

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PROFESSIONALS: UNDERSTANDING EARLY ADOPTERS

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Networking has always been vital to business and career development. The rise of social media presents organizations and professionals with opportunities to augment the power of their networks by revealing new chains of connection between people and enabling firms and individuals to gather around areas of shared interest and potential collaboration.

What do we know about the professionals who are using social media to connect with colleagues, clients, and thought-leaders in their fields? An analysis of users of LinkedIn, a social media site catering to professionals, reveals that entrepreneurs and employees who are making use of this social media platform are among the most engaged, adaptable, and ambitious Canadians.

To understand who is populating this area of the social media landscape, Environics Research Group performed a social values analysis comparing current LinkedIn users to their professional peers. We began by isolating the LinkedIn users in our sample and looking at the professional categories they occupy; we found they were predominantly professionals, managers (in both small and large businesses), and technicians or semi-professionals.

Having established where LinkedIn users fit in the labour force, we then examined the values of everyone who held these kinds of jobs, regardless of their social media use. The final step was to compare LinkedIn users to the wider population of professionals in order to see what kinds of values, if any, differentiated the LinkedIn community from the pack.

The Environics analysis suggests LinkedIn users are indeed different from the wider professional community. In many ways, they are the most dynamic segment of this population. The average LinkedIn user is outstanding in his or her adaptability, entrepreneurialism, and approach to colleagues and others.

LINKEDIN USERS ARE AMBITIOUS AND ADAPTABLE

Even when compared to a field of other educated professionals—including entrepreneurs—LinkedIn users stand out for their confidence, adaptability to change, and sense of personal efficacy.

The cornerstone value of LinkedIn users' mindset may well be their exceptionally low scores on fatalism. LinkedIn users believe that to a great extent, their future is in their own hands: through focused work, they can chart their own course. And if life throws some obstacles in their path, LinkedIn users are more likely than others to believe there will be hidden opportunities in these challenges. They score high on adaptability to complexity and adaptive navigation, reporting that they feel at ease in a world full of change and that they try to see advantages amid what might look like adversity.

When LinkedIn users talk about adaptability and personal efficacy, they are very likely to be thinking about their professional lives in particular: this group is heavily focused on work, scoring exceptionally high on values like the need for personal achievement and the quest for fulfillment through work. Together, these values suggest that LinkedIn users identify strongly with their jobs: they are pursuing career paths that are meaningful and satisfying to them, and having set themselves on these paths they now happily throw themselves into their jobs, seeing little distinction between “who I am” and “what I do.” Notably, despite their obvious drive to achieve, LinkedIn users report below-average time stress. They may work a lot, but their hard work produces more satisfaction than anxiety.

With their adaptability and get-it-done attitude, LinkedIn users have an entrepreneurial mindset—so the fact that they stand out in their openness to risk-taking is no surprise. Many LinkedIn users are indeed small business owners; but the fact that entrepreneurial values are so strong in this group suggests that even those employed in large organizations are likely to be creative and self-directed, no matter where they sit on the organizational chart.

LINKEDIN USERS ARE SOCIALLY ASTUTE AND ADVENTUROUS

Professionals who use LinkedIn not only understand the power of networking to help them work effectively, they are naturally social creatures. Strong on some of the most fundamental values of social life, introspection and empathy, these professionals say they are interested in understanding themselves better—and equally interested in trying to understand other people’s perspectives and orientations.

Although the values of LinkedIn users suggest they do their best to learn from every experience and relationship, these professionals’ high scores on social learning suggest they are especially interested in connecting with people different from themselves as a way of broadening their own perspectives. Increasingly diverse workplaces in Canada—and a business environment in which international collaboration is increasingly the norm—are exhilarating conditions for these Canadians. Secondments, sales trips, conferences and exchanges are likely to excite LinkedIn users and stimulate new insights and ideas.

Not surprisingly, LinkedIn users are even more likely than professionals at large to say they are entirely at ease with ethnocultural diversity, and that cross-cultural exchange (including intermarriage) is enriching for everyone involved.

LINKEDIN USERS WILL CHAMPION A GREAT PRODUCT, SERVICE, OR BRAND

There is one more distinctive characteristic of the LinkedIn community that is likely to intrigue prospective employers as well as marketers hoping to reach out to this dynamic population. This is a savvy group that thinks through its relationships and its consumption decisions—but once a product, service, or brand has proven itself, these professionals are more likely than others to say they happily tell the world. LinkedIn users are busy, focused people who appreciate tools that help them perform at work—or have fun in the off-hours. With high scores on Consumption Evangelism, they say that when they get great service or find a tool that works, they spread the word through their networks.

TAKE-AWAYS

- The values of LinkedIn users differ noticeably from the values of other professionals who hold similar types of jobs. They tend to espouse entrepreneurial values: flexibility, drive, and an outlook that prizes exploration and experimentation.
- LinkedIn users are confident and adaptable to change. They have no illusions about controlling external circumstances, they simply have faith in their ability to adapt, and find opportunity even in challenging times.

LinkedIn users are deeply sociable and at ease with diversity. They are likely to quickly perceive the business advantages in collaboration, diversity, and teamwork.

- LinkedIn users prize efficacy. When they find a product, service, partner, or practice that works, they will use it as much as possible and spread the word to others.

For more information

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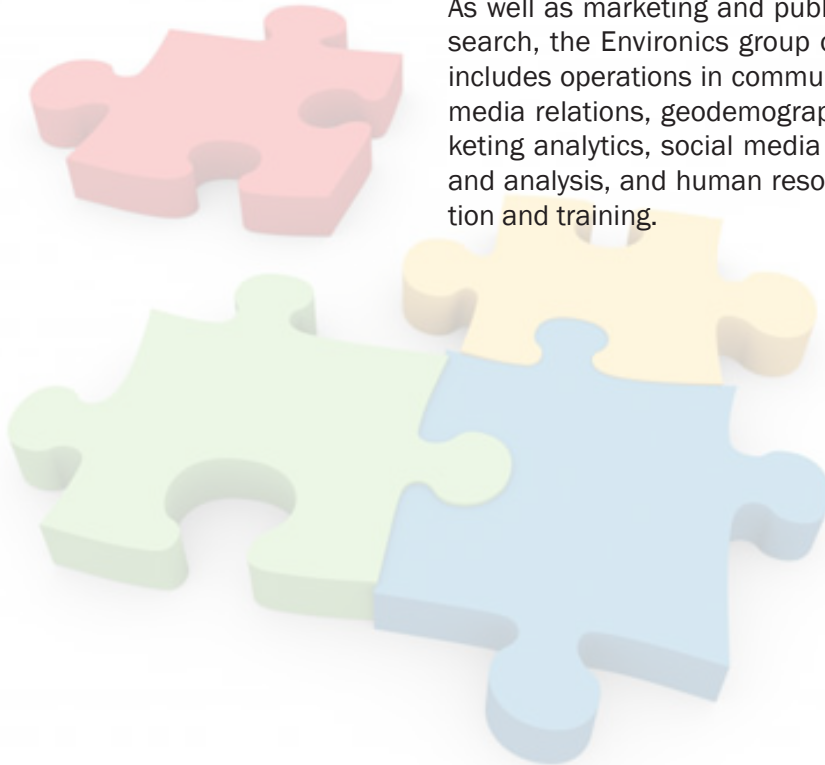
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About Environics Research Group

Environics Research Group Ltd. is one of Canada's leading marketing and public opinion research firms, with a reputation for integrity, accuracy, and insight. Established in 1970, the firm has evolved into a multi-disciplined international research and consulting group offering a broad range of research services to business and government, with its headquarters in Toronto with affiliated operations around the world.

As well as marketing and public opinion research, the Environics group of companies includes operations in communications and media relations, geodemographic and marketing analytics, social media communities and analysis, and human resources motivation and training.



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