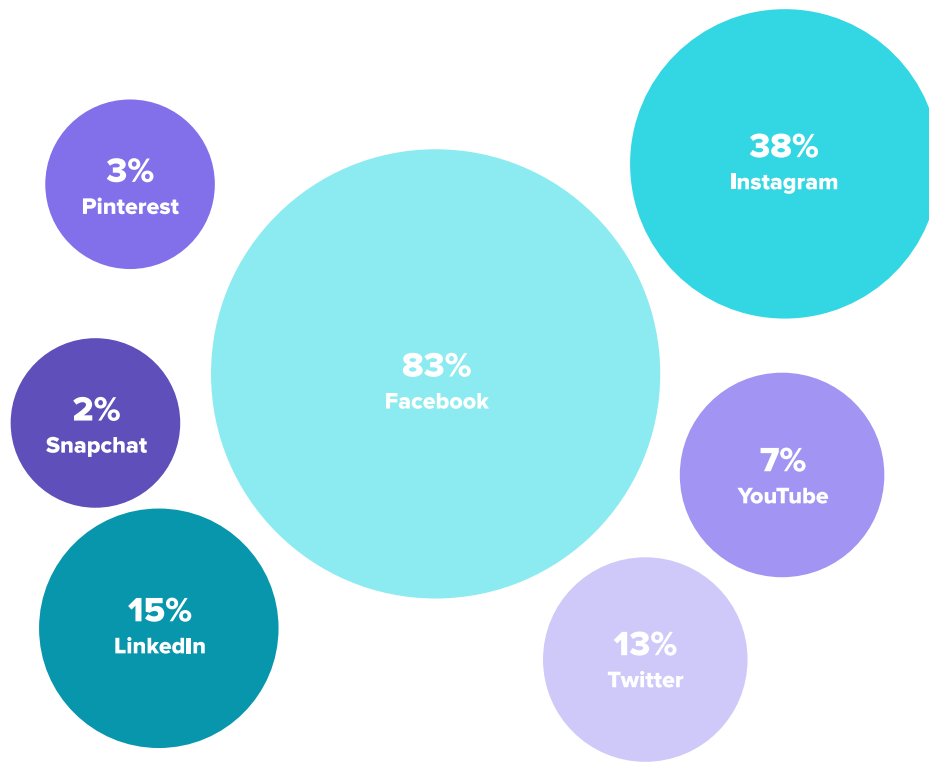
Additionally, social marketers spend the most time strategizing and executing on Facebook. Eighty-three percent of social marketers buy ads on Facebook. This matches up with consumer data we gathered: 94% of consumers surveyed use Facebook.
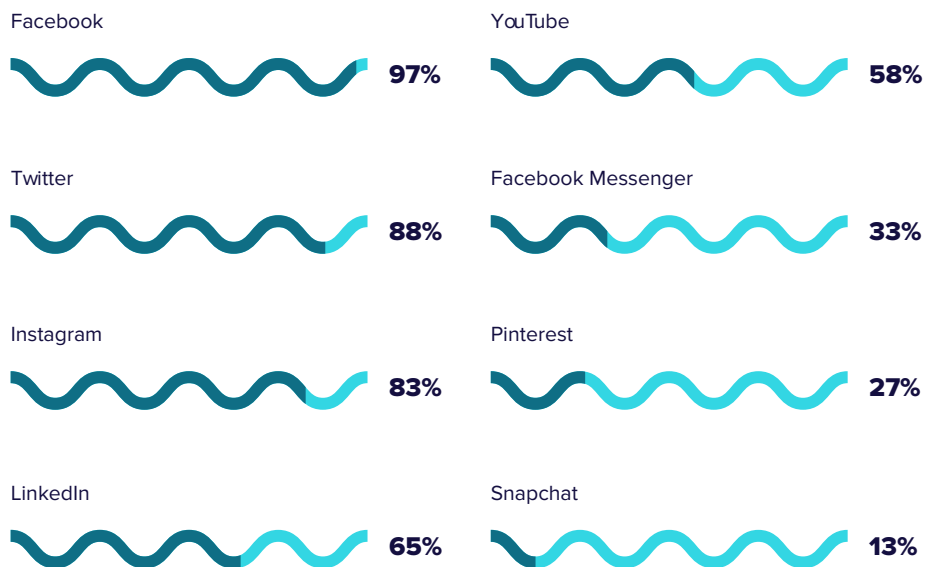
Also of note is that Instagram blows Snapchat out of the water by social marketer usership and consumer adoption. Eighty-three percent of marketers use Instagram vs. 13% use Snapchat.

📊 Instagram vs. Snapchat Usership

■ **Consumers** | ■ **Marketers**

| 30% | 13% | | 51% | 83% |

Snapchat   Instagram
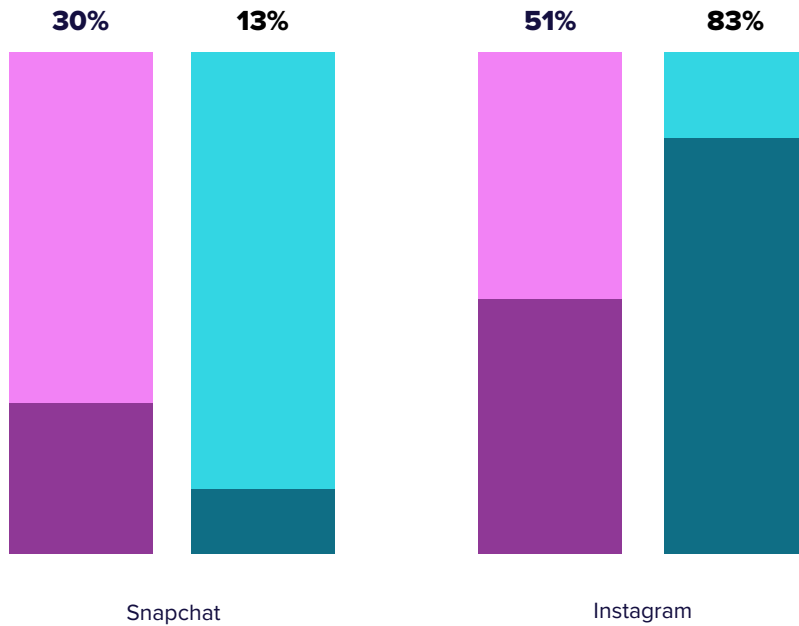
📊 Percentage of Social Marketers Using Each Network

Facebook
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **97%**

YouTube
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **58%**

Twitter
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **88%**

Facebook Messenger
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **33%**

Instagram
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **83%**

Pinterest
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **27%**

LinkedIn
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **65%**

Snapchat
〰️〰️〰️〰️〰️ **13%**

f Facebook Key Findings

- The top reasons consumers use Facebook are to engage with friends and family, share information with family and friends, and find entertainment.
- 79% of consumers have used Facebook Messenger.
- 71% of consumers like or follow company pages on Facebook.
- 64% of consumers have used Facebook Groups.
- 47% of consumers surveyed used Facebook Live.
- 40% of consumers watch the most video on Facebook.
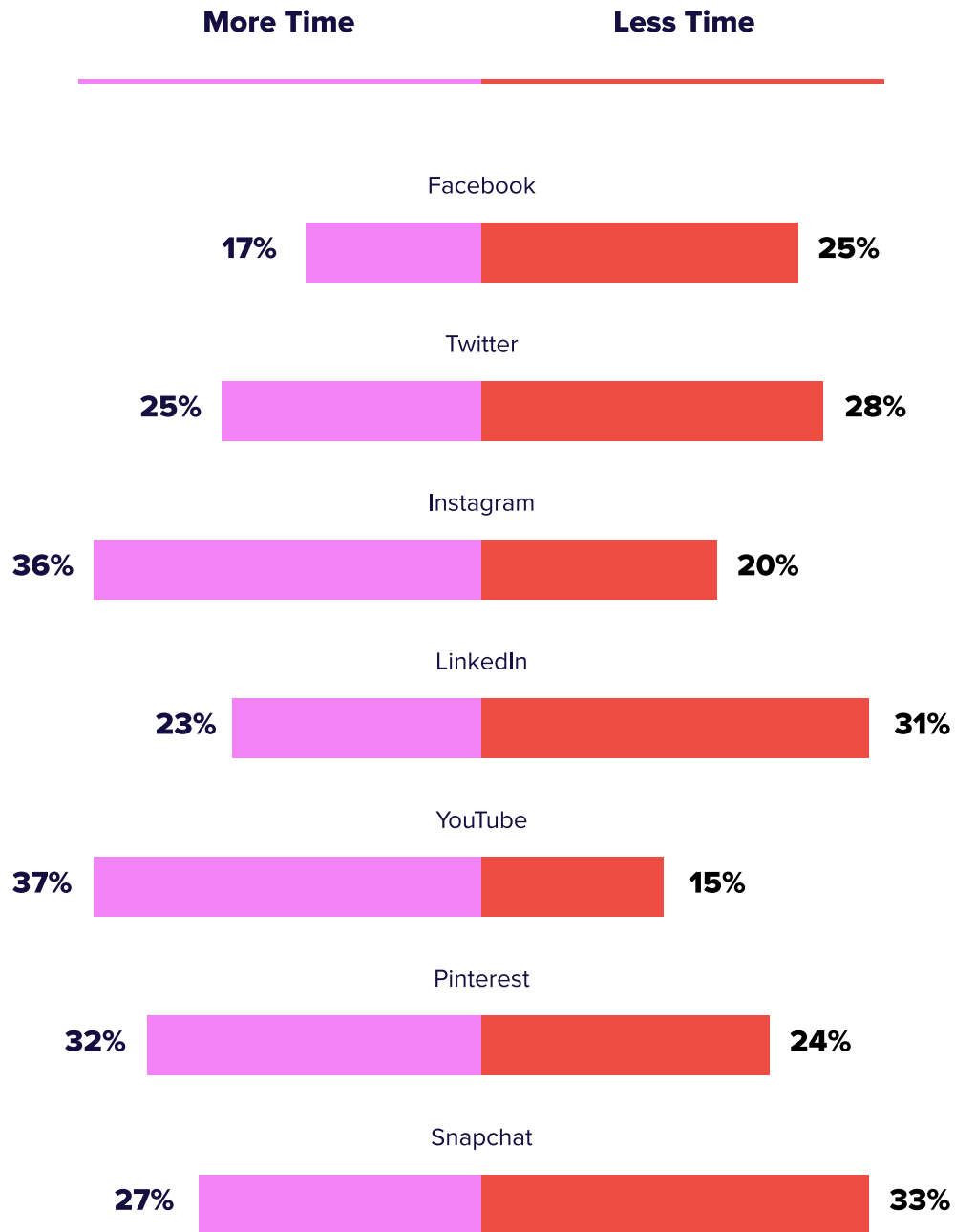- 39% of consumers have sent a message to a brand on Facebook.

Instagram Key Findings

- Engaging with friends and family, entertainment and inspiration are the top reasons consumers use Instagram.
- 51% of consumers used Instagram regularly, and more than half of those people (30%) like or follow a brand.
- 42% of consumers have used Instagram Stories.
- 29% of consumers have followed a hashtag on Instagram.
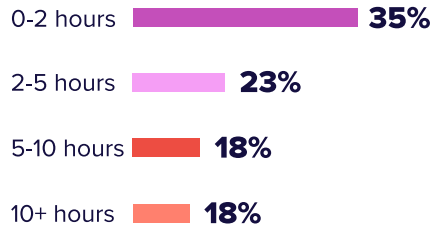- 26% of consumers have used Instagram Live.

Twitter Key Findings

- Consumers turn to Twitter for entertainment, news and engaging with friends and family, differentiating it from Facebook and Instagram.
- 43% of consumers use Twitter regularly, and more than half (27%) of those follow brands.
- 22% of consumers have used Twitter Moments.
- 19% of consumers have sent a message to a brand on Twitter.
- 13% of consumers have engaged with brand content within Twitter Moments.

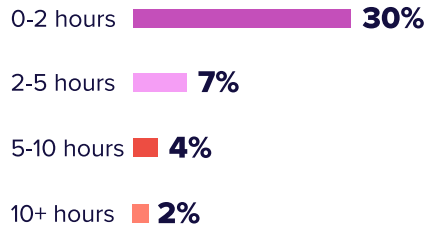## 📈 Shifts in Consumer Time Spent on Social, by Network

More Time   **Less Time**

Facebook
17%   25%

Twitter
25%   28%

Instagram
36%   20%

LinkedIn
23%   31%

YouTube
37%   15%

Pinterest
32%   24%

Snapchat
27%   33%

📈 Consumer Time Spent on Major Social Networks, Per Week

f Facebook

0-2 hours   **35%**

2-5 hours   **23%**

5-10 hours **18%**

10+ hours   **18%**

🐦 Twitter

0-2 hours   **30%**

2-5 hours   **7%**

5-10 hours **4%**

10+ hours   **2%**

ⓘ Instagram

0-2 hours   **31%**

2-5 hours   **11%**

5-10 hours **6%**

10+ hours   **3%**

in LinkedIn

0-2 hours   **30%**

2-5 hours   **2%**

5-10 hours **1%**

10+ hours   **<1%**

▶ YouTube

0-2 hours   **38%**

2-5 hours   **17%**

5-10 hours **12%**

10+ hours   **11%**

ⓟ Pinterest

0-2 hours   **37%**

2-5 hours   **9%**

5-10 hours **4%**

10+ hours   **2%**

👻 Snapchat

0-2 hours   **23%**

2-5 hours   **4%**

5-10 hours **2%**

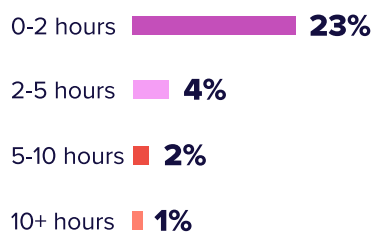10+ hours   **1%**
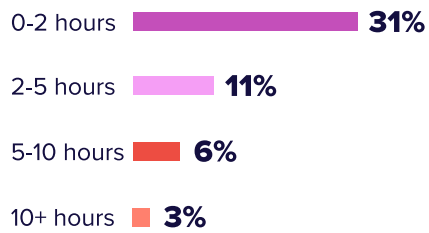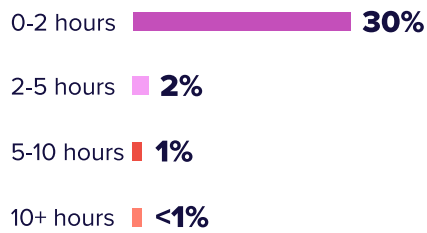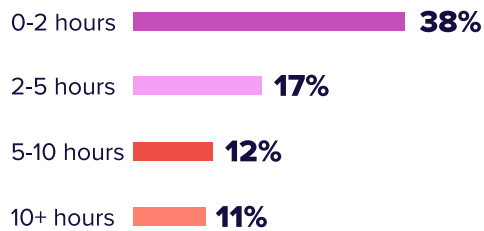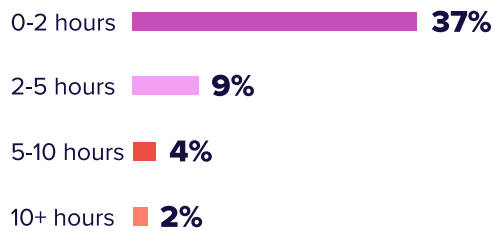
The State of the Social Marketing Team

The Social Team in 2018

Social budgets are growing in 2018—but are they growing the right way? It's vital that social teams focus on awareness and consideration, invest in the right tools and hire people who understand the kind of impact they're trying to make.

While social marketing teams don't have hiring plans this year, they do expect a budget increase. This tells us that the money being added to social will take the form of content, such as ads and video, to help expand reach and build engagement. But will marketing departments have enough people power to manage the new goals, strategies and conversations sparked by these resources?
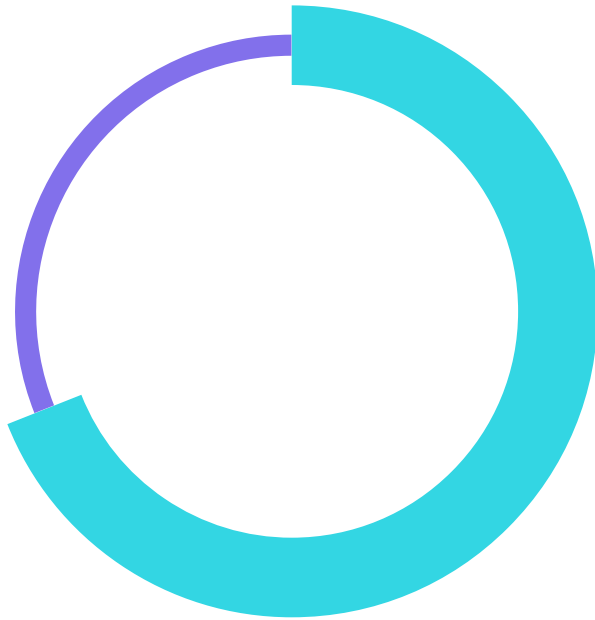
📊 Social Marketers Allocating More Budget to Social in the Next Year
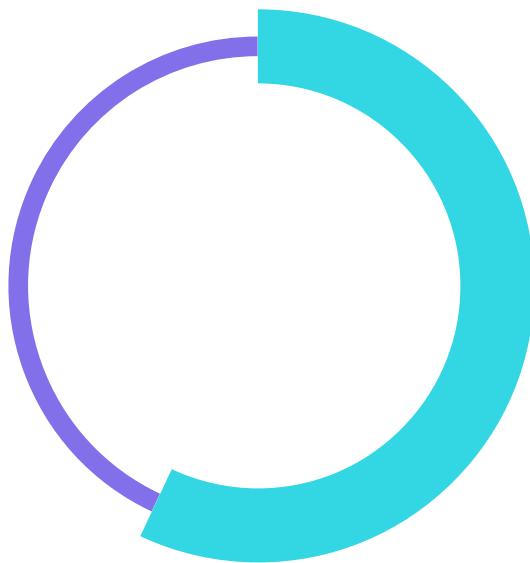
57% Allocating More Budget   **43%** Not Allocating More Budget

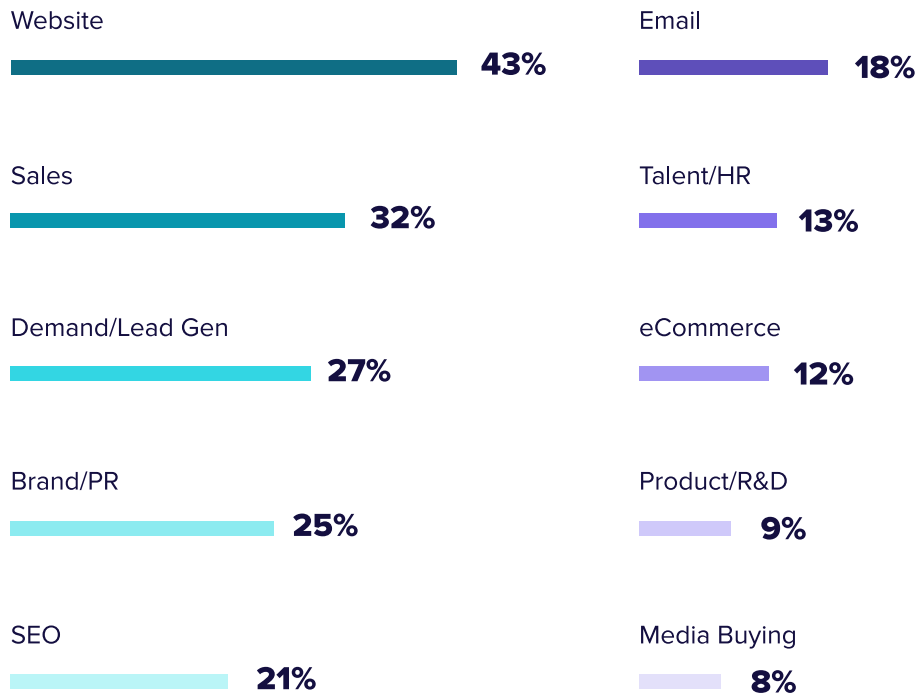## 📈 Brands Hiring More Social Staff in the Next Year

69% Not Hiring More Staff   **31%** Hiring More Staff

In 2018, the social team is owning social spend—not the media buyer. Eighty-two percent of social marketers surveyed say they control social ad spend in their organization. This makes sense, since the social marketer is set up to see the full scope of the social life cycle, not just individual touchpoints.

The majority of social marketers (64%) share data with the web team more than any other team in their organization, have the most insight into the web team (79%) and interact with the web team most (70%). Yet 42% still wish they had a bigger impact on the web team. There is a disconnect between what social marketers are experiencing and conveying from the social side and the change being made/integrated on the web side. It's time to make this alignment a key priority in 2018 and beyond.
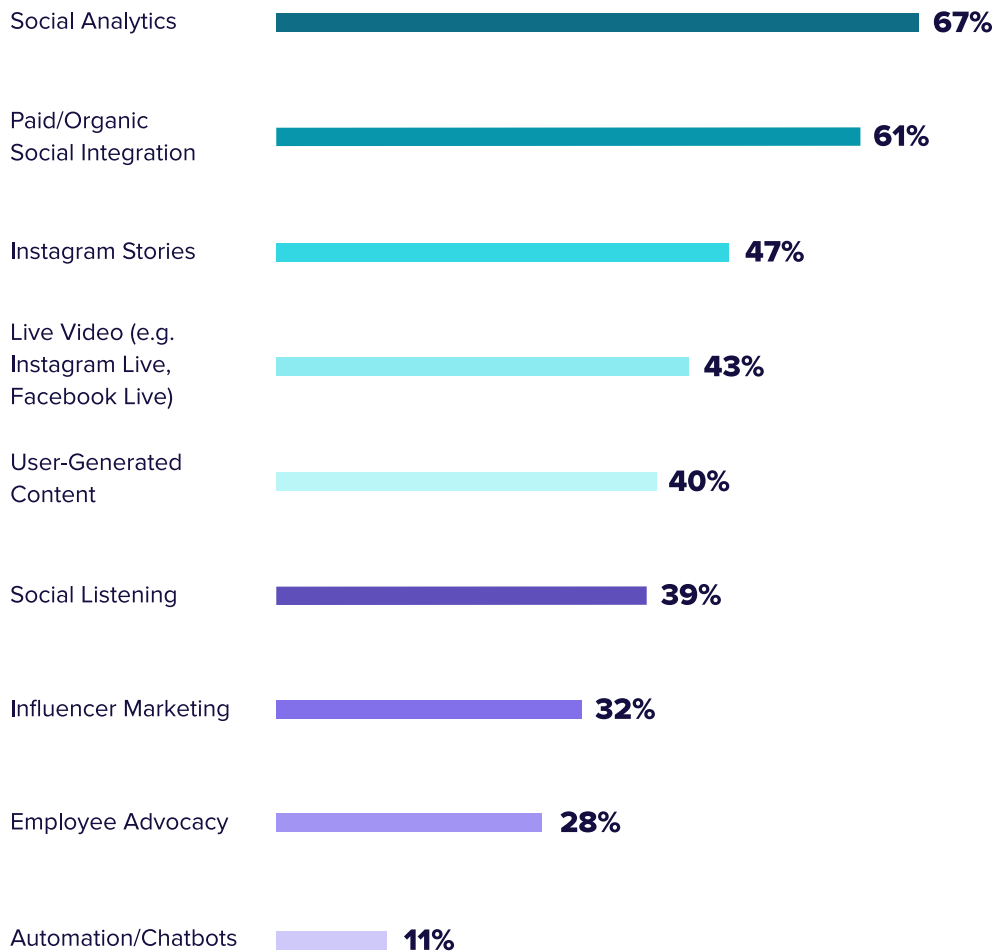
⛰ Other Departments Social Marketers Hope to Impact

Website
43%

Email
18%

Sales
32%

Talent/HR
13%

Demand/Lead Gen
27%

eCommerce
12%

Brand/PR
25%

Product/R&D
9%

SEO
21%

Media Buying
8%

Live video, paid/organic social integration and Instagram Stories are the top three features that social marketers expect to grow in the future. But when asked which features they are actually using, social marketers put social analytics at the top, followed by paid/organic integration and then Instagram Stories.

This tells us that social analytics—tracking progress towards goal and looking deeply into the data—is a key priority for social marketers, even above "shinier objects" like Instagram Stories and live video.

📊 Social Marketers' Most Used Features & Strategies

Social Analytics ███████████████████████ **67%**

Paid/Organic
Social Integration ████████████████████ **61%**

Instagram Stories ███████████████ **47%**

Live Video (e.g.
Instagram Live,
Facebook Live) █████████████ **43%**

User-Generated
Content ████████████ **40%**

Social Listening ████████████ **39%**

Influencer Marketing █████████ **32%**

Employee Advocacy ████████ **28%**

Automation/Chatbots ███ **11%**

How Social Marketers Use Social Data

And speaking of social data: accessing their social data is no longer a problem for social marketers—only 8% of respondents listed this as a challenge.

It's figuring out how to best leverage that social data that is challenging for social marketers in 2018, with 42% saying they have a hard time understanding what success means across all social channels. Additionally, 70% of social marketers say they know how to use social data to adjust social strategy,

but only 67% actually use their social analytics solution. This tells us that the majority of social marketers *think* they are making all necessary strategy adjustments with social data, but still aren't using their data to full capacity with in-depth social analytics—a huge missed opportunity.

Social marketers use social data most often to assess campaign performance (77%), understand target audience (63%) and develop creative content (60%), harkening back to their desire to prove ROI, serve audience needs more fully and create the content that will do just that.

How Social Marketers Use Social Data

To Assess Campaign Performance

77%

To Report to My Boss

59%

To Understand My Target Audience

63%

To Optimize Campaign Performance

57%

To Develop Creative Content
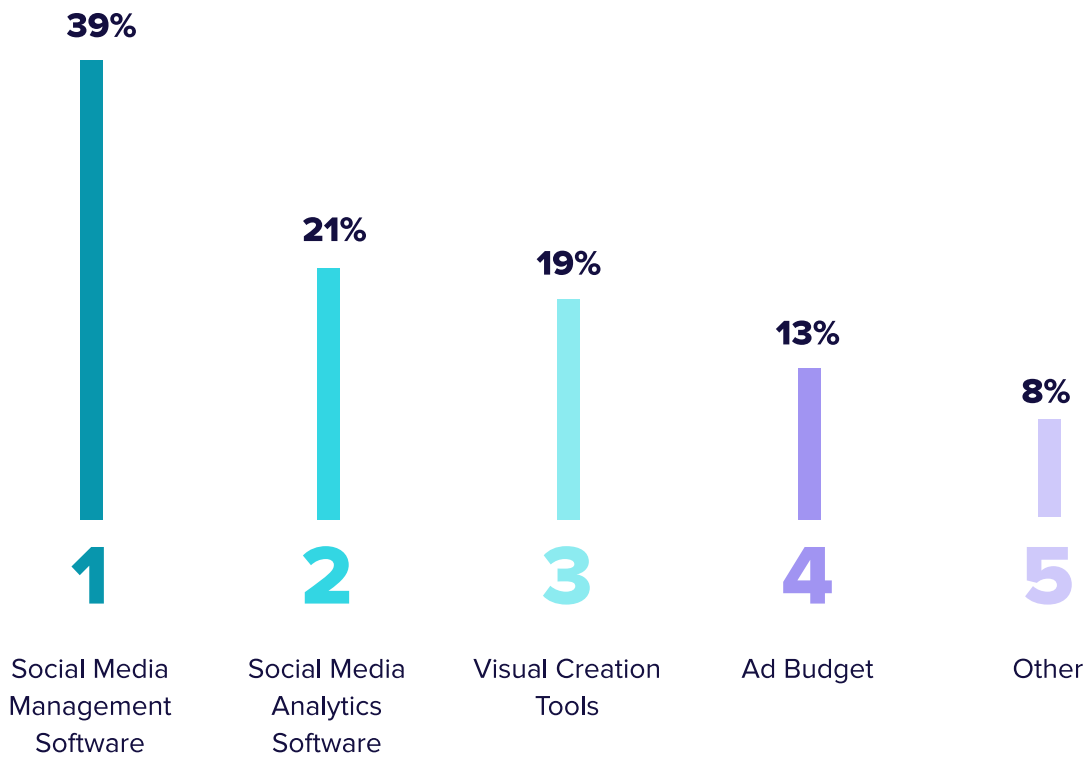
60%

To Measure ROI

47%

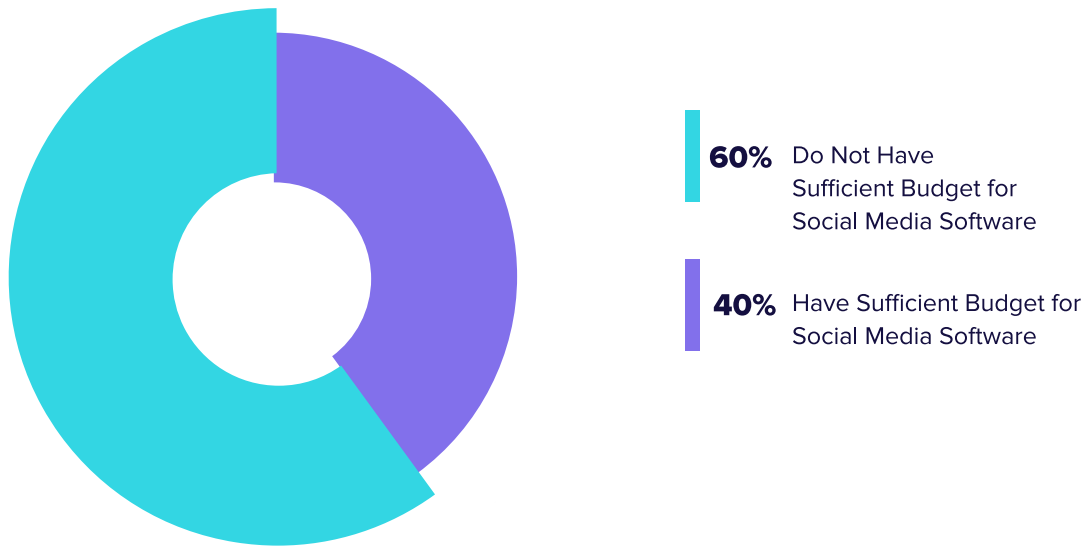## The Resources Social Marketers Need to Do Their Best Work

Since we know social media data is important to social marketers, it makes sense that the social marketers we surveyed said that they couldn't do their jobs without social media management and social analytics software.

However, only 33% of social marketers have the software they need. With the budget increases noted earlier, it appears that investments in the year ahead will likely focus on improving content as opposed to managing engagement and analyzing data. Content is certainly a priority across the board, but it is also important to see the impact of those efforts. Having candid conversations around how and where to divvy social spend can be beneficial to ensure teams are allocating budget in a meaningful way.

📈 Social Marketers' Must Have Tools

39%

21%

19%

13%

8%

1
Social Media Management Software

2
Social Media Analytics Software

3
Visual Creation Tools

4
Ad Budget

5
Other

📈 Social Marketers' Budget Availablity for Social Media Software

60% Do Not Have Sufficient Budget for Social Media Software

40% Have Sufficient Budget for Social Media Software

📈 Additional Resources Social Marketers Need to Succeed

Dedicated Resource for Content Development

65%

Analytics Software

53%

More Staff

47%

Publishing Software

28%

As referenced previously, influencer and employee advocacy programs will also require more marketing resources in 2018. Sixty-nine percent of social marketers either engage in employee advocacy today or want to in the future, and 70% of social marketers consider influencer marketing vital to their strategies. Social marketers understand the efficacy of influencer and employee advocacy programs and will need additional resources to throw their full weight behind them in 2018 and beyond.

Finally, social marketers will need more resources for social ads, especially on Facebook. Eighty percent of social marketers list social ads as important to their overall strategy.

Sprout Stance

Ambitious goals are important. But a goal without a plan —and the resources to support that plan—is only a dream. Whichever strategies you choose to meet your brand's goals on social, from influencer marketing and employee advocacy to social ads and video content, make sure you are equipped with the resources you need to succeed: a dedicated resource for content development, social analytics and social media management software, and the necessary amount of staff.

Conclusion

The first stage of the social marketer's evolutionary journey, proving that it's a valid marketing channel, has ended. In 2018, social media is a key channel for marketing organizations. But the next stage of evolution has just begun. In this stage, marketers must redefine success and realign with what consumers want to fulfill their mission on social. With this data and analysis, we hope you're equipped to make decisions and real change in your organization, from having tough conversations about ROI to selecting and deploying a consumer-focused content strategy.
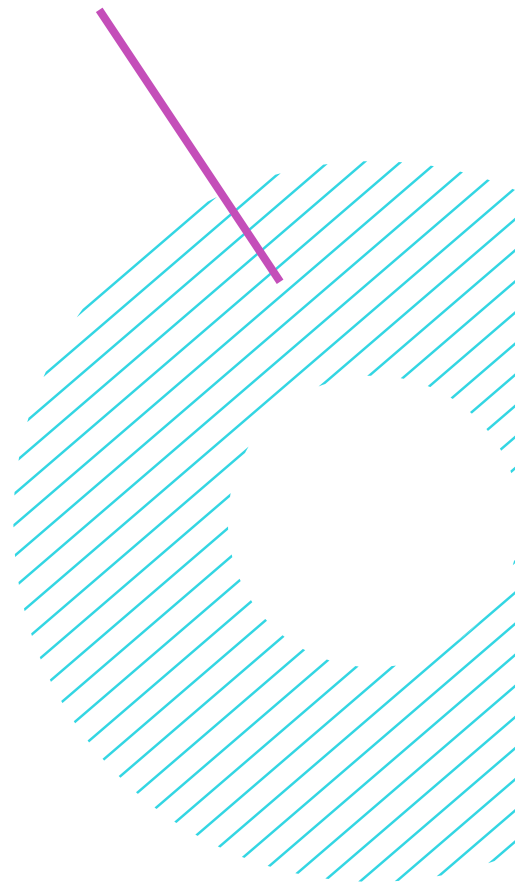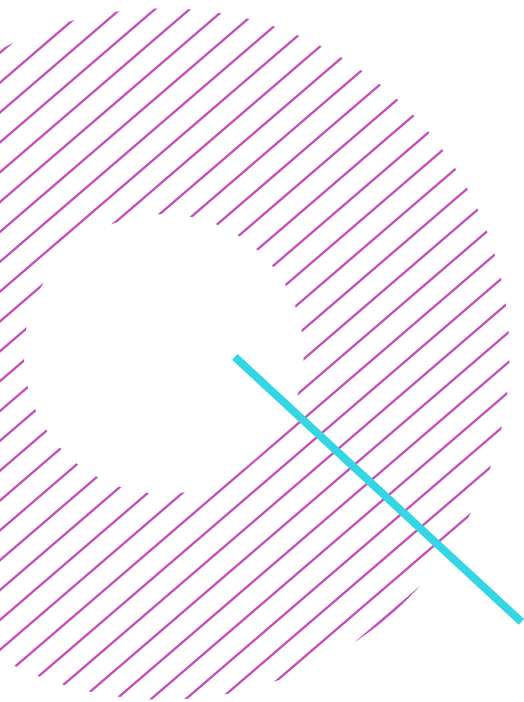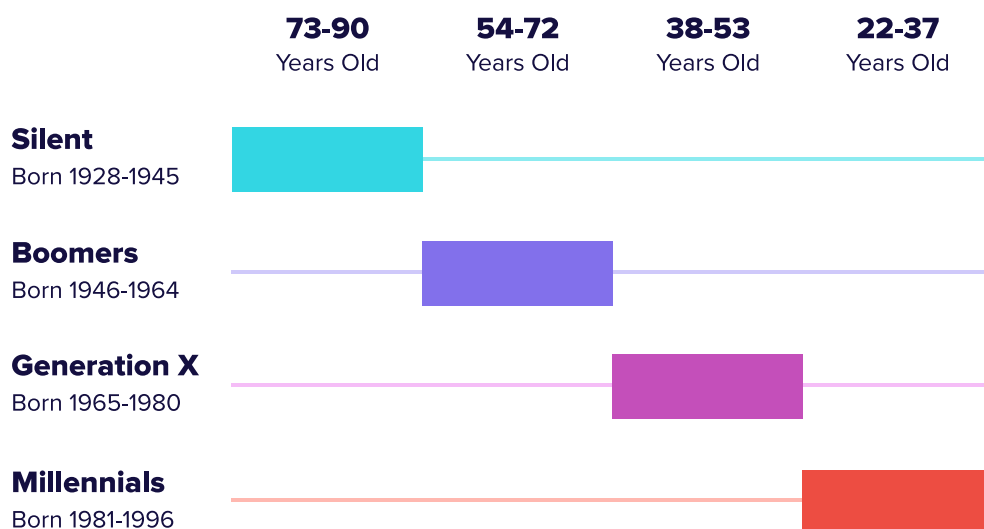
Appendix: Dissecting the Data by Age and Industry

A recent Pew Study differentiated between millennials (ages 22-37) and Generation X (ages 38-53) and their media consumption patterns. We wanted to see how this differentiation translates to social. Here were our most significant findings.

- Millennials are twice as likely to use Snapchat as Generation X
- Millennials want to see only friends' content on social 52% more than Gen X
- Millennials and Gen X prefer the same content from companies: Discounts or sales, posts that showcase products or services and educational posts

We also wanted to see how this translated to consumption around verticals, including automotive, banking/finance, government, marketing and advertising, media and entertainment, nonprofit, real estate, utilities, internet and software, hospitals and healthcare, retail and ecommerce, travel and hospitality, and food and beverage.

📈 Generations Defined

	73-90 Years Old	**54-72** Years Old	**38-53** Years Old	**22-37** Years Old
Silent Born 1928-1945	▬			
Boomers Born 1946-1964		▬		
Generation X Born 1965-1980			▬	
Millennials Born 1981-1996				▬

As a general rule, consumers are looking for product information, promotions and deals, and educational content. All content consumption preferences listed in each category are ranked in order of preference.

Automotive

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Product Information	Promotions and Deals	Educational Content	**Millennials** prefer inspirational and entertaining content and business updates more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers product information and news more than millennials.

Banking/ Finance

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Product Information	Promotions and Deals	Educational Content	**Millennials** prefer inspirational content, promotions and deals, educational content, and entertaining content more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers product information and news more than millennials.

Government

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
News	Educational Content	Business Updates	**Millennials** prefer entertaining and educational content more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers news more than millennials.

Marketing & Advertising

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Promotions and Deals	Product Information	News	**Millennials** prefer inspirational and entertaining content and business updates more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers product information and news more than millennials.

Media & Entertainment

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Entertaining Content	News	Content including celebrities/ influencers	**Millennials** prefer inspirational content and promotions and deals more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers entertaining content than millennials.

Nonprofit

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Inspirational Content	Educational Content	News	**Millennials** prefer product information and promotions and deals more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers news content more than millennials.

Real Estate

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Product Information	Promotions and Deals	News	**Millennials** prefer promotions and deals more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers product information more than millennials.

Utilities

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Promotions and Deals	Product Information	News	**Millennials** prefer promotions and deals more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers news more than millennials.

Internet & Software

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Product Information	Promotions and Deals	News	**Millennials** prefer promotions and deals and inspirational content more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers product information and news more than millennials.

Education

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Educational Content	News	Inspirational Content	**Millennials** prefer inspirational content more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers educational content and news more than millennials.

Hospitals & Healthcare

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Educational Content	News	Product Information	**Millennials** prefer promotions and deals more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers educational content, news, and product information more than millennials.

Retail & eCommerce

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Promotions and Deals	Product Information	News	**Millennials** prefer promotions and deals more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers educational content, news, and product information more than millennials.

Travel & Hospitality

| Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Promotions and Deals	Product Information	News	**Millennials** prefer inspirational and educational content more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers news and promotions and deals more than millennials.

Food & Beverage

Consumer Content Preference #1	Consumer Content Preference #2	Consumer Content Preference #3	Where Millennials & Gen X Differ
Promotions and Deals	Product Information	News	**Millennials** prefer inspirational and entertainment content more than Gen X. **Gen X** prefers product information and promotions and deals more than millennials.

About the Data

The Sprout Social Index is a report compiled and released by Sprout Social.
All referenced data is based on 1,253 consumer respondents and
2,060 marketer respondents.

The consumer survey was conducted by Survata, an independent research
firm in San Francisco. Survata interviewed 1,253 online respondents between
April 12, 2018, and May 1, 2018. For further information, visit **www.survata.com**.
The marketer survey was conducted via email, by Google Forms, between
April 4, 2018, and May 1, 2018.

For questions about the Index data, please contact **pr@sproutsocial.com**.
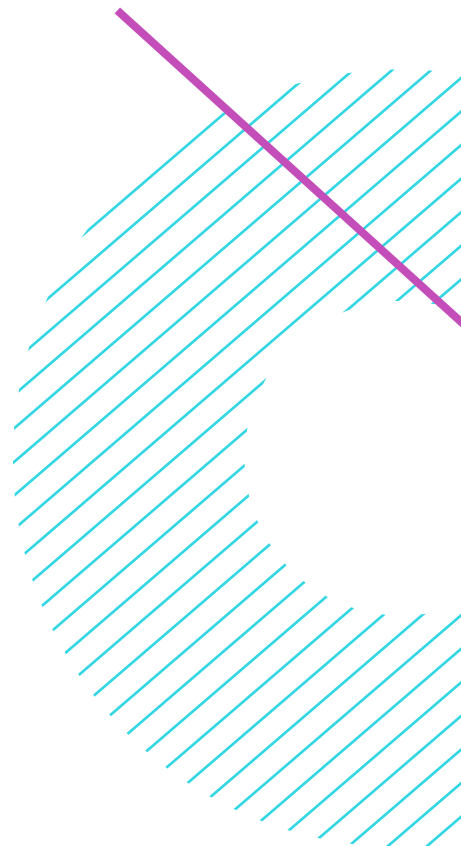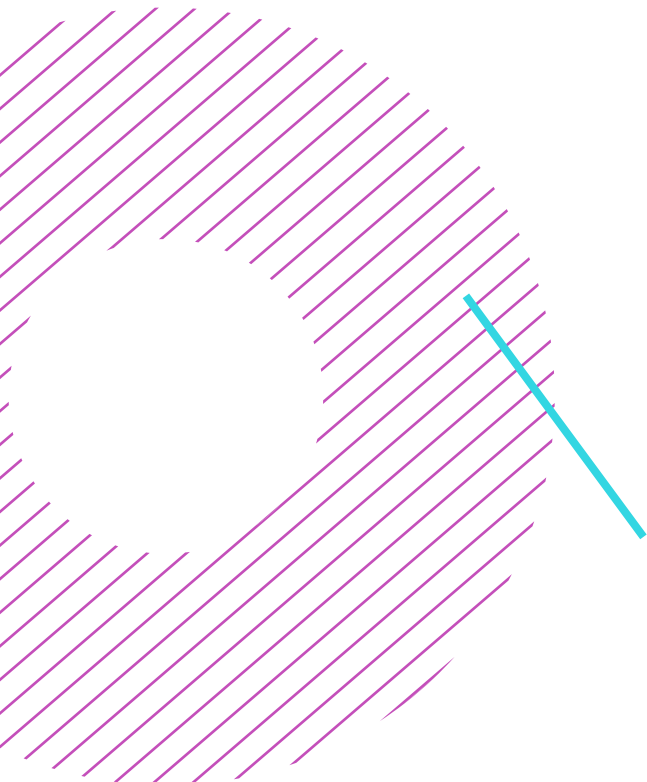
About Sprout Social

Sprout Social offers social media analytics, engagement and advocacy solutions to more than 20,000 leading brands and agencies, including Evernote, adidas, West Elm and Edelman. Sprout's suite of solutions, including **Simply Measured** and **Bambu by Sprout Social**, support every aspect of a social program and enable businesses to better connect with their audience, extend their reach and amplify their brand.

Headquartered in Chicago, Sprout is a Twitter Official Partner, Facebook Marketing Partner, Instagram Partner Program Member, LinkedIn Company Page Partner and Google+ Pages API Partner

Learn more at **sproutsocial.com**.