

# The New Symbiosis of Professional Networks

## Survey Results

SNCR Research Symposium  
Harvard University - November, 6<sup>th</sup> 2009

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# The Purpose Of The Study



## Research Questions:

- Are professional networks being utilized by decision-makers in business?
- Is social media typically regarded as a trustworthy source of information for professionals?
- In what ways do professionals rely on social networks to support business decisions?
- Will social media change the business and practice of enterprise-level operations?

## Methodology and Sample Composition:

- The survey was administered online to 356 participants via online survey developed by SNCR Fellows Don Bulmer and Vanessa DiMauro
- Link to survey distributed to SNCR's panel of 15,000+ business leaders + via social media
- Close to a quarter (23%) are CEO of their organization
- 50% are "Director" (24%) or "Manager" (24%)
- Company size ranged from less than 100 to over 50,000 full-time employees
- Age was well distributed with the greatest proportion in the 36-45 range
- 25 countries were represented, with 58% of respondents living in the US
- All respondents were either the decision makers or influenced the decision process

# Six Key Findings

## Professional decision-making is becoming more social

- Traditional influence cycles are being disrupted by Social Media as decision makers utilize social networks to inform and validate decisions
- Professionals want to be collaborative in the decision-cycle but not be marketed or sold to online; however online marketing is a preferred activity by companies.

## The big three have emerged as leading professional networks: LinkedIn, Facebook & Twitter

- The average professional belongs to 3-5 online networks for business use, and LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are among the top used.
- The convergence of Internet, mobile, and social media has taken significant shape as professionals rely on anywhere access to information, relationships and networks

## Professional networks are emerging as decision-support tools

- Decision-makers are broadening reach to gather information especially among active users

## Six Key Findings - 2

Professionals trust online information almost as much as information gotten from in-person

- Information obtained from offline networks still have highest levels of trust with slight advantage over online (offline: 92% - combined strongly/somewhat trust; online: 83% combined strongly/somewhat trust)

Reliance on web-based professional networks and online communities has increased significantly over the past 3 years

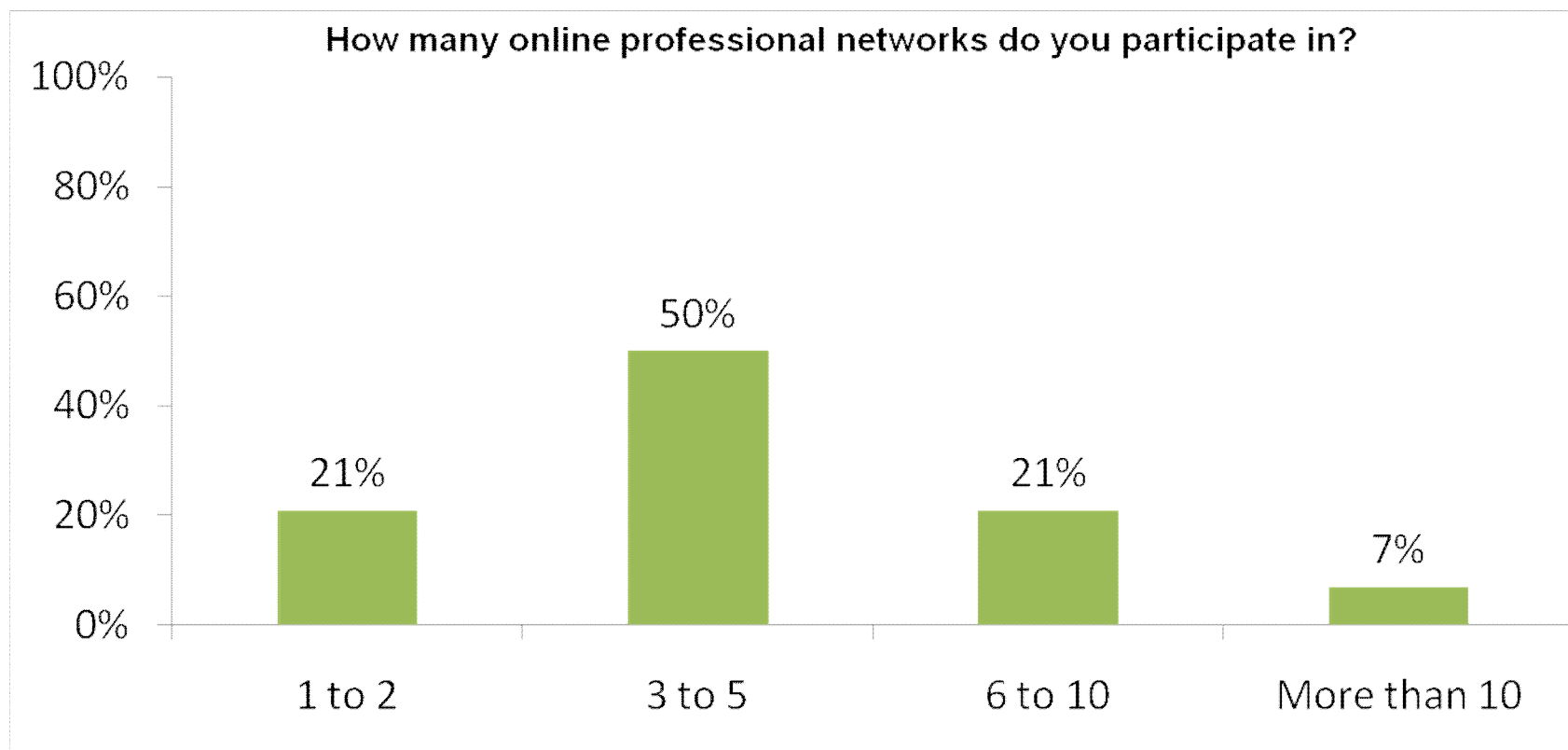
- Three quarters of respondents rely on professional networks to support business decisions
- Reliance has increased for essentially all respondents over the past three years

Social Media use patterns are not pre-determined by age or organizational affiliation

- Younger (20-35) and older professionals (55+) are more active users of social tools than middle aged professionals.
- There are more people collaborating outside their company wall than within their organizational intranet

# Professionals Tend To Belong To Multiple Social Networks for Business

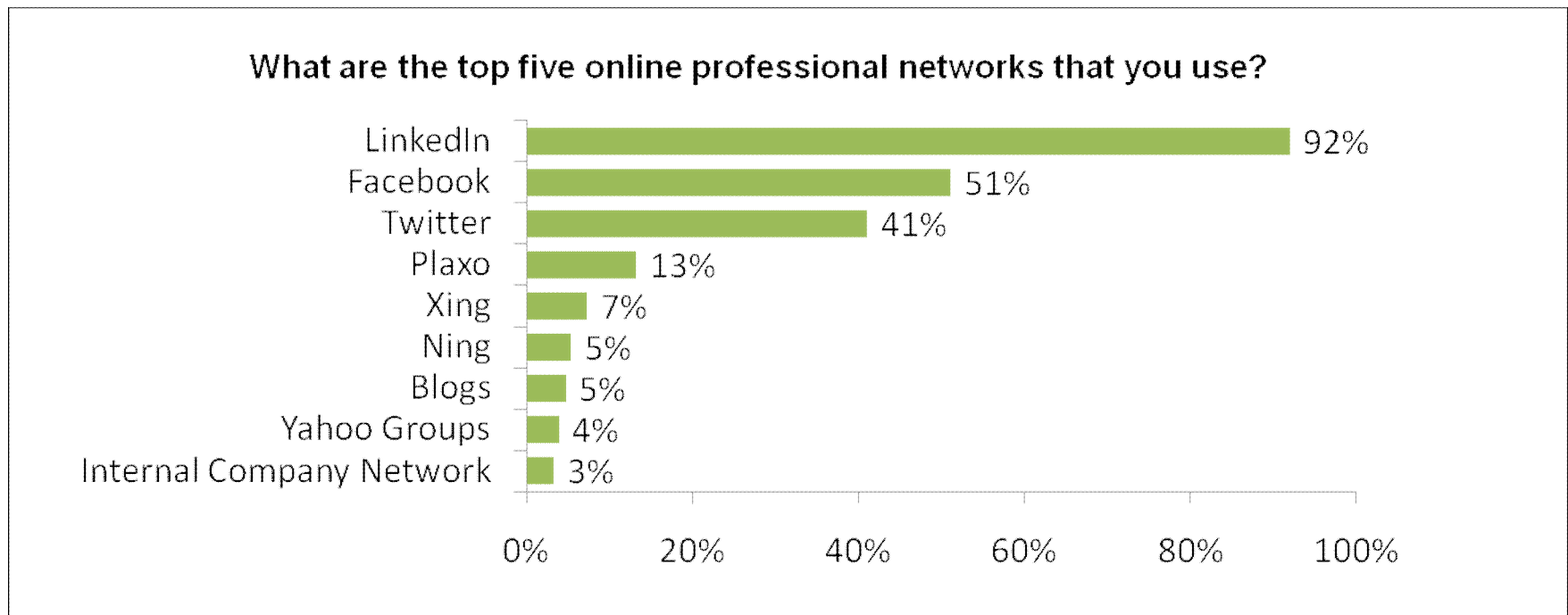
- Half of respondents report participating in 3 to 5 online professional networks
- Another three in ten participate in 6 or more professional networks



Note: Those who indicated that they do not participate in any online professional networks were excluded from the study

# The Big Three Social Networks Have Emerged as Professional Networks

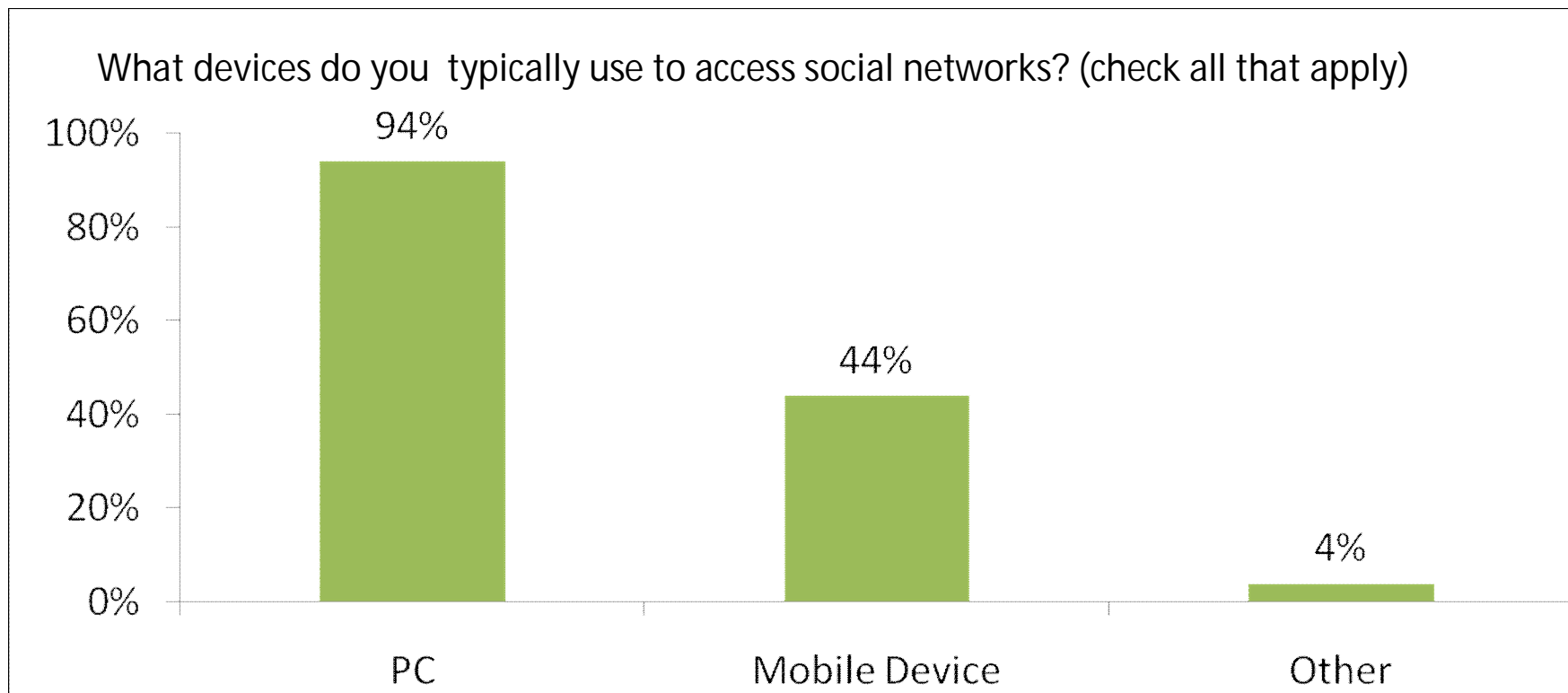
- Popular social networks are now being used frequently as Professional Communities
- More than nine in ten respondents indicated that they use LinkedIn and half reported using Facebook
- Interestingly, Twitter and blogs were frequently listed as 'professional networks'
- Hundreds of other networks were mentioned, many by only one or two respondents



Note: respondents were asked to fill in top 5 professional networks

# Mobile Is Emerging As A Frequent Professional Networking Access Point

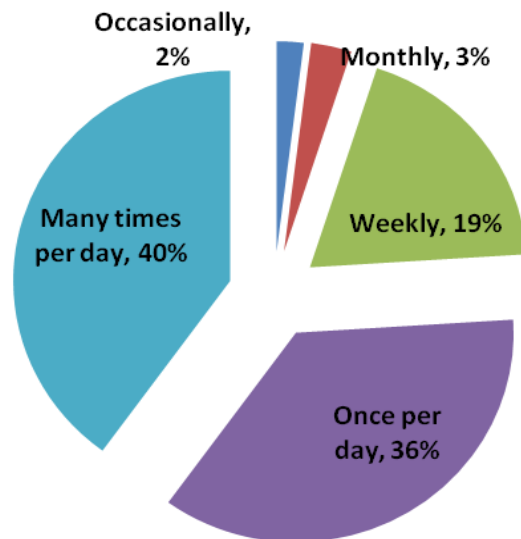
- Essentially all respondents access social networks on a PC or Mac
- Close to half also access social networks using a mobile device
- Those who use multiple networks are more likely to access them using mobile devices
- Younger respondents are also more likely than older respondents to indicate that they access networks through a mobile device.



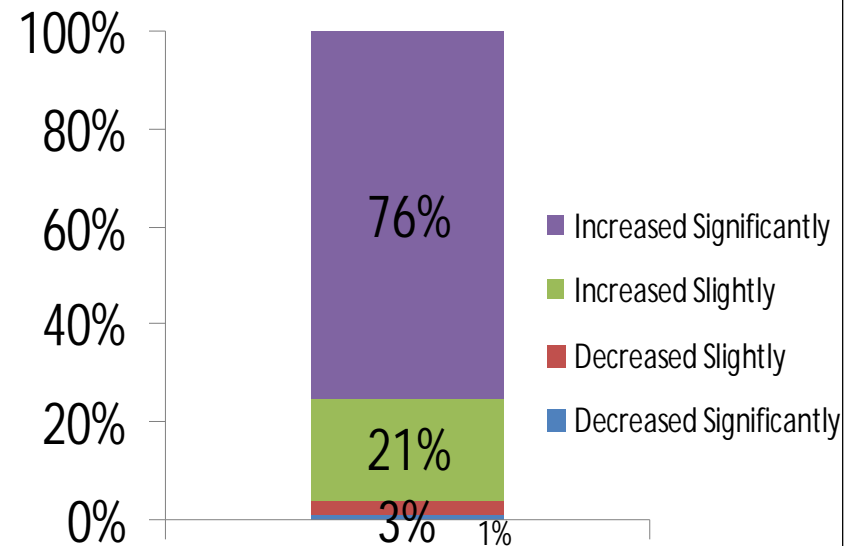
# Usage Of Professional Networks Is Increasing

- Three quarters of respondents visit their social networks at least daily
- Four in ten visit many times each day
- All indicated that their usage has increased over the past three years
- Those who belong to more online professional networks are more likely to visit many times per day
- Small companies are more likely to indicate that they have increased their use significantly

**On average, how often do you visit the networks or communities you belong to?**



**How has this changed over the last three years?**





# Professionals Who Engage in Multiple Networks Report Greater Decision-Support Activities Online

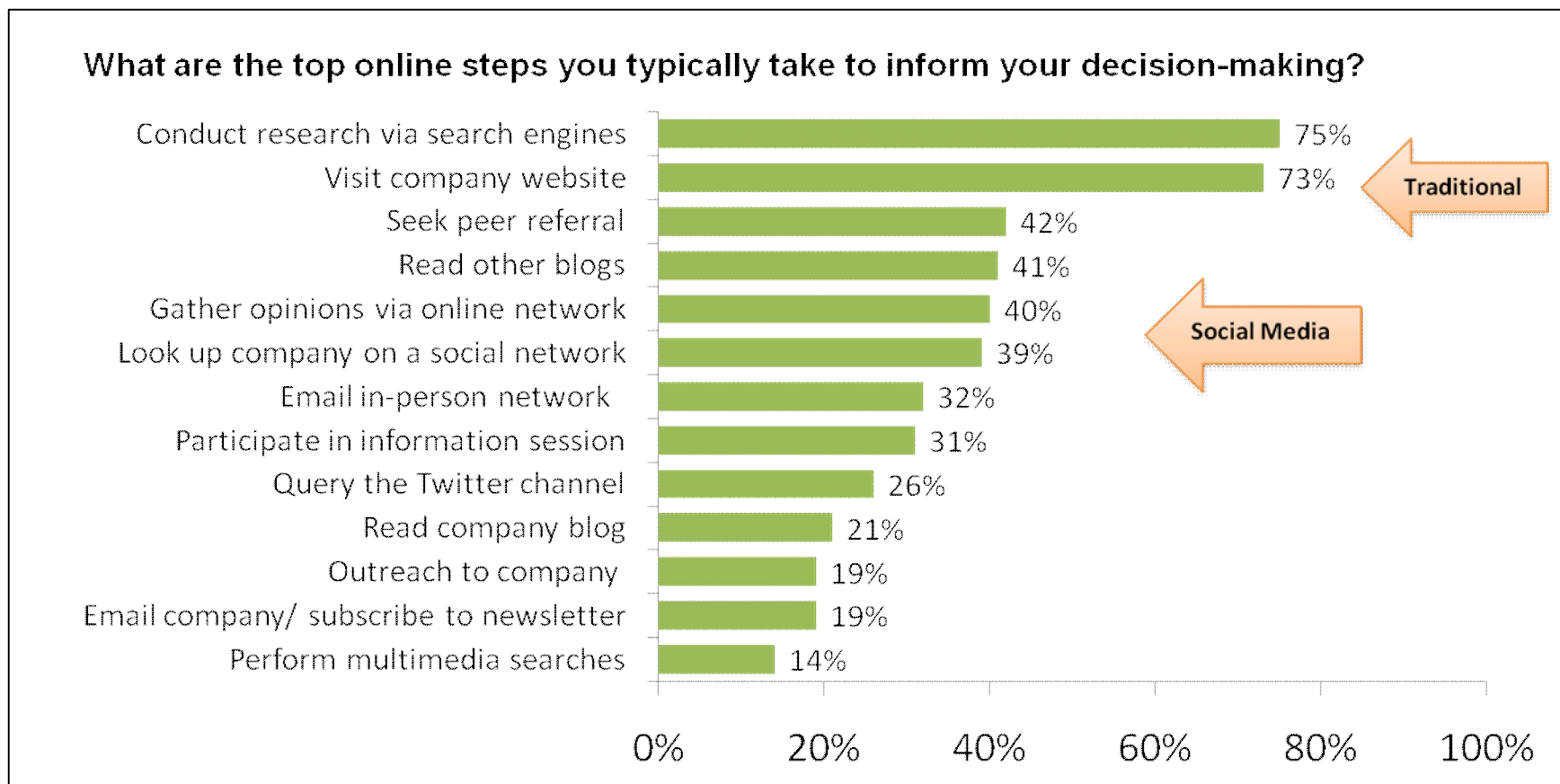
- Keeping track of peers and access to thought leadership are top reasons why professionals participate in online networks
- Professionals who use more than three networks are likely to be more collaborative and have higher reliance on networks to support decision making process

Primary Reasons To Visit Online Networks and Communities	Percent Strongly Agree			
	Overall	1 or 2	3 to 5	6+
Keep track of peers and colleagues	52%	43%	57%	51%
Access to thought leadership /information I couldn't get elsewhere*	44%	22%	51%	49%
Showcase myself or my company*	43%	35%	45%	46%
Access to learning/professional development*	41%	22%	43%	51%
Finding out what others think of products, vendors, approaches, etc. *	36%	18%	37%	47%
Increase speed of collaboration*	32%	11%	35%	40%
Research business decisions*	28%	7%	30%	39%
Reduce costs typically found with traditional networking	18%	14%	21%	14%
Accelerate decision-making processes through peer input*	15%	9%	12%	26%
Improve reliability of information	14%	7%	15%	18%
Reduce travel costs	11%	9%	12%	11%

Question: What are the primary reasons you visit professional online networks and communities?

# Traditional Decision-Making Process is Supplemented By Social Media

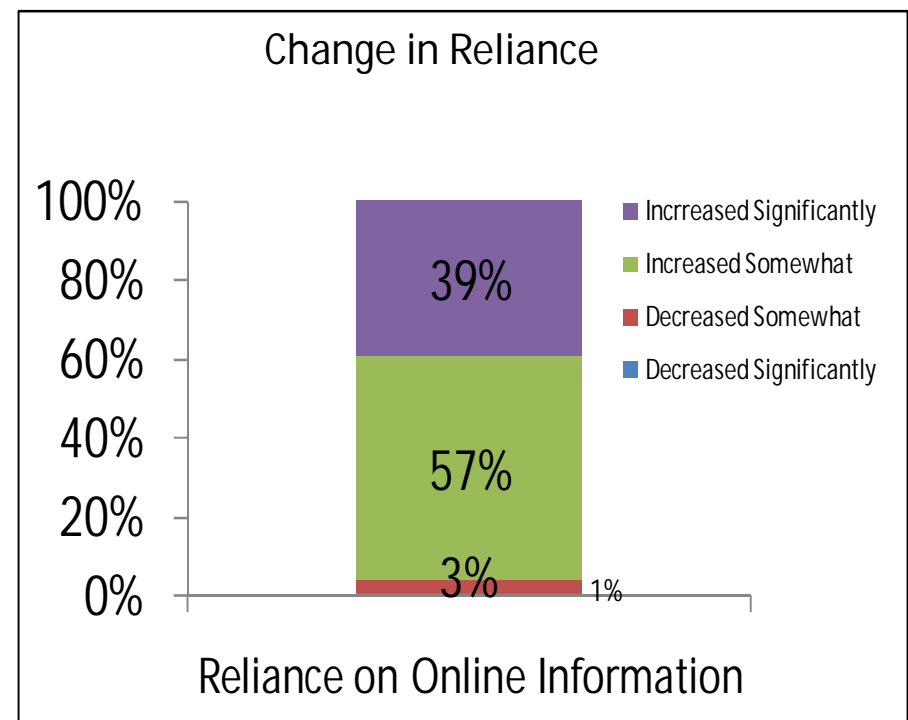
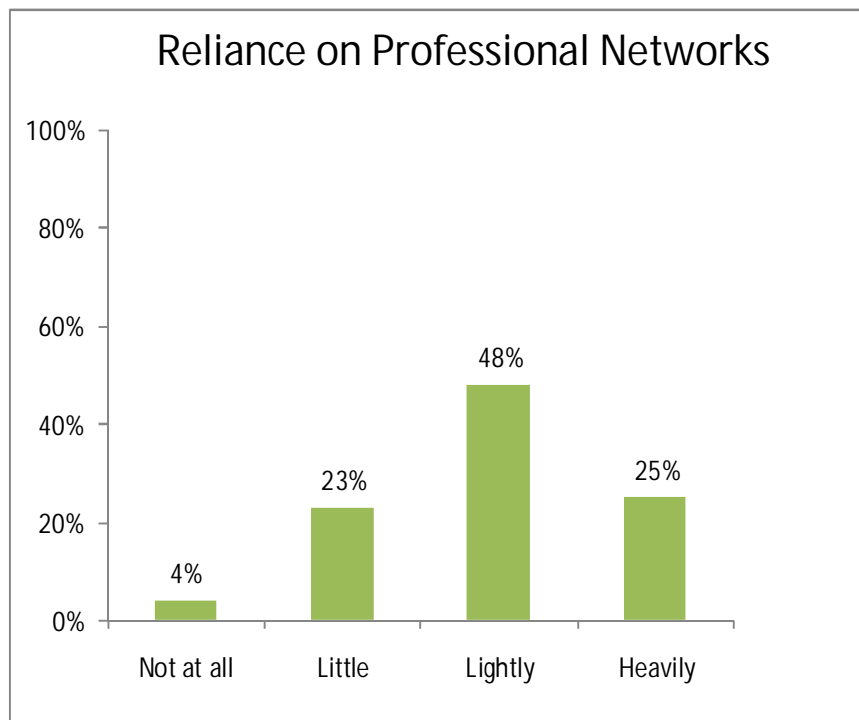
- Three quarters of respondents conduct research via search engines, and close to three quarters visit a company website to inform decision-making
- Seeking peer referral, reading blogs, gathering opinions through an online network, and looking the company up on a social network are all steps taken by about four in ten respondents



Note: Respondents could select up to 4 options

# Professional Networks Are An Increasingly Essential Decision-Support Tool

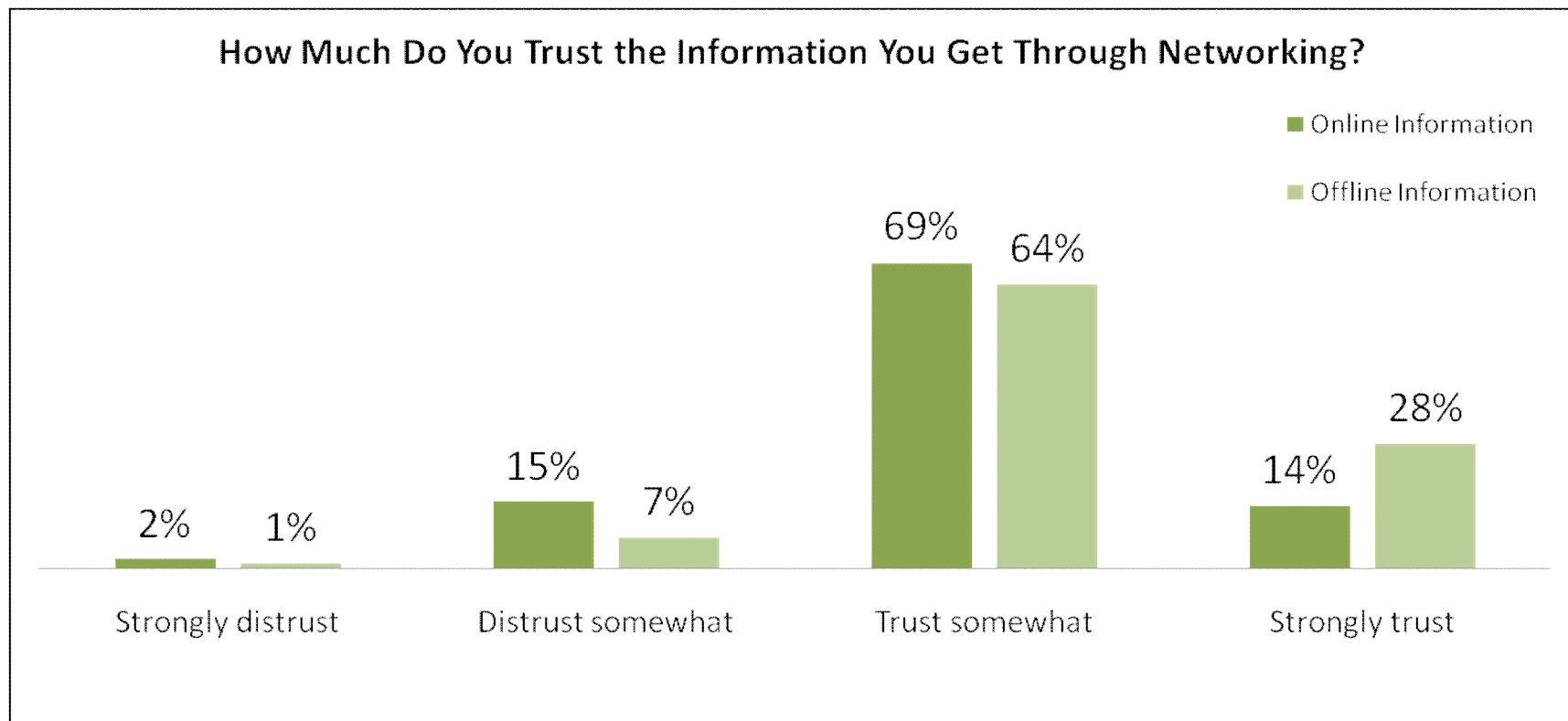
- Three quarters of respondents rely on professional networks to support business decisions
- Reliance has increased for essentially all respondents over the past three years



Question: How much do you rely on professional networks for information/advice/insight to support business decisions?  
Question: How has this changed over the last three years?

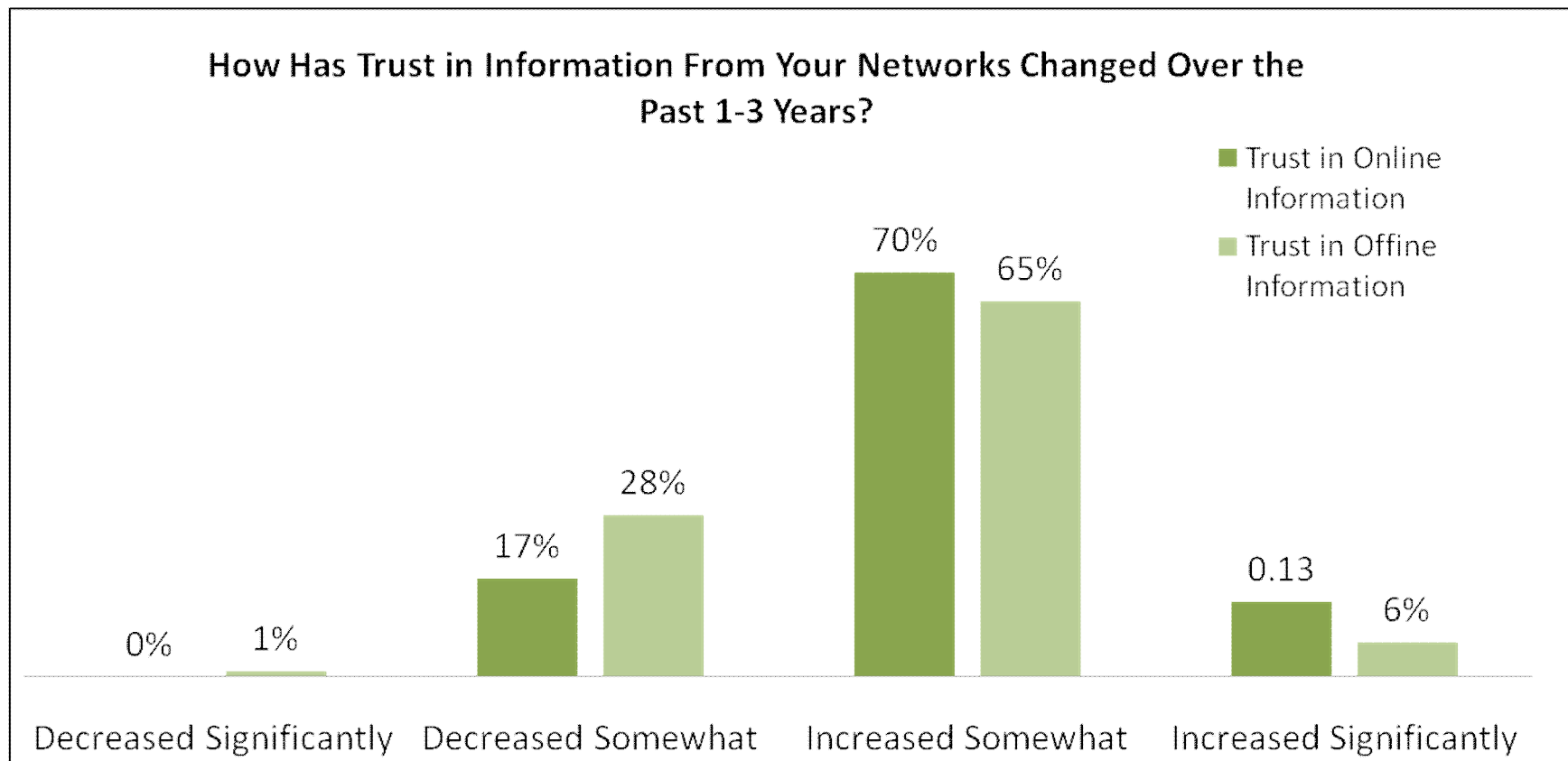
# High Levels of Trust Exist in Information Obtained From Online Networks

- Offline is strengthened by online engagement – to extend relationships and collaborate
- Information obtained from offline networks still have highest levels of trust with slight advantage over online (offline: 92% - combined strongly/somewhat trust; online: 83% combined strongly/somewhat trust)



# Strong Increase in Trust From Information Obtained Through Online and Offline Networks

- Trust in online networks rises as people engage more and gain comfort with online community and professional networking



# Connecting And Collaborating Are Key Drivers For Professional Use of Social Media

- Respondents clearly see the value in online collaboration
- They most appreciate the ability to reach out and connect with others and to gain fresh insight, ideas, and actionable information

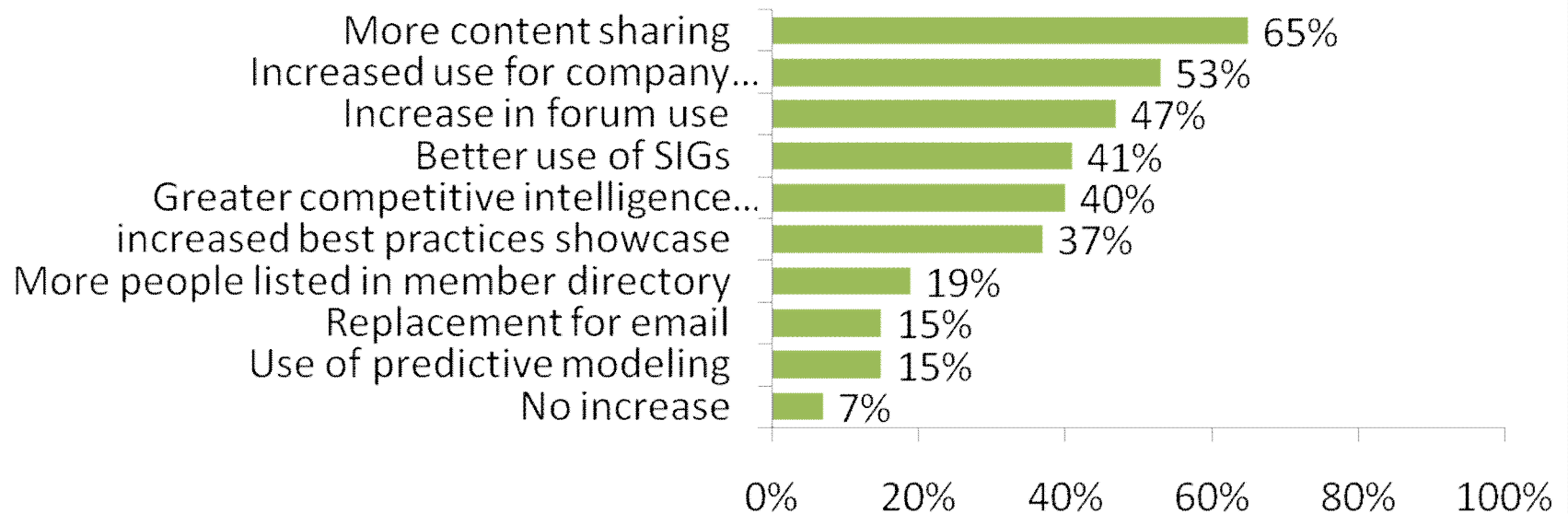
Statements	Percent Agree
I am able to reach & connect with other professionals due to the network	73%
Collaborating with others provides me with fresh insight, ideas, and actionable information	71%
My collaboration with peers is strengthened by online connections & made more efficient	65%
My connections online have shared information with me that inform the work I do in meaningful ways	60%
Collaborating with others saves me time and money	49%
I find people are more willing to collaborate online and share information than offline	47%
I only collaborate or connect online with people I already know	19%
Online connections are best for sales and marketing but not for collaboration	6%
Connecting to others or collaborating does not interest me	3%

Question: Which statements best capture your experiences collaborating with others in an online environment? (select all that apply)

# Changes in Company Internal Use of Social Media

- More than half of respondents expect that in 1-2 years their company will increase social media use to share more content and do more company-wide communications
- Less than one in ten expect to see no increase in their company's internal use of social media tools

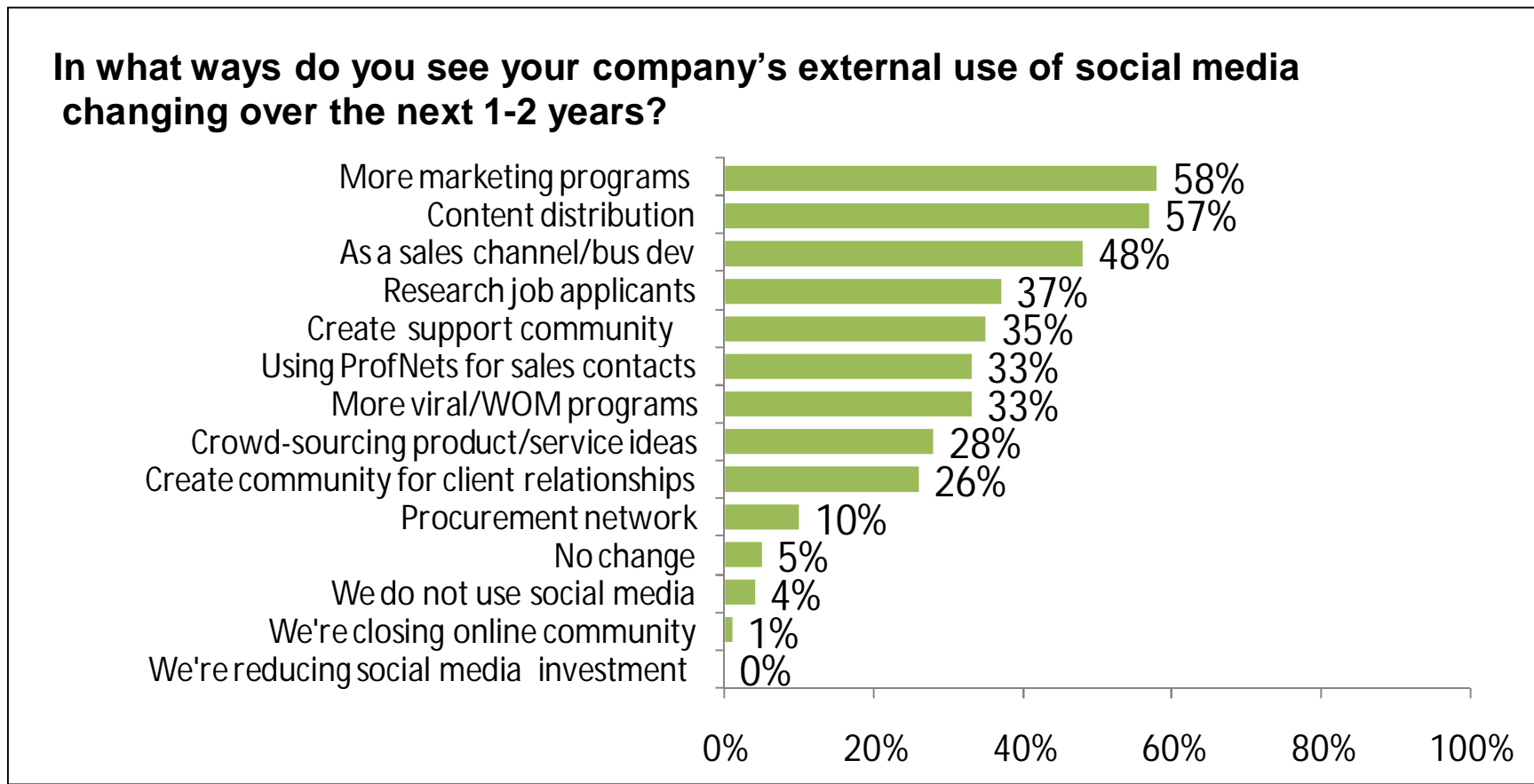
In what ways do you see your company's use of internal social media tools increasing over the next 1-2 years?



Question: In what ways do you see your company's use of internal social media tools increasing over the next 1-2 years? (select all that apply)

# Changes in Company External Use of Social Media

- More than half of respondents foresee more marketing programs and content distribution in the next one to two years
- None foresee a reduction in social media investment



Question: In what ways do you see your company's external use of social media changing over the next 1-2 years? (select all that apply)



# What Does This All Mean?

- Social Media is supplementing the traditional professional decision-making cycle with great affect
  - The era of Social Media Peer Group (SMPG) has arrived and information will travel at a business velocity that has never been seen before enabled by the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies.
- Challenges are facing marketers who endeavor to manage or control social media network content
  - Traditional cycles of decision-making are being disrupted by SMPG
  - Managing and influencing professional decision-making will be the major challenge as professionals often do not seek the information that marketers want to share online.
- The greatest opportunity business has is to engage collaborative influence – via immediacy of impact through social channel



# THANK YOU!

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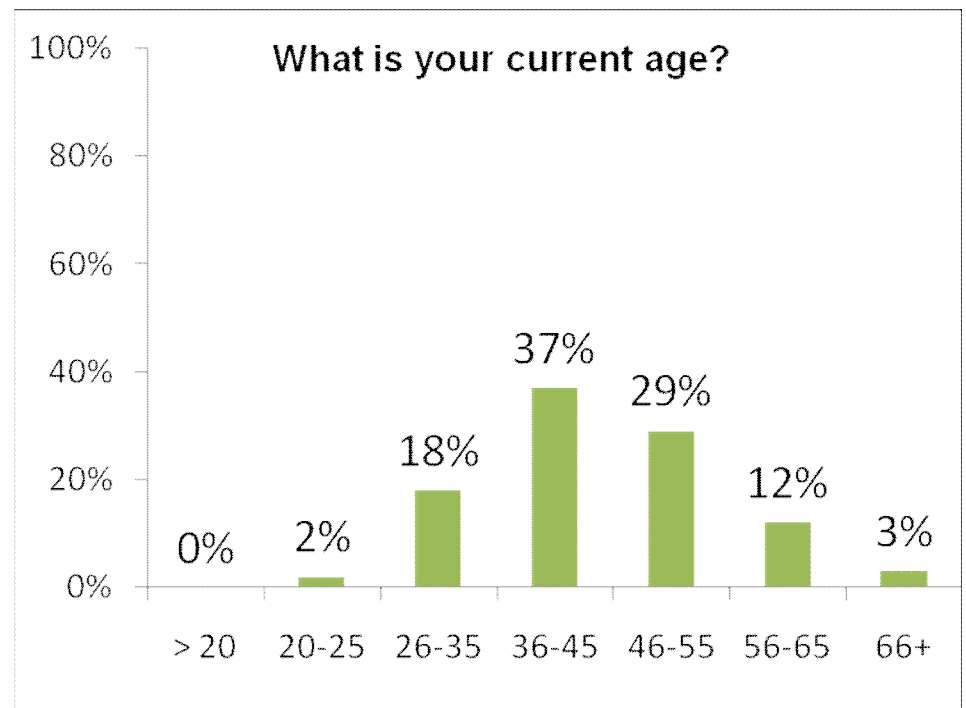
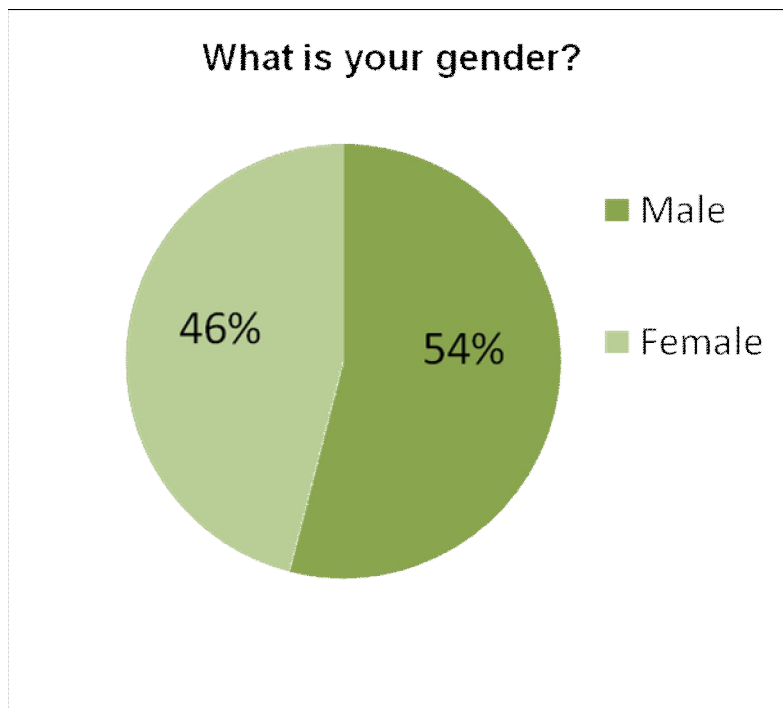
Twitter: @vdimauro



# Supplemental Slides

# Gender and Age

- Slightly more than half of the respondents were male
- A wide range of age groups were represented, with about two thirds of respondents falling between the ages of 36 to 55



# Country

- The largest number of respondents live in the US (58%), followed by the UK, Germany, and Canada

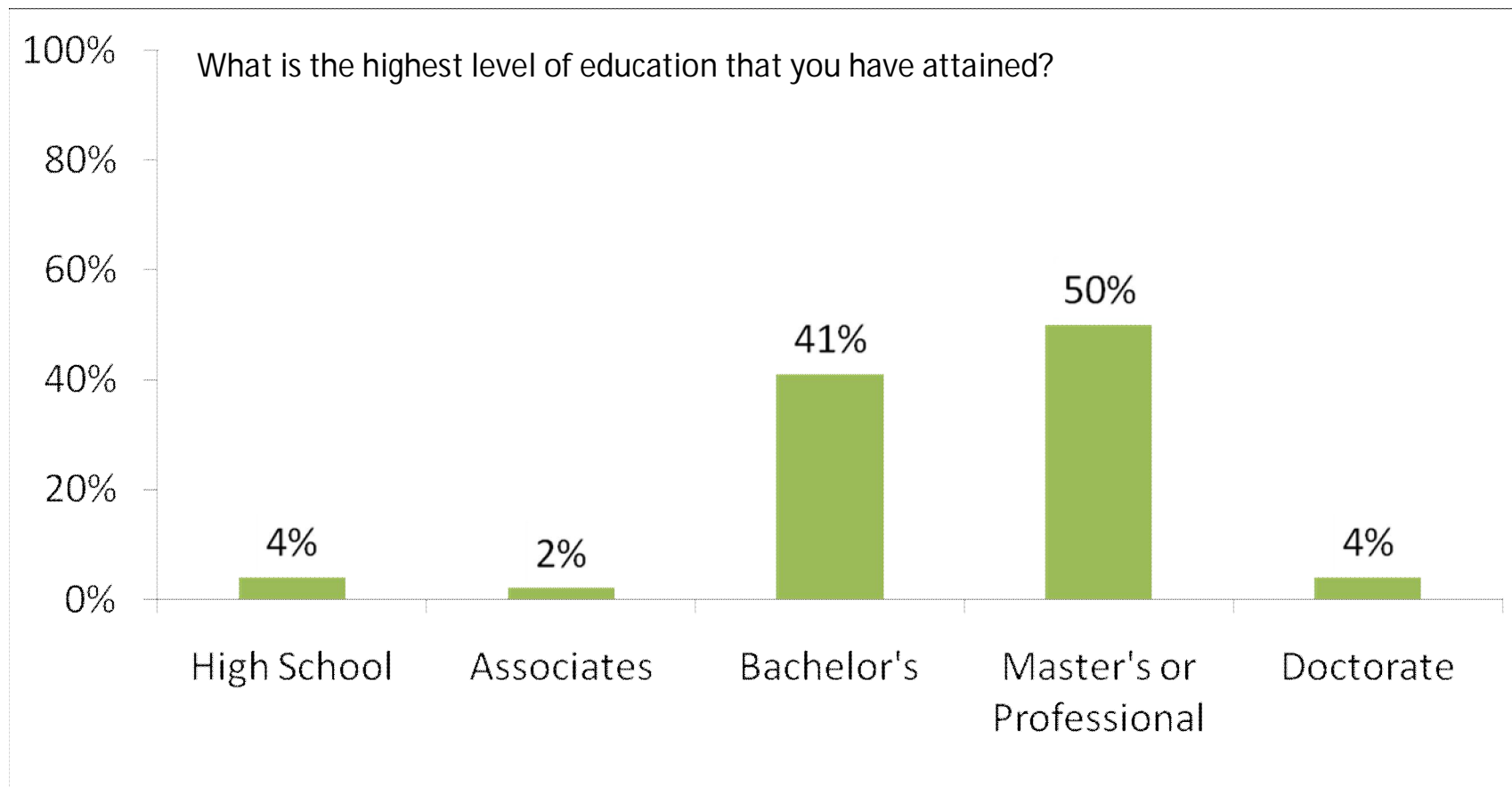
In what country do you live?

Country	N	Country	N
United States	207	Austria	1
United Kingdom	15	Brazil	1
Germany	14	Denmark	1
Canada	11	Jamaica	1
India	5	Lithuania	1
Australia	3	Malaysia	1
Ireland	3	Netherlands Antilles	1
Netherlands	3	New Zealand	1
Belgium	2	Russia	1
France	2	Singapore	1
Philippines	2	Spain	1
South Africa	2	United Arab Emirates	1
Switzerland	2		

Note: 73 respondents did not list a country

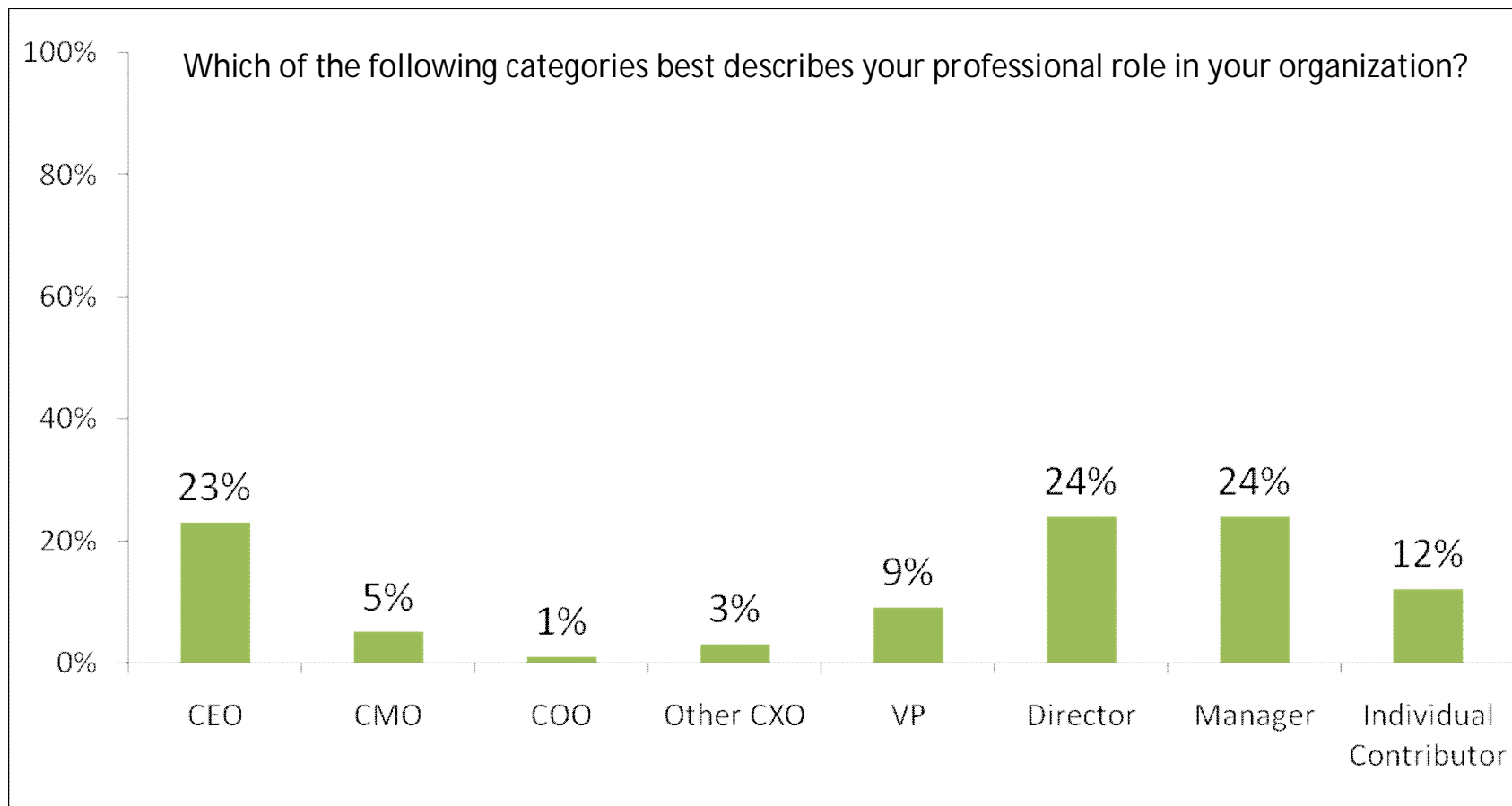
# Education

- More than nine in ten respondents hold a Bachelor's, Master's or Professional degree



# Professional Role

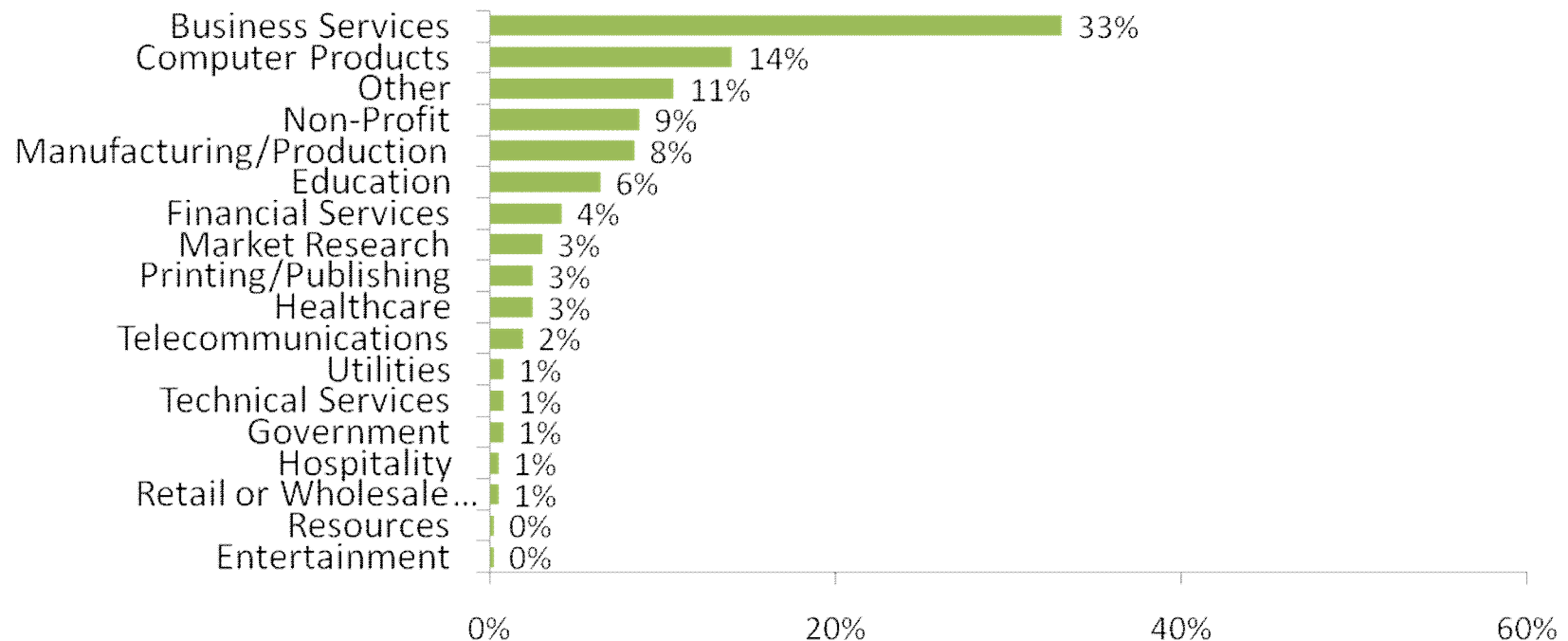
- Close to a quarter of respondents reported that they are the CEO in their organization



# Primary Business

- One third of respondents described their organization's primary type of business as "Business Services"
- "Other" responses varied, with no single industry receiving more than one or two mentions

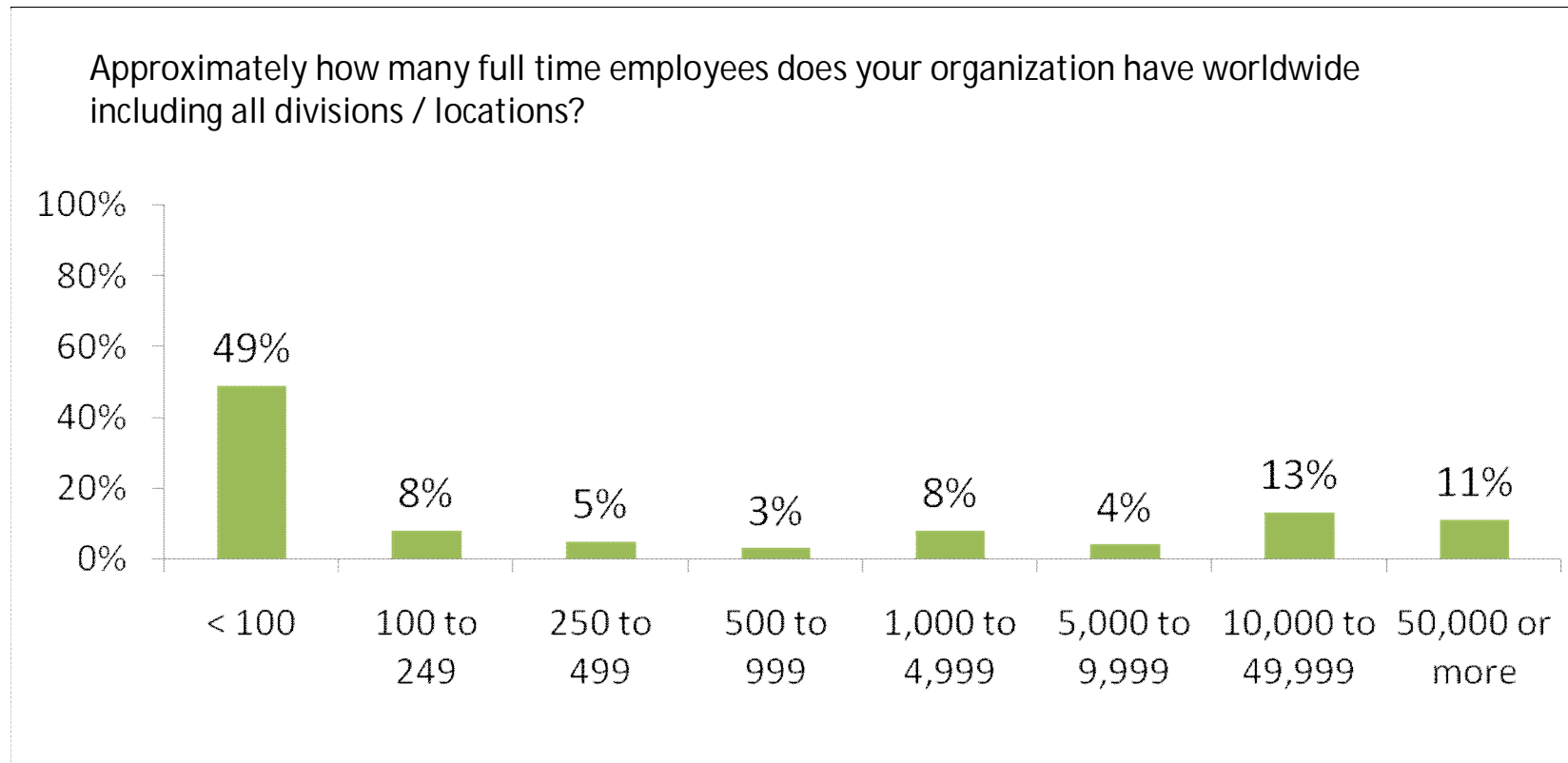
Please indicate your organization's primary type of business





# Number of Employees

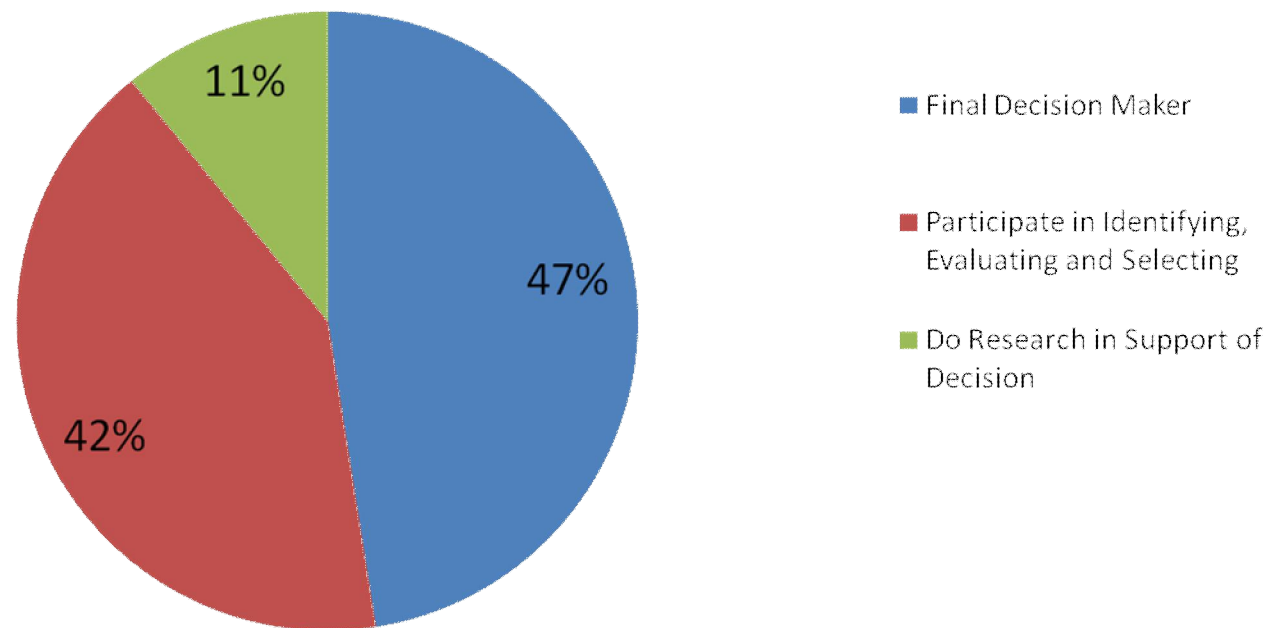
- About half of respondents indicated that they work for an organization with less than 100 full time employees
- At the other extreme, close to a quarter work for organizations with 10,000 or more employees



# Responsibility

- Close to half of respondents reported that they are the final decision-maker
- Another four in ten reported that they participate in the decision-making process, while one in ten do research in support of the decision-maker

Which of the following best describes your responsibilities in making decisions on products and services in your company or organizational unit?



Note: Those who indicated that they had no decision-making responsibility were excluded from the study

# Analyses

- Frequency distributions were calculated for all items
- Chi Square analyses were conducted to determine possible differences among segments of interest on each item. Differences significant at the  $p < .01$  level are identified in the deck. The following segments were examine
  - Responsibility: Final Decision Maker vs. Other
  - Size of Company: < 100 employees, vs. 100 to 4,999 vs. 5,000 or more employees
  - Number of Online Professional Networks: 1 or 2 vs. 3 to 5 vs. 6 or more
  - Age: 35 or under vs. 36-45 vs. 46-55 vs. 56 or older
  - Role: CEO vs. Other CXO vs. VP/Director vs. Manager/Individual Contributor