

VITAL SIGNS

Talking about technology

Evaluating how Internet tools and social media help in-store operations

An industry survey by *Christian Retailing*

» BY JIM SEYBERT

Christian retailers have overwhelmingly embraced social networking services for their personal use and have adopted some of the popular tools for use in their stores.

Here is what we found in our latest Vital Signs industry survey:

PERSONAL

Nearly all retailers (92%) said that they have a personal Facebook account. Among them, 39% checked their “wall” multiple times each day, while another 28% did so daily.

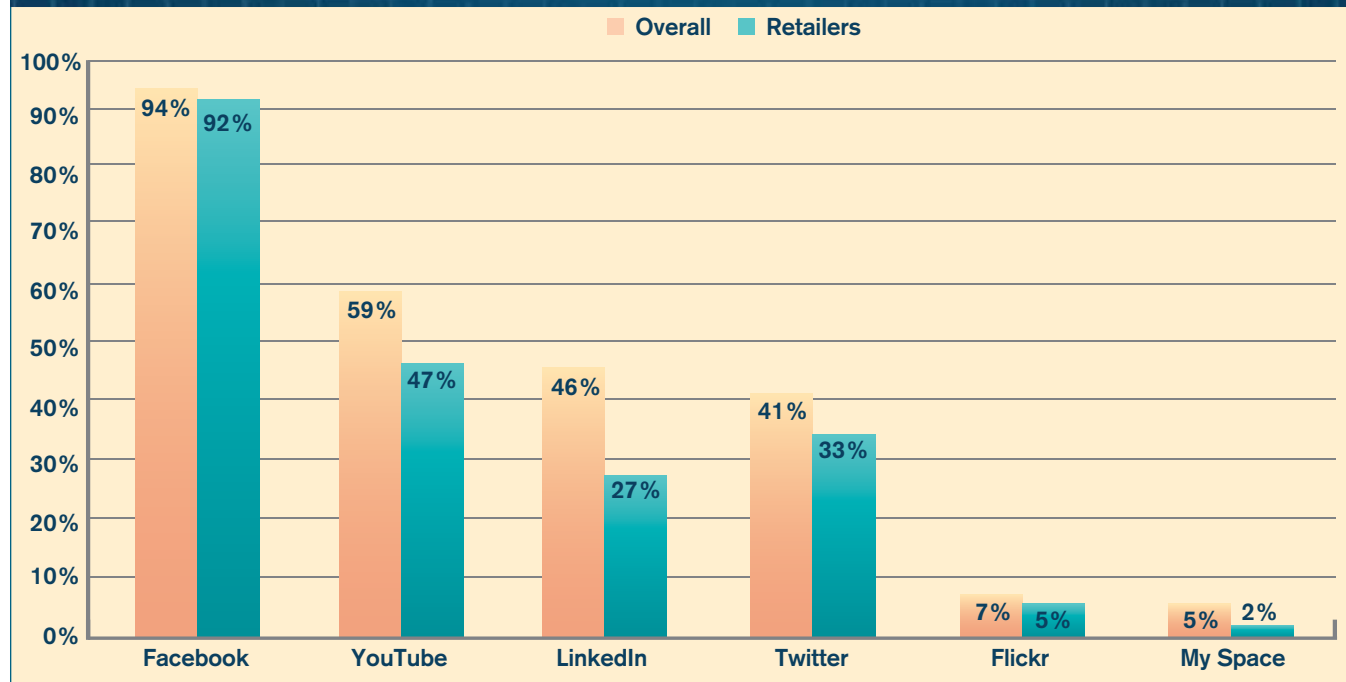
Slightly more than one in 10 posted an update to their personal Facebook page multiple times each day, 17% posted at least daily, and about a third (32%) told us that they have a personal account, but “seldom or never” use it.

The number of retailers using a personal Facebook account was nearly equal to the number of suppliers and other non-retailers in our survey who use it (94%). Personal use of Twitter among retailers (33%) was slightly lower than among non-retailers (41%). Those not working in retail were far more likely to have a LinkedIn account (46%) than those in retail (27%).

Christian retailers believed by a 6-to-1 ratio that social networking technology is a “plus” in their lives. One in four said that tools such as Facebook have added “considerable” personal benefits.

More than half of Christian retailers (55%) admitted having bought a book online in the previous 12 months—the same level as when we asked the ques-

Social media usage



tion in March 2008. Slightly more than a third (36%) reported purchasing music online in the previous year, and 34% had bought office supplies.

PROFESSIONAL

As consumers, Christian retailers may have adopted Internet and digital technologies, but their positive personal experiences were somewhat tempered when it comes to applying the same tools on a store level.

Only two-thirds (63%) of Christian retailers had a Facebook page for their store. Of those who did, one in four updated their status “two or three times a month,” nearly a third did so “seldom or never,” and 21%

posted updates to their store’s Facebook page two or three times a week.

Just over half (55%) sent email promotions to their customers, with the most popular frequency being two or three times a month. Less than half (43%) sent an online newsletter to customers, and one in three used Twitter to send messages about promotions at their store.

The majority of stores (83%) told us they have a Web site, an increase of 10 points over the number that did so in March 2008 (73%). Promotions on store Web sites, we learned, were updated two or three times a month by 37%, once per quarter by 17% and seldom or never by 36% of stores.

POTENTIAL

While they saw strong personal benefits to social networking technology, retailers for the most part rated its value to their marketing efforts as “neutral,” with 48% placing the marketing value right in the middle.

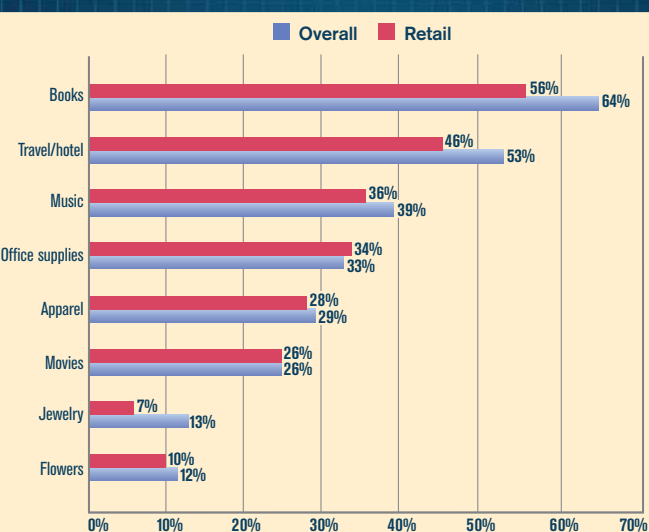
Staying current on the rapidly changing, digital playing field was the greatest technology challenge identified by retailers. Many echoed the comments of one who wrote that “technology is very time-consuming. In order to be relevant, you need to be continuously updating content.”

The use by consumers of e-books and downloadable content was a growing concern. Although 80% of retailers said that they did not sell e-books, 18% were “considering” their options related to carrying digital readers.

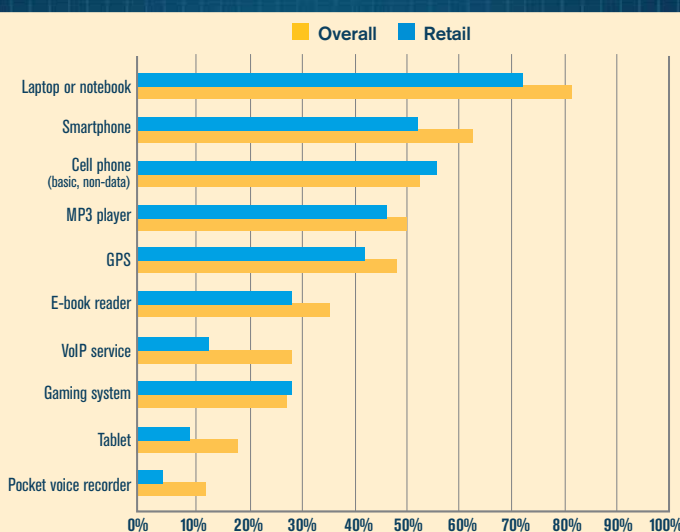
When asked about the “benefits you have seen in your store” as a result of technology, some viewed the glass as half empty while for others it was half full. Responses ranged from “none that I can see” and “very little” to “cost-effective communication with customers” and “increased sales plus increased awareness.”

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Online buying | Purchases made in the last year



Tech tool usage



This Vital Signs survey was conducted online in March 2011 among readers of Christian Retailing's Christian Retailing Update news service. Of 127 respondents, 73 were retailers. Vital Signs is a joint project of Christian Retailing and Jim Seybert, who are solely responsible for its content.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

...of the findings and comments?

Write to **Vital Signs** at: Christian Retailing, 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, FL 32746, or e-mail andy.butcher@charismamedia.com.