

ONLINE MEDIA DAILY

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Social Media Not Preferred Recommendation Resource

by [Laurie Sullivan](#), Monday, February 22, 2010, 7:30 AM

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Word-of-mouth recommendations from friends or family remain the most influential resource on advice for those looking to purchase products and services, but overall, search engines are also becoming a trusted source.

Young and highly educated consumers say online sources influence their buying decisions at a higher rate compared with the rest of the population, but social media resides down at the bottom of the list, according to a recent survey. Overall, consumers rely less on resources in social sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace, according to a survey from Opinion Research Co., sponsored by ARAnet.

"Consumption of media will be increasingly online," says Scott Severson, president of survey sponsor ARAnet. "We are not seeing any indication that online media consumption will slow."

Severson believes companies need to have more than one way to reach consumers online because not all will want to have contact via email or social sites. Companies will need search engine optimization (SEO) and paid-search campaign strategies, too. In other words, one campaign message will not resonate with all consumers the same way.

Depending on the relationship with the company, Severson says he prefers email marketing. It helps him build a relationship with the brands that know his preferences. Since they know Severson's likes and dislikes, the brands send him relevant information. Severson also is open to building relationships with brands in social media, especially when the site makes him aware of companies he didn't know.

When consumers were asked to rate the importance of 14 information sources before deciding on goods and services to buy, younger survey participants between the ages of 18 and 34 and highly educated Americans said they more often look online to search engines, articles, ads, email offerings and social media to find the answers.

Overall, among survey participants, 49% who bring home annual salaries of \$75,000 or more chose search engines as the preferred choice vs. 39% for all respondents. But break that down into participants between the ages of 25 and 34, and about 50% say they prefer search engines.

For the age group 25 to 34, online articles are another trusted source of information, at 39% vs. 28%, respectively. Younger consumers also appreciate information in emails from retailers or manufacturers, at 32% compared with 20% for all respondents.

Oddly, younger consumers believe online ads and social media have less influence than search, articles and emails from retailers or manufacturers. In the study, 30% of consumers age 25 to 34 believe online ads are influential, compared with 31% for social media.

Overall, most people participating in the survey -- 59% -- choose personal advice from friends or family members; followed by TV news or other broadcasts at 40%; search engines Google, Bing, Yahoo or Ask at 39%; TV ads, 36%; articles in newspapers or magazines, 33%; newspapers or magazines ads, 31%; online articles, 28%; and radio news or other broadcasts ads, 25%.

The remainder of the breakdown follows. Direct mail came in at 24%; radio ads, 20%; emails from retailers or manufacturers, 20%; online ads, 19%; messages or posts on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or MySpace, 18 percent; and billboards, 15%.

The results are based on 1,029 interviews conducted by Opinion Research Corp. online from Jan. 7-8, 2010 among a demographically representative U.S. sample of adults 18 years of age or older.

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