

# The State of Social Media in Tech Transfer: 2013 Survey Results and Recommendations

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Over the past several years, the role of social media in the technology transfer industry has changed dramatically. Fuentek has monitored this evolution closely as part of its efforts to help organizations achieve optimal success for their technology transfer programs. In February 2013, Fuentek conducted an online survey of technology transfer professionals to determine social media's role in their daily operations and its impact on their technology transfer office (TTO).

Although the brief survey was unscientific, the results provided interesting data on the positive impact of social media as well as concerns about the use and role of these tools. Key insights include:

- TTOs *are* using social media, and usage has increased fairly dramatically during the past 2 years.<sup>1</sup>
- Many TTOs are finding social media effective, and most current users plan to keep using it.
- TTOs are mostly using the tools that have the greatest relevance, the least risk, and the lowest content-creation requirements—that is, LinkedIn<sup>®</sup> and Twitter<sup>®</sup>.
- Most non-users of social media do not believe its potential impact for their organization is significant, citing a lack of deals attributable to social media and discounting the importance of “brand building.”

This paper provides an overview of the survey responses as well as recommendations for increasing the impact of social media for technology transfer.

## 1.0 Social Media Usage

Over a 2-week period, 108 technology transfer professionals participated in the online survey. About two-thirds of these respondents were from academia, which is in large part due to the fact that the survey was conducted in preparation for a panel discussion entitled “Social Media Unplugged: Is It Worth the Hype?” (<http://bit.ly/X3Ebj>), held at the 2013 annual meeting of the Association of University Technology Managers<sup>®</sup> (AUTM<sup>®</sup>). However, the survey was advertised broadly, and other survey participants included tech transfer professionals at non-profit and government research labs, for-profit companies, health care organizations, law offices, and consulting firms. Key take-aways about social media usage are summarized in the bullets and charts below.

- **75% of respondents have used social media for at least 6 months.** Users have a combination of an organization-level presence and individual staff members using social media as part of their work.

### Focusing on Fundamentals

Readers who are new to social media, and thus are unfamiliar with the tools and terms, may find the following resources useful:

- **Webinar: How We Rode the Social Media Wave: Lessons Learned from a Technology Marketing Effort** (<http://bit.ly/dl9Wfg>)
- **White Paper: Leveraging Social Media for Technology Transfer Marketing** (<http://bit.ly/10FzIDl>)
- **Other Insights: Your Online Presence—Doing Digital Right** (<http://bit.ly/frq3Kn>)

<sup>1</sup> The response to this survey was much greater than what Fuentek received for a similar survey in January 2011.

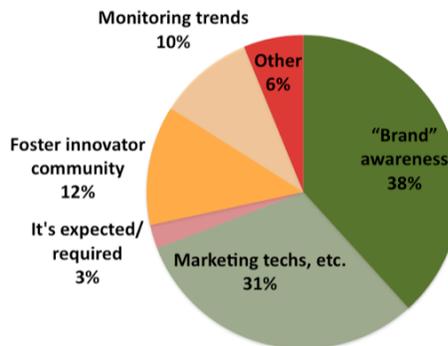
- **25% of respondents do not currently use social media.** Many of these organizations plan to start using within the next 12 months, and their primary focus is learning more about how social media could be used to support organizational goals. Interestingly, just over 5% of all respondents indicated that they do not plan to use social media in their technology transfer work. Non-users most frequently cited uncertainty of social media’s value as the reason their TTO does not use social media.
- **Building the brand of the TTO or overall organization is the most common objective for social media.** Marketing technologies, research, and/or capabilities was a close second.
- **LinkedIn is clearly the favored networking-oriented social media tool.** Nearly 85% of the respondents use this tool, with more than half using it regularly. Twitter and Facebook® are also used commonly, with about half of respondents using each of these tools.
- **Interest in content-driven social media tools is mixed.** While some organizations are using tools such as blogs and video sharing (YouTube™/Vimeo™), many respondents have no plans for incorporating this type of social media.

**Non-users indicated a variety of drivers for not engaging with social media.**



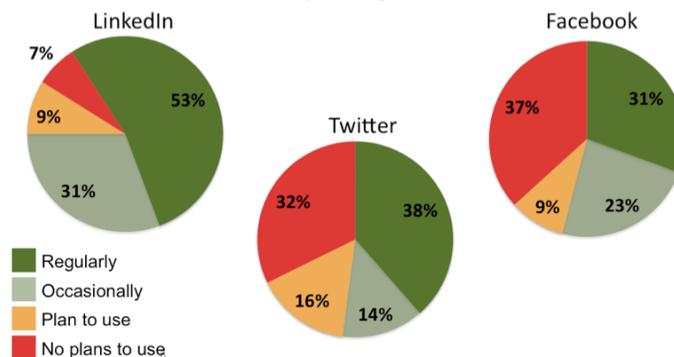
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**Building the office “brand” was paramount, but marketing opportunities was a close second**



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**Most frequently used tools**



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When asked to characterize social media’s impact on their TTO, respondents offered a variety of insights. The following sections present an analysis of those responses along with recommendations for achieving the positive effects realized by some TTOs while avoiding the negative situations cited by others. We hope to empower readers to replicate positive outcomes at their own TTO.

## 2.0 Achieving a Positive Impact from Social Media

More often than not, respondents indicated that their technology transfer organization had experienced a positive impact from using social media. Positive outcomes generally fell into four categories: gaining knowledge/market intelligence, establishing/maintaining connections, having a presence, and achieving secondary goals. Specifics regarding this feedback from survey respondents are provided below, along with Fuentek’s insights about how these successes may have been achieved.

### 2.1 Gaining Knowledge, Market Intelligence

Respondents submitted a variety of comments indicating how social media has improved their ability to stay abreast of market trends. For example:

- “[We have] greater awareness of trends in TT [tech transfer] and in industries we are interested in.”
- “[G]ood to know what other TTOs are up to.”
- “There’s a sense of community among TTOs, especially on Twitter.”

Others indicated that social media helped them be “more aware of opportunities” and was “useful in negotiations.”

LinkedIn and Twitter are two very effective tools for monitoring trends in the technology transfer industry. In addition, LinkedIn discussion groups and Twitter feeds/hashtags can be identified for specific industries or even individual companies, providing an information resource that can be tapped when determining a technology’s market potential, researching a specific potential licensee or partner organization, and monitoring sector trends and events.

#### More about Using LinkedIn and Twitter

- Facebook versus LinkedIn: Which Is Better for Your Business? <http://bit.ly/16dh07W>
- When Marketing Techs on LinkedIn, Find the Right Group <http://bit.ly/Knz6hg>
- It’s Not Just for Job Searches: Using LinkedIn for Technology Transfer Marketing <http://bit.ly/10Gaw00>
- “140 Characters Is Plenty!” Says Fuentek’s Chief Tweeter <http://bit.ly/YAIEe4>
- Best Practices for Tweeting <http://bit.ly/I6CntV>

## Sample Technology Transfer–Focused Discussion Groups and Feeds

LinkedIn	Twitter
Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals	#techtransfer
Association of European Science and Technology Transfer Professionals	@APLUIInnovation
Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM membership required)	@ASTPoffice
APLU Innovation	@ATTPmedia
Licensing Executives Society (USA & Canada)	@AUTM_Network
Licensing Executives Society International	@federallabs
Licensing Managers	@fuentek
techno-I	@ipwire
Technology Transfer – Valorisation	@LESIntl
Technology Transfer Network	@LESUSACanada
TTS Global Initiative (Tech Transfer)	@maxbpv9
University-Industry Demonstration Partnership (UIDP)	@TechTranTactics
	@tto2newco

As of March 31, 2013

### 2.2 Establishing/Maintaining Partner Connections

Several respondents reported successfully using social media as a networking tool for establishing and maintaining connections with current or potential licensees or research partners. Specific comments included:

- “Social media has improved our office’s ability to connect with potential commercialization partners.”
- “[We successfully introduced] a new company to an academic who we contacted through LinkedIn.”
- “Videos we have compiled have inspired competitiveness by licensees to be featured in the future.”

For these respondents, social media has provided an additional mechanism for networking and relationship building, enabling them to connect more broadly and deeply with targeted partners. As these successful organizations likely have discovered, within the realm of social media, traditional “rules” of tech transfer relationship building still apply. The following guidance, derived from the Fuentek blog series “Overcoming One of the Biggest Barriers to Open Innovation: Understand-Address-Present” by Dr. Nannette Stangle-Castor,<sup>2</sup> provides examples of applying social media tools to the activities that are commonly considered best practices for relationship-building:

- **Do your homework:** Several social media tools help with the process of learning more about the people and organizations with whom you hope to connect:
  - **LinkedIn:** Check the profiles of your targets and join their relevant group(s)—doing so makes the Connect process easier later.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fuentek.com/blog/2010/03/build-strong-relationships-with-your-internal-“customers”/>

- **Twitter:** Check the feed for the individual and/or their organization, joining as a Follower if appropriate (i.e., if they post mostly personal topics, joining as a Follower may not result in the desired outcome).
- **Facebook:** Monitor the page for the organization where the individual works; it is often not appropriate to Friend a target directly, since most people use this tool primarily for personal networking.
- **Listen before you talk:** Read what your targets are posting on LinkedIn or Twitter before commenting; this helps ensure that you avoid getting off on the wrong foot and may also help you find appropriate—perhaps previously unforeseen—opportunities to interact with them.
- **Provide valuable information:** When sharing online information via social media channels, ensure the content is relevant for followers (and use the appropriate hashtag) and provide your insights on why you feel it is valuable for the intended community.
- **Don’t overwhelm them:** Avoid posts that are too frequent or overly lengthy. Be direct, concise, and to the point, inviting others to contact you for more information.

### 2.3 *Having a Presence*

Several respondents noted that social media has provided “greater exposure to specific markets, customers, and collaborators with minimal investment.” Others noted that social media has allowed them to achieve “greater awareness of our office among our peers and local networks.” A strong online presence has also attracted leads for some: “We have had people contact us regarding technologies and research tools.” For others, the target audience was internal: “Indications point to better ‘brand’ awareness of our office, particularly among students.”

#### More about Using Social Media to Build the TTO’s Brand

- Marketing Your TTO in All the Right Places (<http://bit.ly/15LeBiK>)
- Partner with Internal Resources to Optimize Social Media Efforts (<http://bit.ly/JfTg6y>)
- Social Media: Choose the Right Sites and Make Your Message Clear (<http://bit.ly/Zl2d8F>)

The table below offers additional suggestions provided by survey respondents regarding options for building your social media presence, along with Fuentek’s recommendations for implementing these approaches efficiently.

Survey Comment	Fuentek Recommendations
“We post videos of hosted seminars on YouTube regularly, so that builds our brand as experts and people connected to experts.”	No need to create a new event exclusively for this purpose. Simply record what is already ongoing and then post it on your Web site and on YouTube and publicize via your other social media channels.

Survey Comment	Fuentek Recommendations
“Useful to show people how our office can work with them.”	Periodically promote the “how to” sections of the TTO Web site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tweet on Twitter with links to relevant sections</li> <li>• Mention in status updates on LinkedIn and/or Facebook</li> <li>• Repurpose “how to” content as blog posts, rewriting as short posts with links to the more detailed Web page</li> <li>• Record short (less than 3-minute) in-person or webinar-based explanations and post on YouTube</li> </ul>
“Has increased engagement in our community - prompted debate and discussion and improved brand awareness.”	Twitter’s 140-character limit can make it difficult to engage in meaningful discourse. LinkedIn is a better option, allowing you to pose relevant questions or start discussions in appropriate groups.

#### Don’t Forget Your Web Site

Regardless of all of the hype about social media outlets, your Web site is still the most valuable digital media tool. The majority of your social media postings will drive your followers to your Web site. If you don’t already have a robust Web site, consider using your resources to build your TTO’s Web site before you get heavily involved in social media. Best practices for TTO Web sites can be found in Fuentek’s online Insights: <http://www.fuentek.com/insights-online-presence.php>. In particular, see the white paper “How to Build an Effective Tech Transfer Web Site.”

## 2.4 Achieving Secondary Goals

A few respondents noted positive outcomes from using social media that fell outside the core TTO goal of transferring technology. These “tangential” goals still provide value and can be achieved without significant increase in required resources:

- **Training:** “YouTube has provided training opportunities at no cost.” *Fuentek Tip:* During training sessions for TTO staff and/or innovators, videotape the session and post it on YouTube and the TTO Web site. If resources are available, edit the full-length video into smaller sections that address a single topic in a shorter amount of time—preferably less than 5 minutes and ideally less than 3 minutes.
- **Recruiting TTO Staff:** “We have recruited interns directly as a result of our efforts on Facebook.” and “We have also effectively used these tools to recruit new talent to the office much better than HR or recruiters can.” *Fuentek Tip:* Post job openings in relevant LinkedIn groups and on Twitter using the #techtransfer and #jobs hashtags.
- **Publicizing Events:** “We organize numerous events through Facebook events and disseminate through Twitter and sometimes LinkedIn.” *Fuentek Tip:* Using multiple social media platforms can increase the reach of your event invitations. As with recruiting, relevant LinkedIn groups and hashtags can help your message get to the right audience.

### 3.0 Concerns Raised about Social Media

Coupled with the many positive responses to social media's impact were several concerns related to social media. These concerns mostly related to the lack of a tangible return on investment (ROI), the amount of time required to implement a social media strategy, and issues surrounding staff usage. While these concerns are valid, there are several strategies for mitigating the negative impact of social media so that the positive rewards can be reaped. Some of the techniques provided here were offered by survey respondents, while others are Fuentek's recommended best practices.

#### 3.1 Tangible Returns

Several comments indicated that survey respondents do not believe that social media generates returns will make the investment worthwhile. Some specifically noted that they could not attribute any deals to social media. Fuentek agrees that a deal is unlikely to emerge solely from social media. Rather, social media is just one tool for achieving a TTO's marketing and communications goals. Survey responses supported this assertion, with one participant noting that "We believe social media is a key tool, although one of many."

Applying a tool for its appropriate purpose is key to a successful outcome (as anyone who has tried to use a screwdriver as a hammer will attest). Several survey respondents feel social media's greatest value is in building the brand of the TTO or the larger organization, as indicated by their recommendations:

- "[We] don't use it for pushing particular technologies - use it to create a community and create awareness
- "Don't have high expectations in using social media for marketing. Use it to help expand network, develop relationships that then turn into targeted marketing opps."

Indeed, some survey respondents citing the lack of ROI—real or perceived—indicated as much:

- "[N]o tangible/significant/specific return yet to demonstrate why it's worth it anything more than a general brand-building exercise."

#### Social Media Metrics: Measuring ROI

During the AUTM 2013 Social Media Panel, audience members were curious to know more about how to calculate social media's return on investment (ROI). Panelists agreed that this is not simple. Most metrics tools, such as bit.ly, Facebook's Weekly Page Update, LinkedIn's stats, and Klout™, indicate how people are responding to your social media efforts — an important measurement of your impact. However, these tools focus on outputs — that is, the specific results of efforts to drive traffic to your Web site, Facebook page, etc. These are different from outcomes — that is, achieving the ultimate goal of, say, getting a licensing deal.

The fact is, whether you're marketing a technology or building your brand or some other goal, social media is just one of the tools for achieving your goal. Marketing campaigns these days take a multi-pronged approach, and success often is tied to more than one single tool. There are plenty of examples where social media contributed to signed deals, but it is not a direct relationship that could be translated into a "spending X dollars and Y hours on social media = Z deals" equation.

Nevertheless, the panelists were definitely in agreement that social media is worth the hype, even if that worth is difficult to measure.

- “Our social media program is for the Laboratory as a whole. We are a regular contributor and the Lab’s social media person reports to TT. So the impact is shared. To date, with our emphasis on branding, the impact has been indirect (no particular license has resulted from this venue alone).”

While it is important to have reasonable expectations for what social media can achieve, it is important to recognize the “small wins” that go along with social media. For example, one respondent noted, “I have used LinkedIn groups and Twitter to post up a couple of licensing opportunities. This activity resulted in a handful of new leads - but yet to be turned into deals.” Further analysis revealed that this individual’s TTO has been using social media tools for less than 6 months. The fact that leads were generated—especially in so short a timeframe—is a significant positive outcome. Just as it takes time to nurture a prospect using traditional tools, connections made via social media tools need time to cultivate.

The bottom line: Social media alone is unlikely to deliver a deal to your doorstep, but it can be a powerful tool for building the reputation and presence of your organization.

### **3.2 Time Requirement**

As noted in *Section 1.0*, the time commitment was frequently cited as a reason for not using social media. In addition to being a barrier to TTOs *entering* the realm of social media, the amount of time required was often linked to the lack of return on investment by social media users: “Some connections have been made, but not enough to currently justify the amount of time spent in feeding content into social media.”

It is true that social media—like any communications tool—requires a time commitment. However, social media’s ability to expand the reach of a TTO’s nationally and even globally, gives it unique value. Furthermore, several respondents noted that the upfront commitment is larger than the ongoing required time:

- “Launching a social media platform takes commitment and is a lot of work to put together, but only takes minimal effort to maintain.
- “It takes a lot of time at first but eventually becomes more efficient.”

One survey respondent suggested: “Using a management app or extension such as BufferApp, HootSuite™, or TweetDeck® is completely essential to maximize output but minimize time put in.” Fuentek has found both TweetDeck and HootSuite to be effective tools.

Other time-management techniques that Fuentek has found effective include the following:

- Don’t feel compelled to join every social media platform. Use the one or two tools that others have found successful—namely, LinkedIn and Twitter. (See *Section 2.0* for suggestions on how to use these tools effectively and efficiently.)
- Schedule a specific time—that is, when during the day/week and how many minutes/hours at a time—to check social media channels for industry trends. This helps prevent social media from becoming a time-sink or causing distractions.
- Turn off real-time alerts and/or set a rule in email software to direct alerts into a folder so you can check them at your scheduled time.

- As appropriate, use a lower cost office resource (e.g., intern, administrative assistant) to post content developed by subject matter experts. (See **Section 3.3** for more about managing staff usage of social media.)

Fuentek has had successful first-hand experience with these techniques. More suggestions are included in the Fuentek paper, “Leveraging Social Media for Technology Transfer Marketing” (<http://bit.ly/10FzIDI>).

### **3.3 Managing Staff Usage**

A couple of respondents cited concerns about staff using social media inappropriately. Such usage included “outbursts and lack of professionalism” in a staff member’s postings as well as comments that social media “attracts the attention of employees away from their work.”

Respondents indicated that social media success requires “involvement of dedicated, knowledgeable folks who believe in building a network and finding ways to communicate with that network in creative, exciting and effective manners.” Indeed, having a dedicated staff member managing the TTO’s social media presence proved advantageous both in terms of efficiency and quality of content: “It is very important that the person(s) handling social media content actually regularly use that form of social media. It is very apparent when an organization is just posting stiff content because it’s on a calendar reminding them to do so.”

Fuentek offers these tips to help ensure appropriate staff usage of social media tools:

- **Limited access:** Allow only trained staff post on the TTO’s social media accounts.
- **Better accurate than fast:** Establish an editorial process to prevent mistakes and missteps.
- **Setting the standard:** Emphasize that—as in face-to-face interactions—staff should not let their emotions lead to posts that are disrespectful, overly opinionated, crass, or otherwise “crossing the line” professionally. Just as they represent the office at professional events, their online presence is expected to be professional as well.
- **Maintain separation:** Encourage (or even require) staff to set up separate profiles/accounts for their personal vs. professional postings and to separate their connections accordingly. (If staff members want to use a beach photo for their profile picture, they can do so on their personal account.)

In the end, social media is like any other interaction: Professionalism is key, and staff are expected to behave professionally.

## **4.0 Conclusions**

In summary, technology transfer professionals that have achieved positive impacts from social media use it as just one of the tools in their marketing toolbox. They consistently indicated that social media is best suited for community- and awareness-building rather than stand-alone marketing of individual technologies, although leads have been successfully generated using social media tools. Furthermore, they recommended that, rather than having all staff spend time building the organization’s presence via social media, the TTO should assign a few—or even one—individual(s) to be the expert. The knowledgeable



individual(s) can make use of related tools to keep the time commitment on an ongoing downward trajectory while simultaneously maximizing the TTO's network and presence, thereby increasing efficiency.

Perhaps the most important comment submitted by survey respondents was: "Social media is here to stay in the business world so tech transfer offices might as well utilize it, if not embrace it."

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