

Social Media and Product Documentation

How your customers use social media and product instructions

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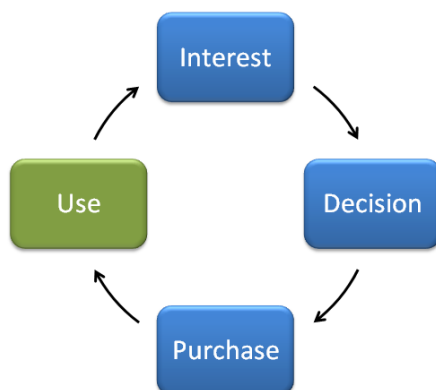
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Summary

Businesses must be concerned about the entire sales cycle. Much research has been focused on the presales cycle - what makes a consumer purchase one product over another. I am interested in the post-sales cycle and how and what makes customers happy as they use our products.



Content matters in the **Use** part of the sales cycle because it supports the customers as they work through using the product. The day-to-day use feeds into perceived value of the product, suitability of the product, and perceived ease-of-use of the product. These issues feed back into future sales.

Additionally, common sense tells us people like working with companies they like. Part of being liked as a company is making the customer feel important, by having customer empathy and concern about their issues. With the dramatic changes to the marketing world from social media, we have new ways to connect with our customers and make them feel important.

Best of breed companies make their customers feel important and these customers are engaged with your brand. Engaged customers are your best source of future revenue (<http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/118339/b2b-customers-feelings.aspx>).

"Fully engaged customers deliver a 23% premium over average customers in share of wallet, profitability, revenue, and relationship growth, while actively disengaged customers represent a 13% discount on the same measures, according to Gallup research."

But what does fully engaged mean, from a customer's point of view? How do we make customers feel important so they want to be fully engaged? We can do this with the after-purchase attention we give to our customers. Social media is one of those ways.

Highlights

From this study comes the following points.

- Respondents use LinkedIn (79%), email lists and Facebook (both 65%), and then Twitter (41%) ([Question 2](#)).
- People post to their social media outlets from their work and personal devices ([Question 5](#)). This result, combined with the results from [Question 2](#) means the data reflects B2B and B2C markets.
- If people post to their social media asking for help with a product, they seem to have exhausted other means to find help ([Question 7](#)). At this point, they are frustrated ([Question 9](#)).
- If people post to social media about a product, they typically name the product or company (Always/Almost always 65%, [Question 10](#))
- When people post to social media for help with a product, they generally expect the company to be responsive (Yes/Sort of 71%, [Question 11](#))
- While the company contacting a person who posts product issues in social media is rare ([Question 12](#)), 68% of those who got help through social media from the company felt the company cared about them ([Question 13](#)).
- If a company is responsive, the issue is typically cleared up (80%, [Question 14](#)).
- If people are helped by the company in social media, 74% of them generally post to social media about the company being helpful ([Question 15](#)).

The rest of this report discusses these points and others in more detail.

Overview

[Social media](#) - Web 2.0 - has fundamentally changed the Internet and how people interact with each other. Recent estimates are that Facebook has over 1.2 billion members (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/social-networking-statistics/>). 91% of online adults use social media regularly and every minute of every day, some 100,000 tweets are sent (<http://thesocialskinny.com/216-social-media-and-internet-statistics-september-2012/>).

Content communities are also part of social media and some companies are trying to build them for their products and services. This entails risk, however, as content communities should be a self governing group of people interested in the brand, with the company playing a minor role in the interactions. The company relinquishes control over the brand and related messages and trusts the community participants. Product forums (typically hosted by the company) and LinkedIn groups are a hybrid solution.

Business and social media

It's safe to say that social media is impacting every aspect of how we do business. It's changed the expectations of how people interact with each other and with companies. In fact, a survey done in 2011 shows that people are expecting more from companies but are not happy with how companies are managing social media outreach

[\(http://www.parature.com/8-thoroughly-satisfied-with-how-companies-use-social-media-to-communicate-with-customers/\)](http://www.parature.com/8-thoroughly-satisfied-with-how-companies-use-social-media-to-communicate-with-customers/).

The business world is working out how and to what extent it wishes to participate in social media. Many companies (certainly the largest companies) still don't have a social media plan in place because they think of social media as part of marketing - of sending the brand message to passive consumers. Social media is by definition an interactive exchange with consumers and that means letting go of some of that control

[\(http://www.forbes.com/sites/alexknapp/2012/08/24/big-companies-arent-using-social-media-for-customer-service/\)](http://www.forbes.com/sites/alexknapp/2012/08/24/big-companies-arent-using-social-media-for-customer-service/). This can be an uncomfortable position to companies who have owned and driven their message.

Why this survey?

With roughly 1.2 billion people on Facebook and 100,000 tweets a minute on Twitter, people are communicating with each other. As part of that communication, I wondered if people are asking for help with products after they purchase them. Are people using product documentation to get help? Or are they tapping into the "hive mind" for help? Or some mix of both, or perhaps neither?

In a previous poll, I discovered that 90% of people use product documentation to help them use a product (<http://www.sharonburton.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ConsumerFeelingsBurton2012.pdf>). But with social media playing such an emerging role in our lives, I wanted to know if people use social media to help them use the products they purchase. If they do leverage their social media, what are their expectations? Do they expect the company to notice and step in? How do they feel if that happens, or doesn't happen?

Because we are at the beginning of this dramatic change, I expect these results to change over time. I anticipate running this poll over several years to gain longitudinal data about how people use social media and product instruction.

This was an opinion poll and is not meant to take the place of ethnographic or observational research into whether or not what people are reporting is factually true. I wanted to get to what people thought and what they report doing. These findings are interesting suggestions into what people are thinking and reporting they are doing. I welcome ethnographic or big data research into these areas.

Poll Instructions

The instructions given in a poll are important, as they set the goals and expectations in the minds of the respondents. I used the instructions to educate people who I was and how I could be contacted. I wanted people to understand as they participated in the poll and didn't want to bias them with what I thought before they started.

Some people are concerned about taking polls "in the wild," so to speak, because they think their personal information is being harvested for mailing lists, data mining, and so on. This is not the case with polls I run, so it was critical to reassure people before they started the poll.

Instructions

Thank you for taking this opinion poll. I am interested in your feelings about product instructions and how you use social media. This opinion poll is being run by an individual as basic research. This basic research will be aggregated and may eventually be published in marketing papers, eBooks, and other informational publications. None of your personal information will be collected or used.

There are no "right" answers--please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Almost every question has a place where you can enter information if the provided answers don't reflect your feelings or you wish to comment further.

If you have questions about this opinion poll, send email to sharon@sharonburton.com with the subject line "Questions about the Social Media Poll." I will try to respond within 3 business days. Thank you for your time.

Questions Overview

This section discusses each question in order. I show the data as tables and as graphs to make it easier to visualize the results.

To see the comments made by the respondents, purchase the full version at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08K9K9K9K) or bn.com.

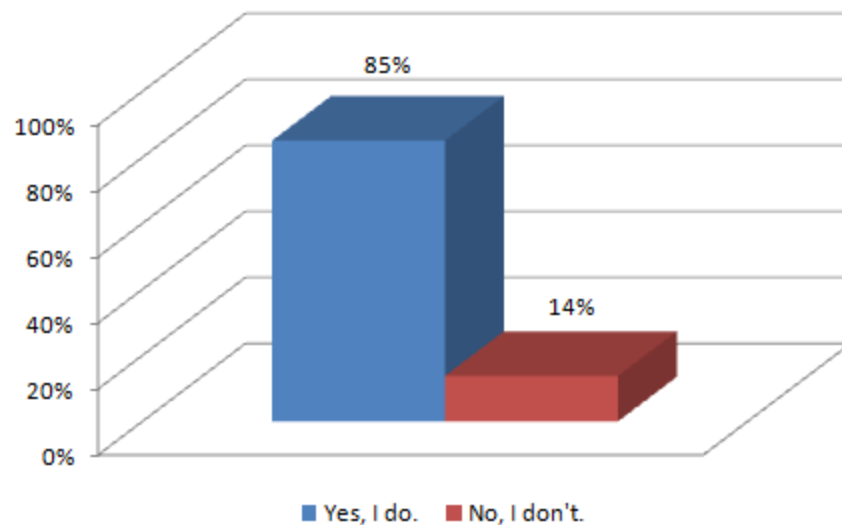
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Question 1

Do you use social media sites or participate in email lists and groups?

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Yes, I do | 85% |
| No, I don't | 14% |

N=214



Discussion

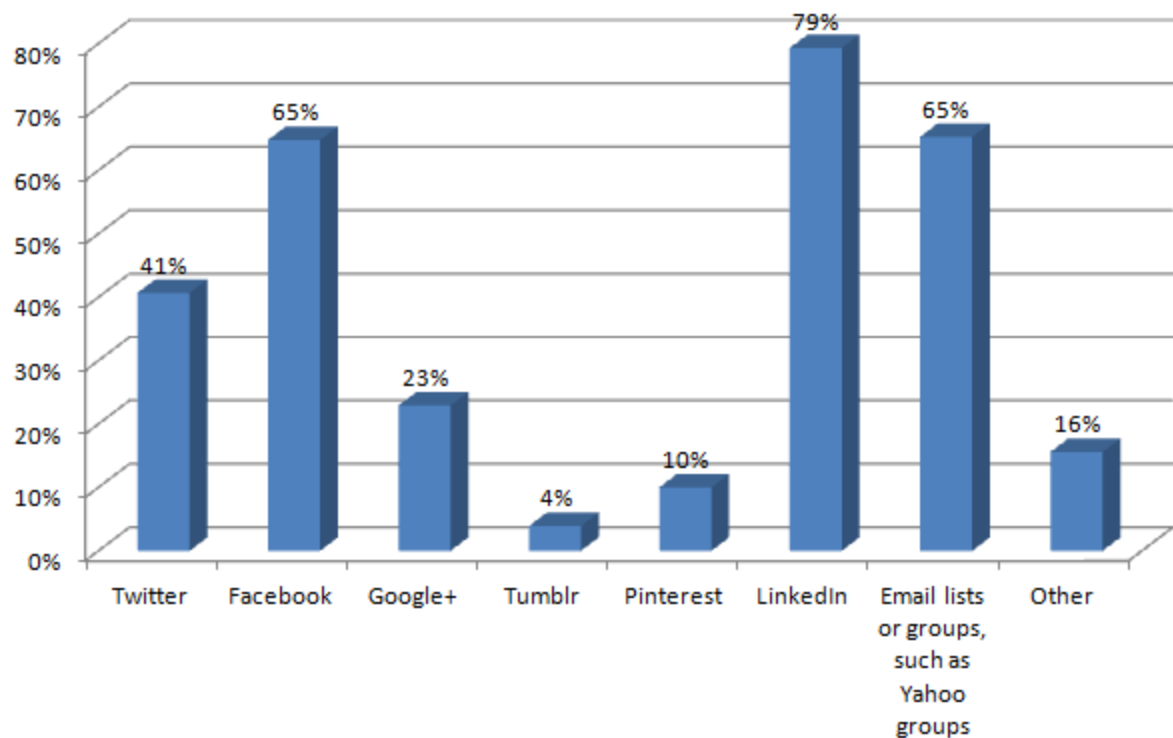
I was sort of amazed by the number of people who responded No to this questions, as this poll was advertised generally through social media outlets.

This was a jump questions, in that if you answered No, you skipped to the Comments question. People who answered No to this question didn't contribute to the rest of the data.

Question 2

Which of the following social media outlets do you typically use in an average week:
(choose all that apply)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Twitter | 41% |
| FaceBook | 65% |
| Google+ | 23% |
| Tumblr | 4% |
| Pinterest | 10% |
| LinkedIn | 79% |
| Email lists or groups, such as Yahoo groups | 65% |
| Other | 16% |



Discussion

Because this was a multiple response question, the numbers do not add up to 100%. I am interested that LinkedIn is so highly rated and that email lists and Facebook are tied as the next more popular. All three options serve different functions, in my mind. LinkedIn is a professional site for typically Business to Business (B2B) conversations and issues. Facebook is typically for a more personal use, although there are a lot of Business to Consumer (B2C) pages that are very popular. Email lists may be a mix of both, as Yahoo, for example, has a list for every interest one can imagine.

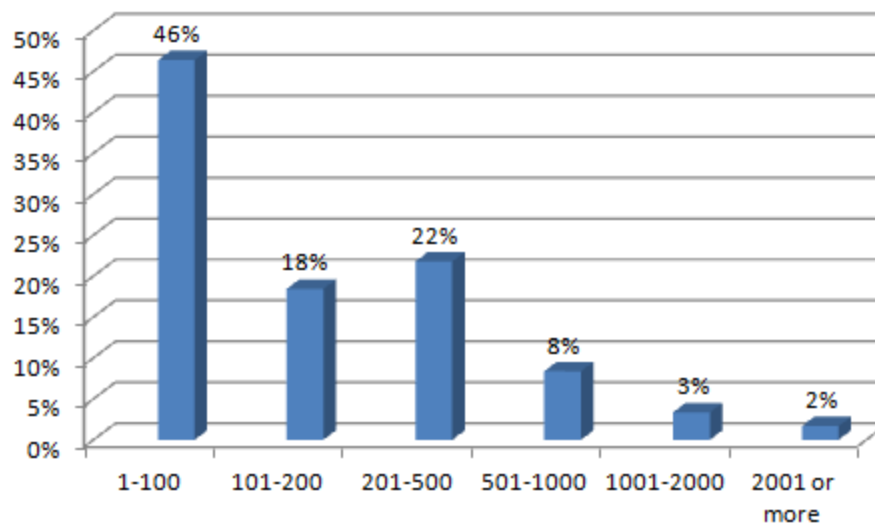
Comments

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 3

How many people do you estimate follow you through your social media?

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| 1-100 | 46% |
| 101-200 | 18% |
| 201-500 | 22% |
| 501-1000 | 8% |
| 1001-2000 | 3% |
| 2001 or more | 2% |



Discussion

I was surprised by the distribution in this response. I expected more in the 201 to 500 range. However, 86% have 500 or fewer followers in social media. 13% have 501 or more people following them in social media. We can certainly say that one post to a social media outlet will reach at least 100 people but may reach up to 500. That's a large sphere of influence for potentially 140 characters.

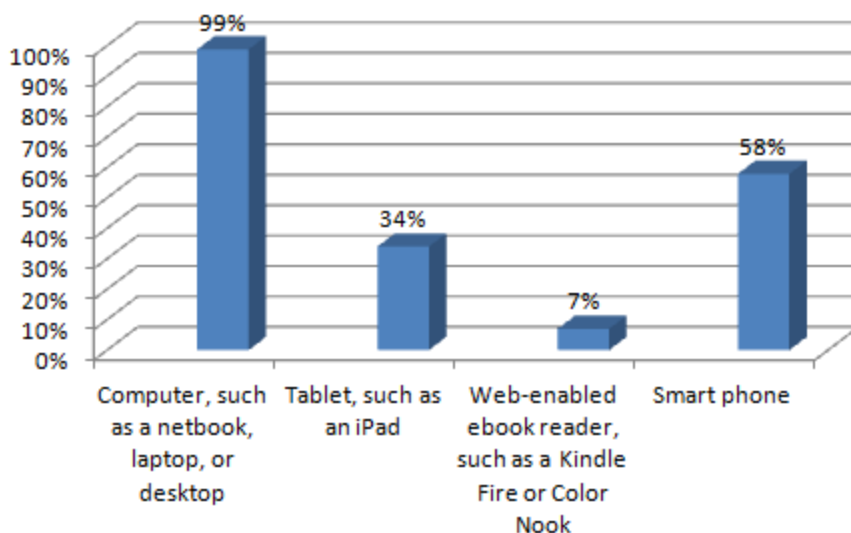
Comments

Not allowed for this question.

Question 4

How do you get to your social media outlets? (choose all that apply)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Computer, such as a netbook, laptop, or desktop | 99% |
| Tablet, such as an iPad | 34% |
| Web-enabled ebook reader, such as a Kindle Fire or Color Nook | 7% |
| Smart phone | 58% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

More than one response was allowed for this question so one person probably uses multiple devices to reach their social media. We see that people are still using more traditional means of accessing the Internet but smartphones are being used by 58% to reach their social media.

Tablets, a new technology, is used by a third of the respondents. Tablets sales are strong with tablet shipments for the first quarter of 2012 estimated at 17.4 million units (<http://www.pocket-lint.com/news/45533/ipad-dominates-tablet-sales-unstoppable>)

Web-enabled devices such as e-readers are not used often for social media purposes. Given the number of e-readers sold in 2011 (14.7 million, from <http://www.statisticbrain.com/e-reader-statistics/>), this number is surprising. I suspect that browsing the web on an e-reader feels funny, as you are using the device to read a

book. This number may change, however, over time as tablets and e-readers merge functionality. The Amazon Fire is starting to blur these lines.

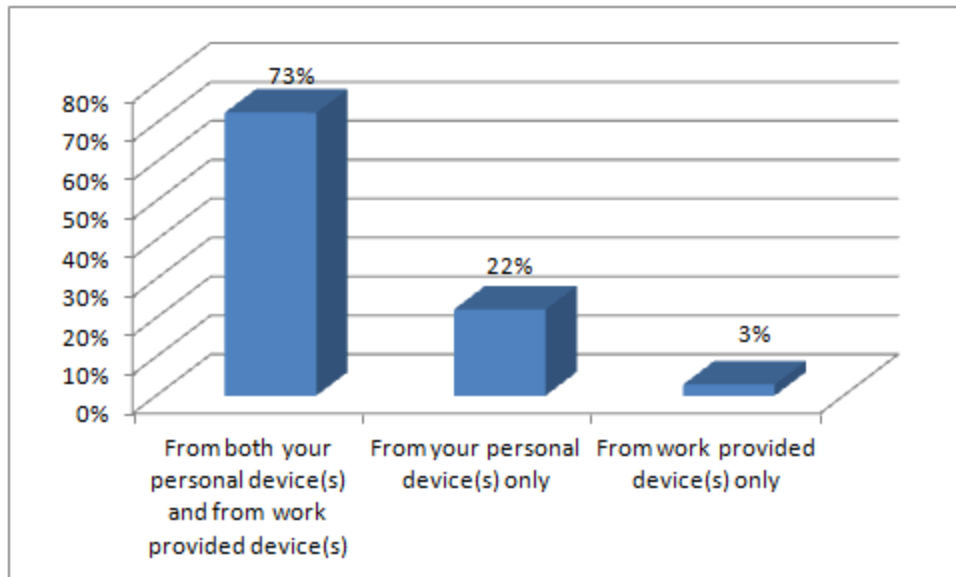
Comments

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 5

Do you typically access your social media: (choose all that apply)

| | |
|--|-----|
| From both your personal device(s) and from work provided device(s) | 73% |
| From your personal device(s) only | 22% |
| From work provided device(s) only | 3% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

Most people access their social media from both work and personal devices. Almost no one uses only their work device for social media.

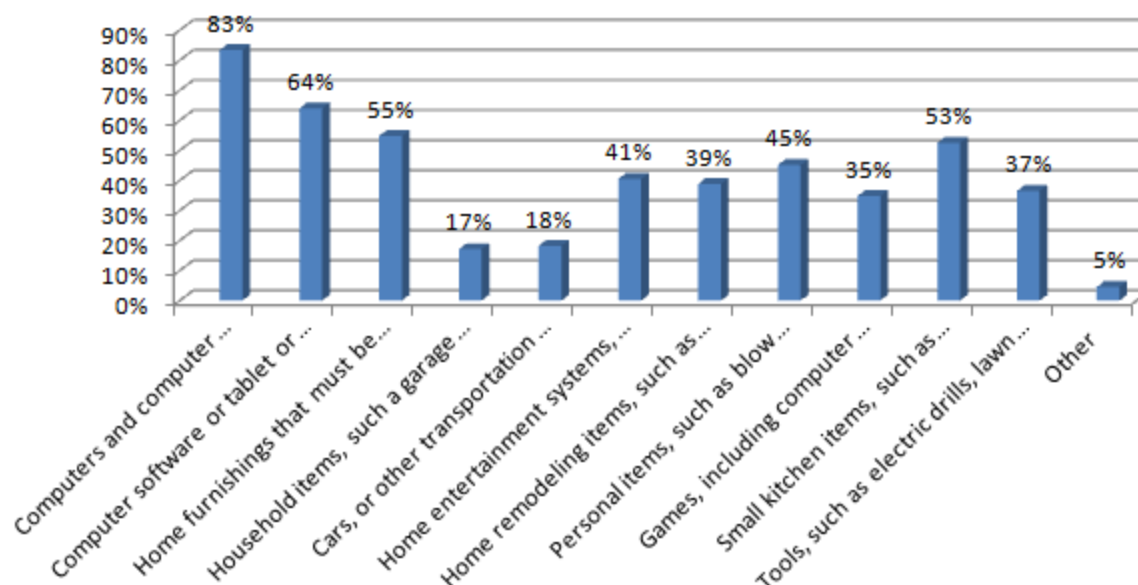
Comments

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Question 6

In the last year, what kinds of products did you or your household purchase that came with instructions?

| | |
|---|-----|
| Computers and computer related products, such as tablets or smart phones | 83% |
| Home furnishings that must be assembled, such as bookcases, desks, or patio furniture | 64% |
| Household items, such a garage door openers or home alarm systems | 55% |
| Cars, or other transportation vehicles, such as jet skis or off-road vehicles | 17% |
| Home entertainment systems, such as TVs, game devices, or remote controls | 41% |
| Personal items, such as blow dryers, electric shavers, or heating pads | 45% |
| Games, including computer games and board games | 35% |
| Small kitchen items, such as blenders, bread makers, or food processors | 53% |
| Tools, such as electric drills, lawn mowers, or trimmers | 37% |
| Other | 5% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

This data shows that people recall buying a lot of products that come with instructions, with computer and computer related items being the most recalled. What interests us for this poll is the fairly wide range of classes of items purchased. There are some differences in what the age groups purchased. For more information on those differences, see [Differences between Groups](#). These differences are expected, given the life differences in each age group, however.

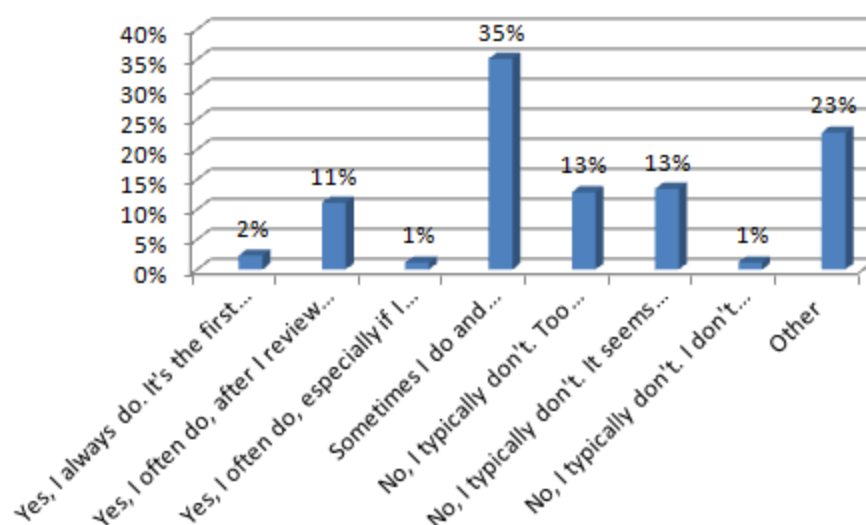
Comments

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](#) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 7

If you get stuck using a product, do you post a question to your social media outlet(s), asking for help?

| | |
|--|-----|
| Yes, I always do. It's the first place I go. Other people always know. | 2% |
| Yes, I often do, after I review the product instructions, either because I saved them or I found them on the web. | 11% |
| Yes, I often do, especially if I feel I need the answer urgently. I don't try the product instructions first. | 1% |
| Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. It depends. | 35% |
| No, I typically don't. Too often, other people are wrong or I just don't trust the answers I get. | 13% |
| No, I typically don't. It seems like a lot of effort or just silly to type my question out and look for an answer. | 13% |
| No, I typically don't. I don't want to look stupid in public. | 1% |
| Other | 23% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

For me, this was one of the most interesting questions, especially given the comments. In this question, we see that people may or may not post a product use question to their social media (49% always to maybe), with the cluster falling into No, they don't (51% maybe to something else entirely).

From the comments, posting product questions to social media is the last resort. People read the instructions, try googling and newsgroups, and then, if nothing has helped, turn to their social media for help. By the time people arrive at social media, they are frustrated and upset that they have not found the answer, despite what they feel is due diligence ([Question 9](#)). And they communicate that upset and frustration with 100 to 500 people ([Question 3](#)).

And based on the comments, this is not a successful strategy.

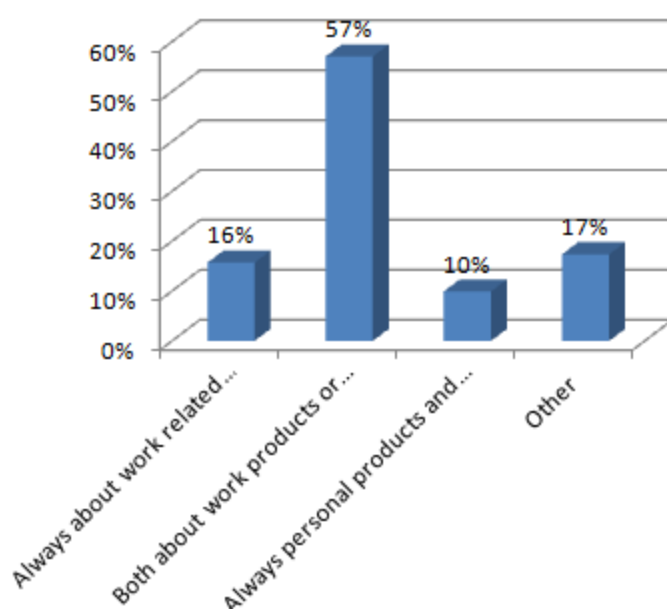
Comments

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 8

When do you typically ask for help with a product using social media?

| | |
|---|-----|
| Always about work related products or tools. I never ask about personal products or tools when I'm not at work. | 16% |
| Both about work products or tools and personal products or tools. | 57% |
| Always personal products and tools. Never about work related products or tools. | 10% |
| Other | 17% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

21 responses (~20%)

Discussion

People ask their social media for help for both work and personal products. I did not ask which social media outlet they ask for each.

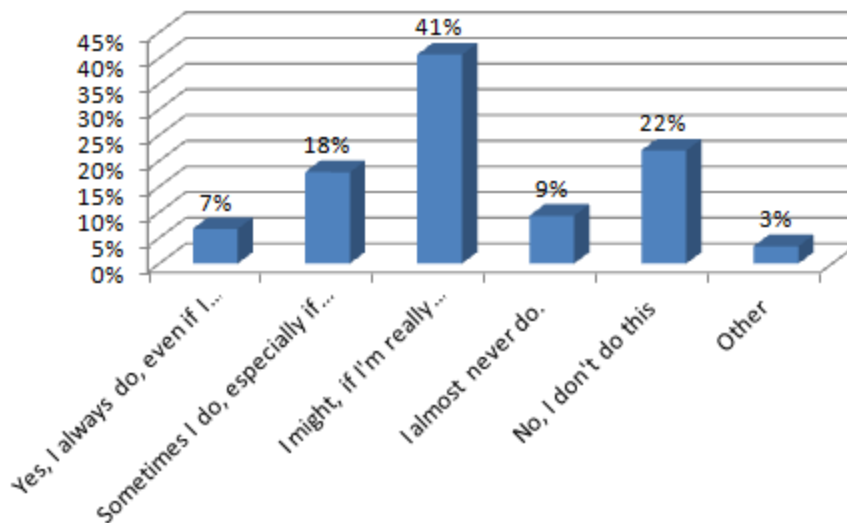
Comments

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Question 9

When a product is hard to use or you encounter an issue, do you post to your social media about it?

| | |
|---|-----|
| Yes, I always do, even if I think the answer might be hard or complicated. | 7% |
| Sometimes I do, especially if I think the answer might be easy or simple. | 18% |
| I might, if I'm really frustrated with the product or the product instructions. | 41% |
| I almost never do. | 9% |
| No, I don't do this. | 22% |
| Other | 3% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

This question and [Question 7](#) are tightly related and should be examined together. In Question 7, we learned that people use their social media as a last resort. In this question, we learn they are more likely to post if they are really frustrated. And in [Question 10](#), we learn more about what they do when they post.

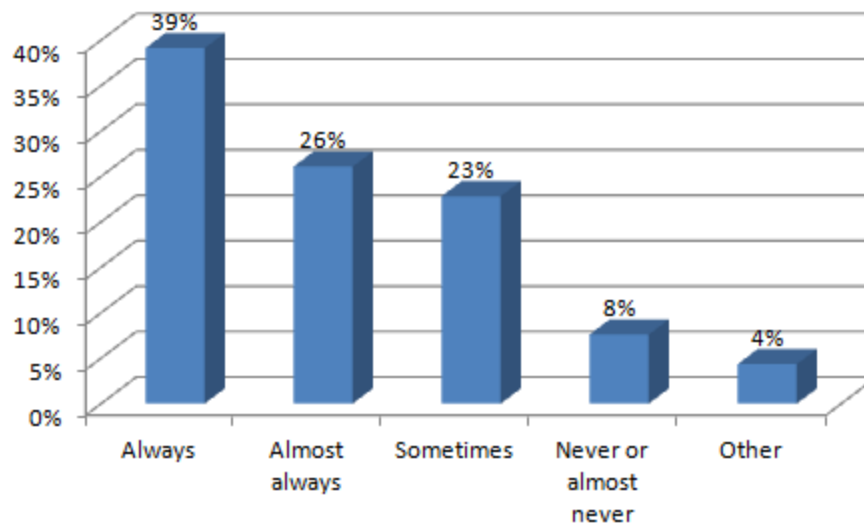
Comments

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 10

Do you use the name of the product or company?

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----|------------------------------------|
| Always | 39% | |
| Almost always | 26% | <i>Always/Almost always 65%</i> |
| Sometimes | 23% | <i>Almost always/Sometimes 49%</i> |
| Never or almost never | 8% | <i>Sometimes/Never 31%</i> |
| Other | 4% | |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

In this question, we see that people name names in social media. In part, this is so the hive mind knows what product is under discussion, the respondents report. But from a brand perspective, this may not be a good thing.

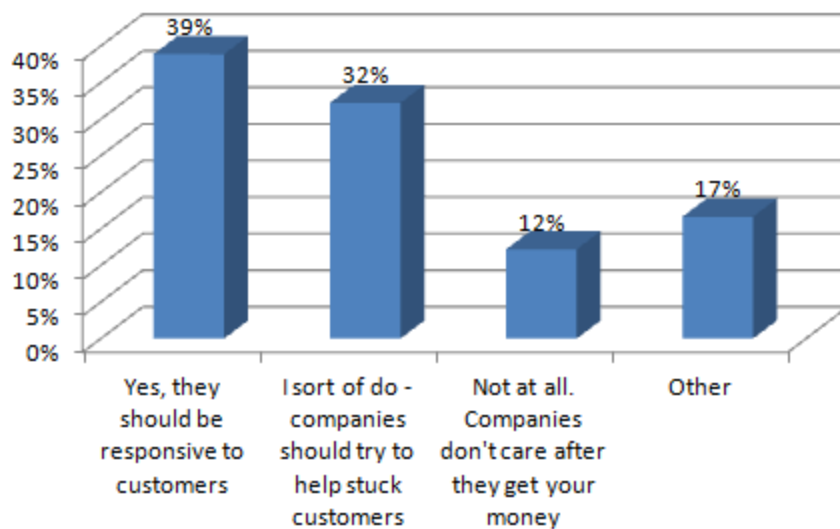
Comments

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Question 11

If you name the product or the company, do you think you should get a response from the company?

| | | |
|---|-----|------------------------|
| Yes, they should be responsive to customers | 39% | |
| I sort of do - companies should try to help stuck customers | 32% | <i>Yes/Sort of 71%</i> |
| Not at all. Companies don't care after they get your money | 12% | <i>Sort of/No 44%</i> |
| Other | 17% | <i>No/Other 29%</i> |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

This question looks at the place that a company has to "make it right" and help a customer sort out the issue. 71% think that the company either should be responsive or has an obligation to help stuck customers. There is an expectation the company shares the burden of understanding the products they sell.

However, the comments for this question are interesting. People point out the difference between *should get answers* and *expect to get answers*. Several people point out the resources required to support customers in social media. There seems to be a tension in this question between "Help me use your product" and "It's unreasonable for me to expect you to help me as an individual in a sea of individuals."

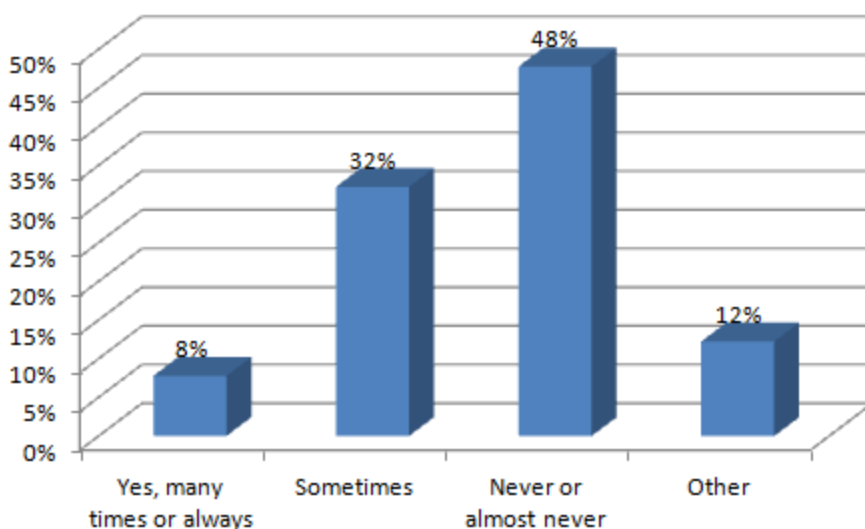
Comments

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Question 12

In general, if you name the product or the company, do you get a response from the company?

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----|----------------------------|
| Yes, many times or always | 8% | |
| Sometimes | 32% | <i>Yes/Sometimes 40%</i> |
| Never or almost never | 48% | <i>Sometimes/Never 80%</i> |
| Other | 12% | <i>Never/Other 60%</i> |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

While 71% of people who post product issues to social media either expect or sort of expect an answer from the company ([Question 11](#)), almost no one gets an answer (80%). The comments and responses to Other also bear out how rare this is, but delightful if it happens ([Question 13](#)).

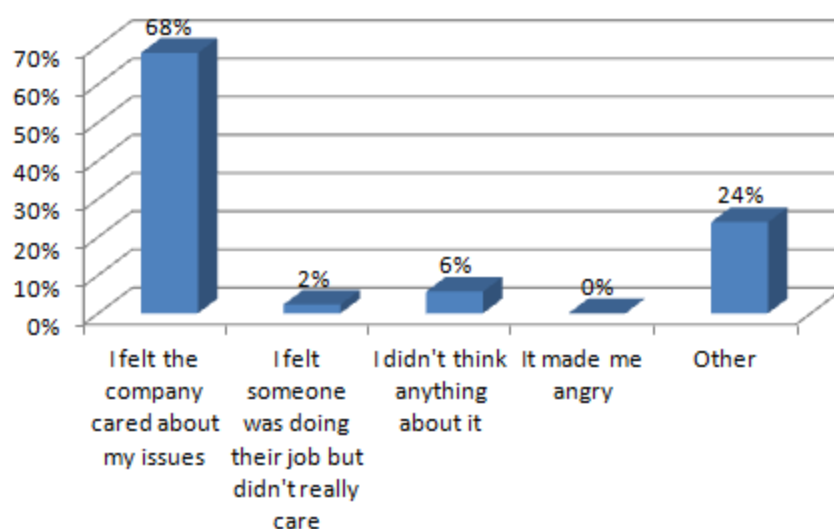
Comments

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Question 13

If you get a response from the company, how does that make you feel?

| | |
|---|-----|
| I felt the company cared about my issues | 68% |
| I felt someone was doing their job but didn't really care | 2% |
| I didn't think anything about it | 6% |
| It made me angry | 0% |
| Other | 24% |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

While the company reaching out to a person who posts product issues in social media is rare ([Question 12](#)), 68% of those who got help through social media from the company felt the company cared about them.

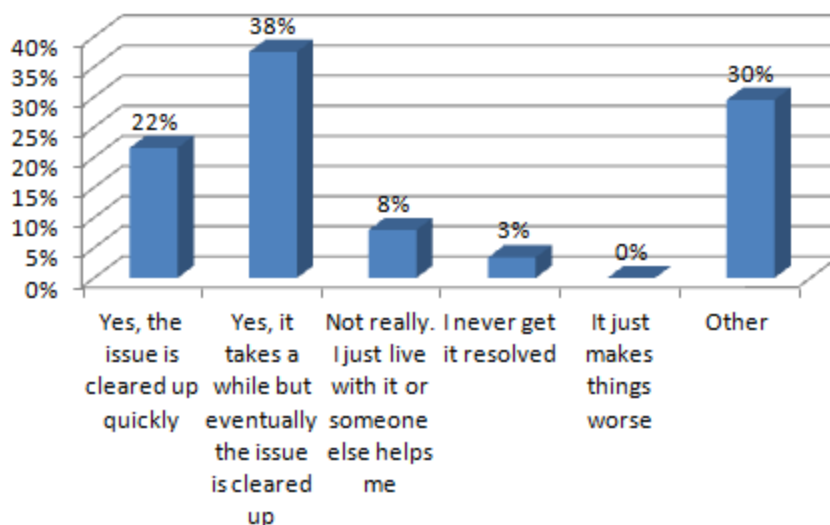
Comments

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 14

In general, if you get a response from the company, does it help with your issue?

| | | |
|--|-----|--------------|
| Yes, the issue is cleared up quickly | 22% | |
| Yes, it takes a while but eventually the issue is cleared up | 38% | Yes 60% |
| Not really. I just live with it or someone else helps me | 8% | |
| It never get it resolved | 3% | No/Never 11% |
| It just makes things worse | 0% | |
| Other | 30% | |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

The really good news from this question is that if a company reaches out to the customer, the issue is resolved 60% of the time. No one reported this issue got worse after the company reached out. For the 30% who chose other, the responses can be summed by with It varies, sometimes it helps and sometimes it doesn't. And the effort matters to the customer, regardless of the resolution, taking us back to [Question 13](#).

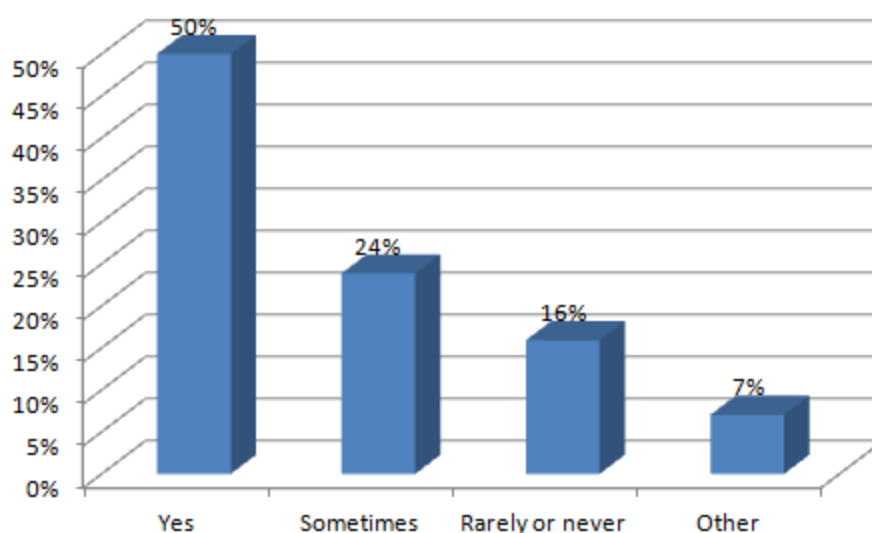
Comments

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 15

If you get a response from the company that solved your issue, do you post in social media about the company helping you?

| | | |
|-----------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| Yes | 50% | |
| Sometimes | 24% | <i>Yes/Sometimes=74%</i> |
| Rarely or never | 16% | <i>Sometimes/Rarely or Never=40%</i> |
| Other | 7% | <i>Rarely or Never/Other=21%</i> |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

In this question, I wanted to see if companies who do reach out to customers in trouble are publicly thanked for the help. 74% of our respondents said they always or sometimes they post to their social media about this. This is in contrast to if they receive no help at all from the company ([Question 16](#))

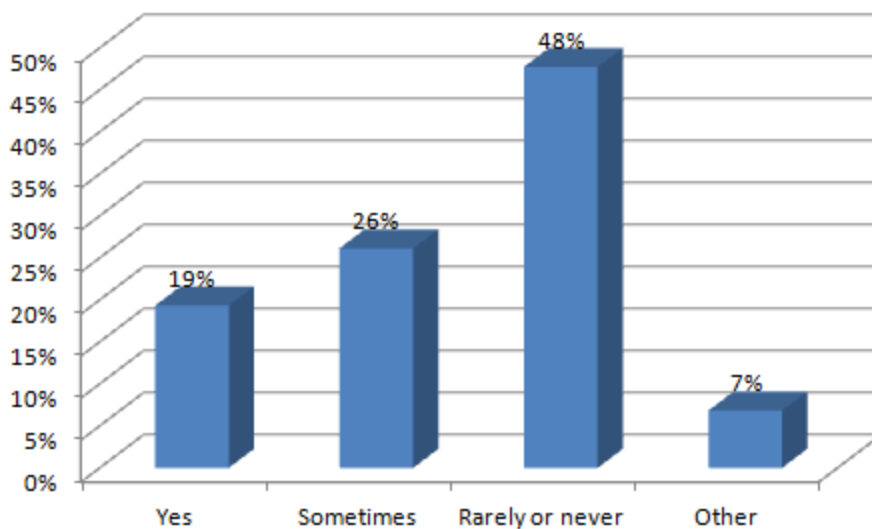
Comments

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 16

If you get no response from the company or the response didn't help, do you post in social media about the company not helping you ?

| | | |
|-----------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| Yes | 19% | |
| Sometimes | 26% | <i>Yes/Sometimes=45%</i> |
| Rarely or never | 48% | <i>Sometimes/Rarely or Never=74%</i> |
| Other | 7% | |



Other Responses

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Discussion

Interestingly, people do not typically post to their social media when the company doesn't help them. I think this goes with the expectations set in [Question 11](#). People think a company has some level of obligation to help stuck customers but don't expect much help. See [Discussion](#) for a comparison of this question and [Question 11](#).

Comments

Purchase the full report at Amazon.com or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 17

Is there anything else you would like to tell us? (Do not provide your contact information or other means of identifying you personally) (32 comments)

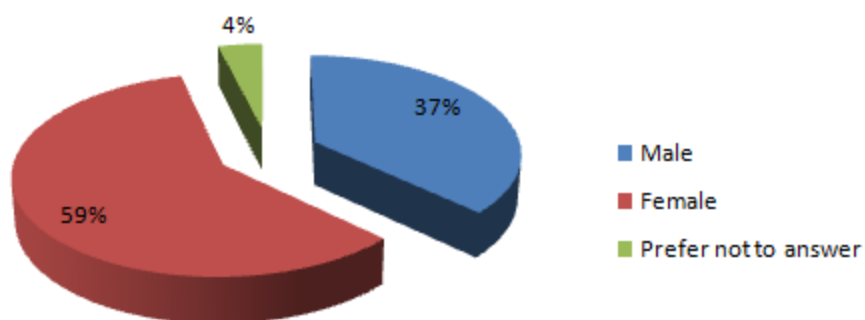
Comments

Purchase the full report at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or BN.com to see the Other responses and comments.

Question 16

What is your gender (optional)

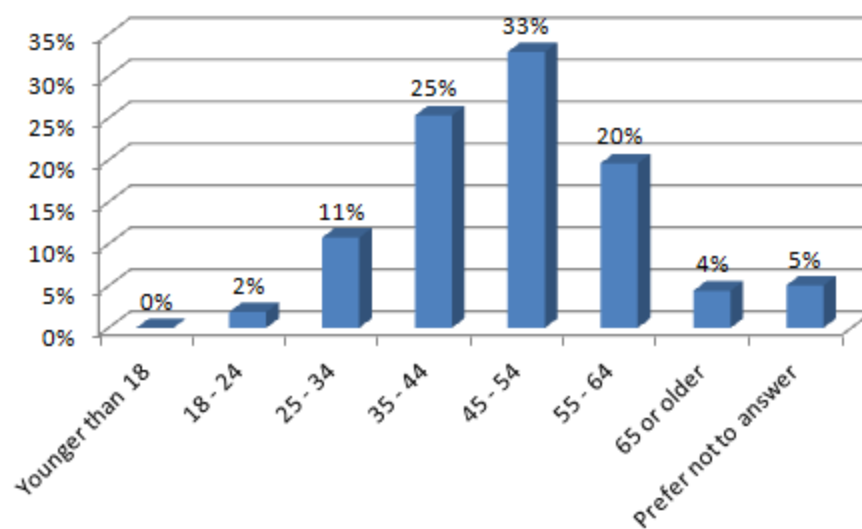
| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Male | 37% |
| Female | 59% |
| Prefer not to answer | 4% |



Question 17

Which category describes your age? (optional)

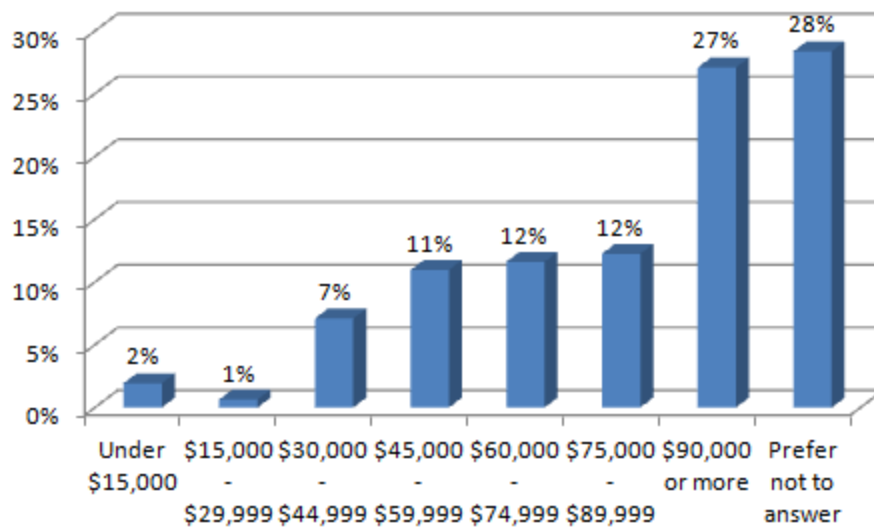
| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Younger than 18 | 0% |
| 18 - 24 | 2% |
| 25 - 34 | 11% |
| 35 - 44 | 25% |
| 45 - 54 | 33% |
| 55 - 64 | 20% |
| 65 or older | 4% |
| Prefer not to answer | 5% |



Question 18

Which category best describes your annual income? (optional)

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Under \$15,000 | 2% |
| \$15,000 - \$29,999 | 1% |
| \$30,000 - \$44,999 | 7% |
| \$45,000 - \$59,999 | 11% |
| \$60,000 - \$74,999 | 12% |
| \$75,000 - \$89,999 | 12% |
| \$90,000 or more | 27% |
| Prefer not to answer | 28% |



Discussion

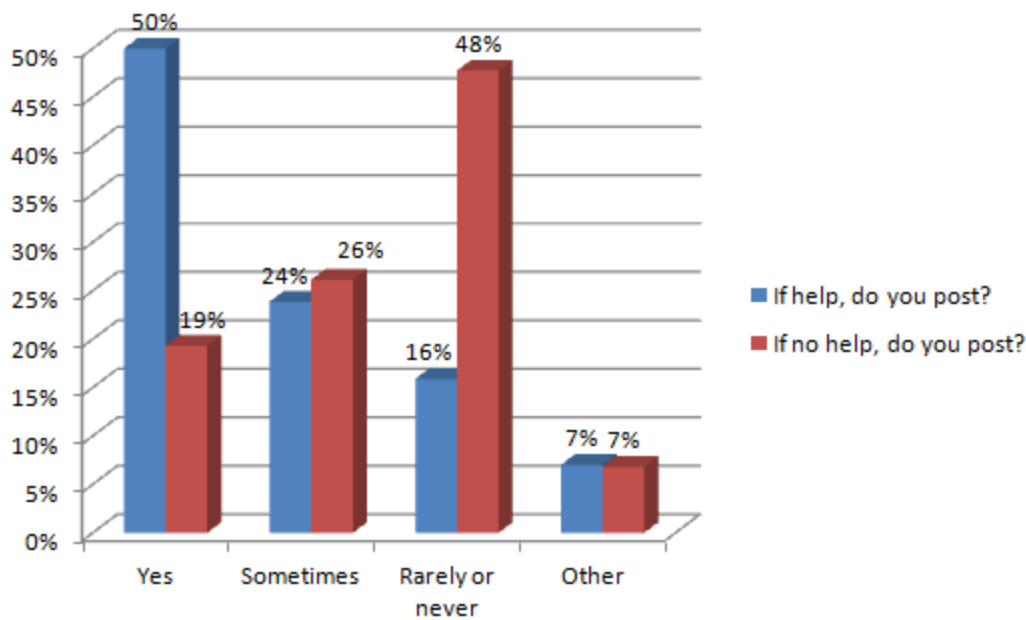
If people post to their social media asking for help with a product, they seem to have exhausted other means to find help ([Question 7](#)). At this point, they are frustrated ([Question 9](#)). In [Question 10](#), we see that we have a possible public relations/brand issue because people name names when they post to their social media, where typically up to 500 other people may read about frustration with Product X.

Certainly one person posting on social media does not necessarily make a public relations issue, but multiple this by 100 or 1000 frustrated people and it becomes an issue. A recent Nielsen poll shows that people use social media to find recommendations for products (<http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/how-social-media-impacts-brand-marketing/>).

Best of breed customer care

While the company contacting a person who posts product issues in social media is rare ([Question 12](#)), 68% of those who got help through social media from the company felt the company cared about them ([Question 13](#)).

Conventional wisdom says that unhappy customers are loud and must be dealt with. While this may be true in other mediums, I did not find this to be true in social media (although even one loud customer can be a problem). People who are helped tend to post about the help, while people who are not helped tend to not say anything more through their social media outlets (74% to 74%). This does not mean we can ignore our customers, however, when they post in social media. What it does say is that helping customers gains positive brand impact while not helping customers doesn't further negatively impact brand.



Differences between Groups

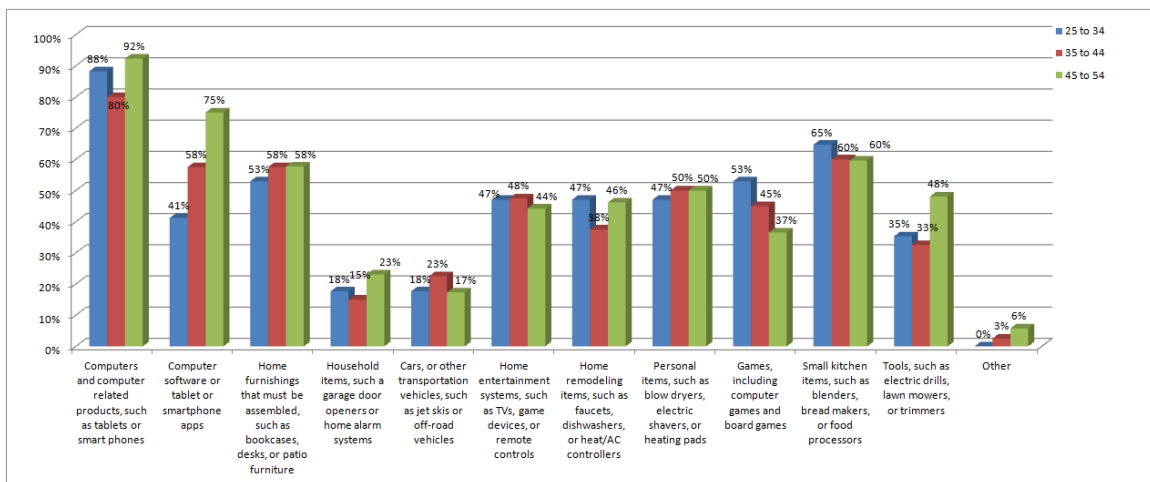
Overall, there seems to be little difference between men vs women, items purchased, and so on. The differences are within a very few percentage points.

There only place we see any real difference is in identified age groups. This next section discusses these differences. This data is not conclusive, as the size of the response groups are not large enough to be conclusive. But the data is suggestive of different ideas about the uses of social media and it's purpose, depending on the age brackets of the person.

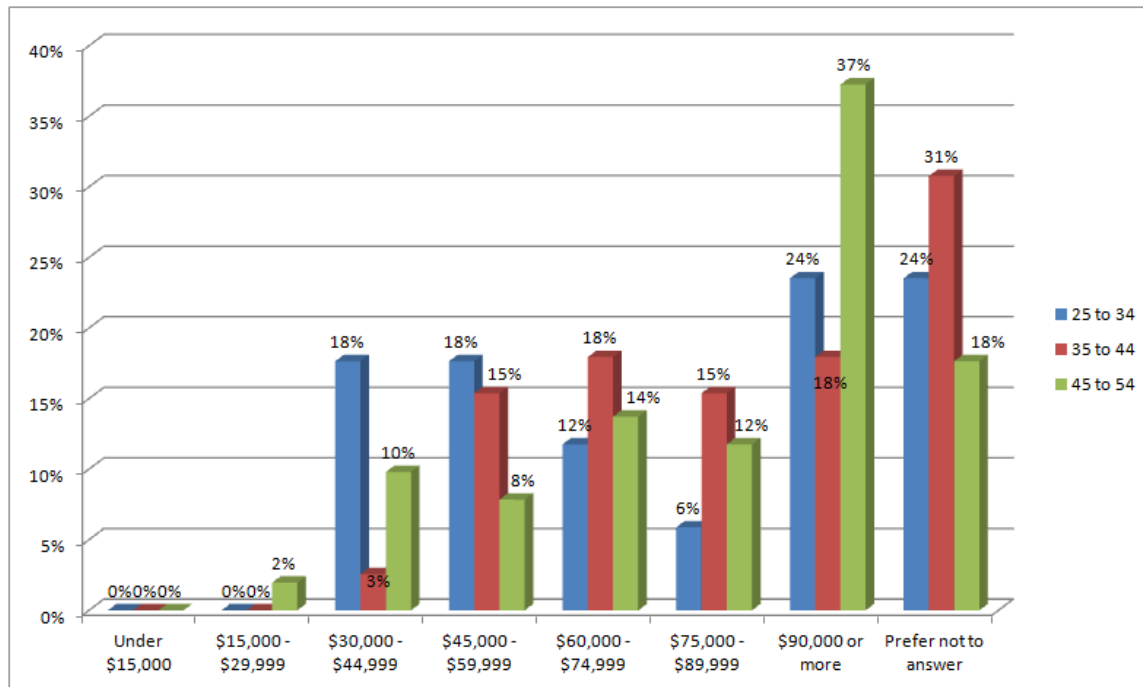
Age groups

If you look at the three largest self identified groups, we see the sorts of differences we would expect, given what we might guess about the different life stages. For example, the 25 to 34 age bracket has less income and more play/social time. So we see them reporting they purchased more computer and other games (53%) than, for example, the 45 to 54 age bracket (37%).

We also see more tools and household products purchased by the both the younger group and the older group in the last year. Additionally, we see more computers/tablets/smart phones purchased and more software by the 45 to 54 age range. This group generally has more income and these purchases makes sense to me.



Total income by age group:



Conclusions

In this study, I focused on product-based customers, but the points here can usefully be applied to service-based companies as well. Service-based companies live and die by return customer rates and by word of mouth. Overall, engaged customers are the best source of future revenue, regardless of product vs services or B2B vs B2C sales models.

In a study at a financial services firm, we discovered a 33 percentage point difference in share of business between fully engaged and actively disengaged customers. In a manufacturing company, Gallup found a 37 percentage point difference between the fully engaged and actively disengaged groups.

(<http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/118339/b2b-customers-feelings.aspx#2>)

Engaged customers are critical to a healthy balance sheet and to growth. Social media is becoming a required method of getting customers engaged in your brand.

This poll has suggested that customers will post questions about products when other means (manufacturer's web sites, user's groups, Google) to find the content they need has failed them. At this point, customers are typically frustrated. They don't expect a response from the company but are pleased if they do get one. And they post to their social media outlets when a company does help them.

Out of this research, I see another way for companies to exceed customer expectations and engage people in the brand, thus directly impacting the bottom line.

