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Future Searches Attitudes to Social Media

Michael Donnelly, Network member, Ireland

Ruth Feldman, Network member, USA

Future Search Network recently surveyed its members on their use, understanding of and attitudes to Social Media. The purpose was to better evaluate the basis for further work on social media within the network, to identify network member's comfort levels with the latest technologies and to identify if there was an appetite to go further in enhancing the Networks capabilities in Social Media.

The Network is comprised of individuals who operate largely independently of each other and on a global basis. There is a degree of collaboration both within nations and internationally. The collaboration is largely around the running of Future Search events and also to organise training sessions and the international annual learning exchange. The current members' Listserve is used to post interesting news and to solicit assistance from the Network.

Future Search already has a presence on Linked In and on Twitter but these are not yet widely populated with Future Search Network members. Sign up to the [Future Search Linked In Group Here](#). The results of the survey have been used to develop an agenda item at the upcoming [Learning Exchange](#) (September 25 to 27) in the Netherlands where members will have the chance to explore in more depth the opportunities and implications of social media on their work. We received around 50 responses to the survey from across the world and this is a basic summary of those responses with some thoughts.

The conclusions from the survey are very clear:

1. There is an innate acceptance that social media will be very important to the network in the future and is something worth spending time on developing.
2. Most members are on the journey with social media already in their work and personal lives albeit mostly at the "entry-level"
3. There is a desire to know more about practicalities of how to use it and how it can help the Network (associated with this there is a low current use of collaboration tools in doing Future Search work)



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4. There are plenty of ideas for greater collaboration using social media identified by the Network membership

Range of Attitudes – Hardcore Yes! to Hardcore No!

The range of attitudes to social media ranged from being hugely enthusiastic about its potential and importance all the way through to outright negative views about it. Most respondents sit in the middle – perhaps understanding that the influence and possibilities of social media are growing but largely untapped as of yet. There is a certain caution towards social media – variously articulated as being “faddy” or not as good as “face-to-face”. There is also an openness to learn about what it can achieve for the Network.

The survey underpinned the wide use of traditional communication methods among members – email and listserve predominate although there is a high awareness and use of some other common social media – Linked In, Skype, and Facebook especially.

Interestingly despite the volume of usage of the most common social media tools, the majority of respondents still do not use social media tools in their Future Search work.

Practically all respondents said they saw increased use of social media as both necessary and desirable for the Network. While many did not know what this meant in practise, practically all expressed a desire to explore the opportunities further. When asked what in particular they would like to learn, again there was a range of requests from practical help with using the tools, to understanding more about the philosophy underpinning the growth of social media. There were also requests for having greater understanding of how it could help the Network and what to avoid.

When proposing ideas for how they think social media can help the Future Search Network there were some interesting ideas. Largely they broke down into three key areas:

1. Helping greater communication and collaboration within the network
2. Achieving greater linkages with other like-minded movements and organisations
3. Assisting with the Future Search process itself – pre and post event communication and conversation.

Conclusions



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Everyone doing this work is online, and everyone recognises that our work involves collaboration. We also recognise that increasingly the broad public are using collaborative software in their work. Social Media penetration will continue to grow. We appear to accept that this fact alone makes it essential to respond. The question in front of us is how to respond in a way that makes us more successful in our work and to increase the impact of Future Search globally.

The Netherlands Future Search Learning Exchange will confront these issues head on and ensure that we are taking the right steps in our journey. Sign up for the Learning Exchange [here](#).