

Which nationals and networks are making best use of social media?



Mitchell Money Penny managing director Nicola Mitchell looks at the best and worst adopters of social media

Devils and dinosaurs

It may have taken half a decade but it seems that almost without exception all the big adviser distributors have now at least begun some level of foreplay with the "devil" that is social media.

Just two weeks ago Tenet announced it has become the latest major adviser network to have really embraced the social media world; rolling out an updated website adorned with interactive sharing buttons already bearing fruit across some of the biggest social media platforms.

Personal Touch and Sesame likewise made significant headway since their entrance into the twitterati and associated social forums last year.

In stark contrast to the positive news that most can report at a corporate level, others however have seen less impressive beginnings, particularly on the more emotive topic of their members' social media policy. Last week saw net-

work Financial Ltd attracting headlines for the wrong reasons. Keen to prevent further high profile member losses, the network agreed to reverse its formerly harsh members' social media policy and lift a ban on tweeting.

This followed a similar event last September when Positive Solutions felt its wrist slapped for an "anti-social" offence; as industry guru Philip Calvert of IFALife accused the national of "behaving like a dinosaur" in its outdated and backward stance on all things social media. A hastily announced review of the offending social media policy ensued.

Underpinning the confusion across the various adviser organisations is the interpretation and implementation of FSA rules announced last year which state "any communications that go beyond image advertising must comply with financial promotion rules".

The regulator also said that before using new media, firms should consider

whether risk information can be prominently displayed; clearly an issue for limited update platforms like Twitter with a 140-character limit.

As a consequence of this, the various networks and nationals that have issued formal social media policies to their members have shown some significant diversities of opinion on just how to educate and enforce their advisers.

The star of social media success at corporate level, Openwork, has probably one of the most light-touch policies among those we reviewed, with an emphasis on education about social media usage generally but very little about any detailed compliance reviews or potential penalties for offenders.

Personal Touch and Tenet have similar policies, with both providing good member support, events and resources to educate members, but the latter taking a more penal stance in outlining what actions would be taken for breaches. Like some of the smaller players,

True Potential, interestingly, does not have a social media policy for members yet but claims it is "aware something is needed".

Hares and tortoises

The latest Money Penny social index of social media results for the main nationals and networks has shown some fascinating new trends emerging at corporate level.

Having been the first to join Twitter back in 2010, Openwork continues to dominate results across the board with impressive growth in followers, Likes and overall social media awareness. Its early adoption of social media and attentive commitment has put it well ahead

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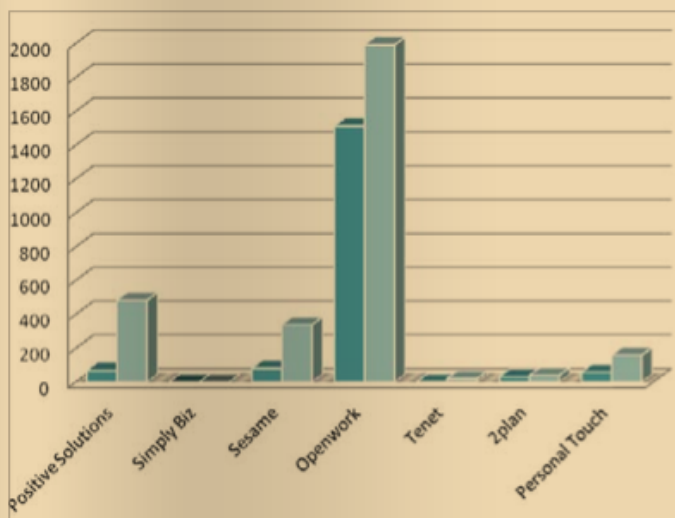
of the game compared to competitors. Alongside Positive Solutions, it has used video content successfully on the YouTube platform.

While most social media players have broad adoption of the three main platforms – Twitter, Linked-in and Facebook – there are some notable anomalies. Simply Biz is rather an oddity, with no Facebook presence and despite absolutely no tweets, a continued growth in twitter followers.

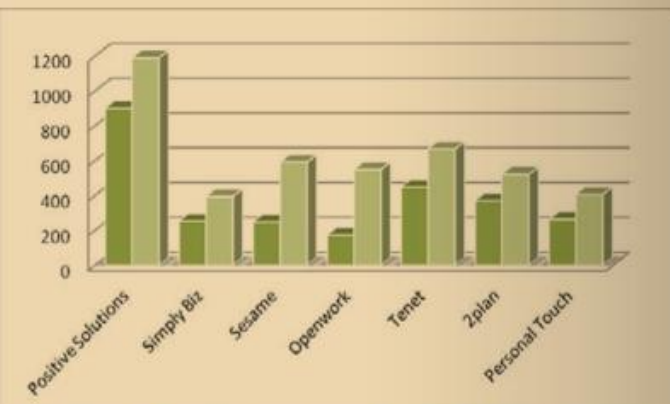
Sesame and Tenet appear to do very well on Linked-in, seen as the most effective social media platform for recruitment and pure business networking, but this may be reflective of its larger comparative scale.

Having amended account names on twitter, Positive Solutions (now @pos_sol) appears to have lost about 200 followers in the past six months but no doubt will recoup these in time. The introduction of its new Facebook page is paying dividends with statistics showing early growth.

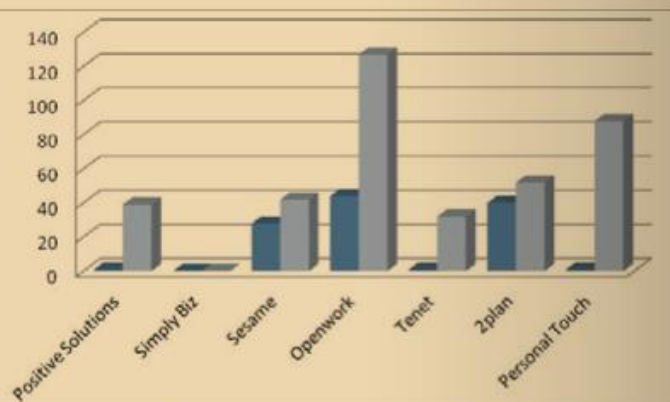
Space prevents more detailed analysis of some of the other key players but as with social media itself, this research is expanding rapidly with several new entrants joining the list of active participants.



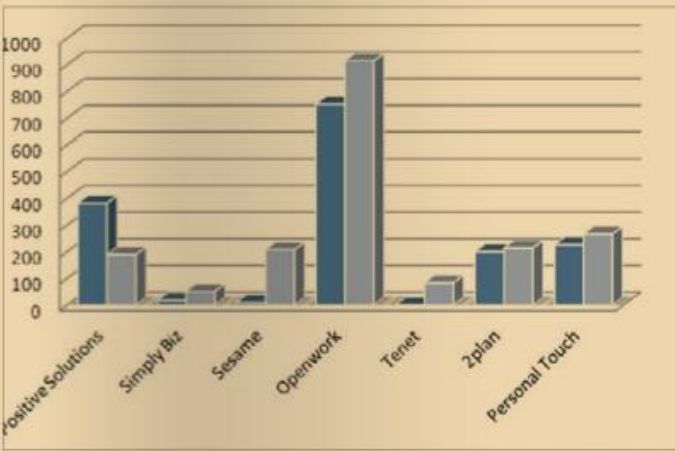
Tweets: the first column shows Nov 2012, the second shows May 2013



Linked-In Followers: the first column shows Nov 2012, the second shows May 2013



Facebook 'likes': the first column shows Nov 2012, the second shows May 2013



Twitter Followers: the first column shows Nov 2012, the second shows May 2013