



Carbon Down

A Research Paper:
Climate Change and the Role of Web 2.0
in Changing Business Behaviour

October 2010





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Executive Summary

Victorian small to medium enterprises (SMEs) is a large and diverse sector that if mobilised to adopt low carbon behaviours could significantly reduce the overall carbon footprint of Victoria. Web 2.0, in particular social media, presents a possible medium to share knowledge and encourage behaviour change. The use of the internet to conduct core business activities is wide spread within the SME sector but the relevancy and understanding of web 2.0 technology for small business is still maturing, possibly contributing to the reported low use of web 2.0. The degree to which SMEs interactively use web 2.0 as readers and content creators is not well understood. The assumption is that given their time poor nature, they are more likely to play a reader role.

Research was conducted, in October 2010, to understand the use of web 2.0 by those more likely to be content creators and distributors: climate change and business sustainability professionals and ambassadors. A survey was distributed to more than 500 email addresses, receiving over 100 responses allowing for analysis of frequency of knowledge sharing, use of web 2.0 and potential to increase their use of web 2.0 for the purpose of educating businesses about climate change, and changing behaviour.

Findings indicate that this group are more active online content creators compared to the 90(readers): 9 (infrequent content creators): 1 (regular content creators) rule and that there is a willingness to increase their use.



Climate Change and the Role of Web 2.0 in Changing Business Behaviour

“Unlike web 1.0 which was largely read only, web 2.0 enables businesses to interact online therefore providing a means to distribute information and to educate businesses in a meaningful way.”

“The issue of climate change presents both risks and opportunities for business” (EPA Victoria 2007). Local and international collaboration at an unprecedented scale will be required to mitigate the risks and seize the opportunities for the ultimate aim of carbon abatement. Given small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) account for almost 90% of businesses globally and employ over half of the entire workforce (Allen Consulting Group 2008), their role in the response to climate change should not be undervalued. In order to mobilise this sector to take action, they must be engaged and supported to do so in a relevant way.

In the absence of a price on carbon in Australia, governments and organisations taking the lead are finding ways to encourage voluntary reductions in carbon emissions. One of the challenges in facilitating wide scale behaviour change will be the quality, cost and speed of knowledge and information generation and dissemination.

Web 2.0 is an umbrella term referring to the new wave of **interactive** web technologies and platforms. This includes technologies such as blogs, forums, RSS feeds, wikis and platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube to name a few (Lefebvre 2007). Unlike web 1.0 which was largely read only, web 2.0 enables businesses to interact online therefore providing a means to distribute information and to educate businesses in a meaningful way. Social media refers to those platforms mentioned above that enable users to directly interact with each other. With over 96% of Australian SMEs connected to the internet with broadband speed and a growing number of Australian SMEs owning a smart phone (Sensis 2009), there is significant potential to reach and engage with businesses en masse. The following review and research informs the topic: climate change and the role of web 2.0 in changing business behaviour.



“Social media marketing, the online application of social marketing, could facilitate the large volume of knowledge generation and sharing required for businesses to adopt low carbon behaviours.”

Review of Existing Research

An SME is usually defined by its number of employees which in Australia is typically less than 200 employees (Allen Consulting Group 2008). Such a definition creates a large and diverse group of businesses from different industries, localities, varying income and turnover. There are however, characteristics that are common to the sector including their time poor nature, scarcity of human resources and cash flow, tendency to work in rather than on their businesses and ability to change quickly if required (Allen Consulting Group 2008). Given these characteristics, it is not surprising to learn that in Australia 89.1% of SMEs employ fewer than 4 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004). Consequently, many SMEs are very focussed on their core business.

From a survey conducted in November 2008 (Carbon Down, 2009), 83.6% Victorian SME business owners noted that climate change was a concern for them personally while 34.3% noted that the biggest barrier to taking action for climate change was that they felt there was nothing else to do or they were not sure what to do suggesting a lack of understanding of what and how to take action. Importantly, 54.7% of business owners said they would go to the internet to find out about climate change information related to their business.

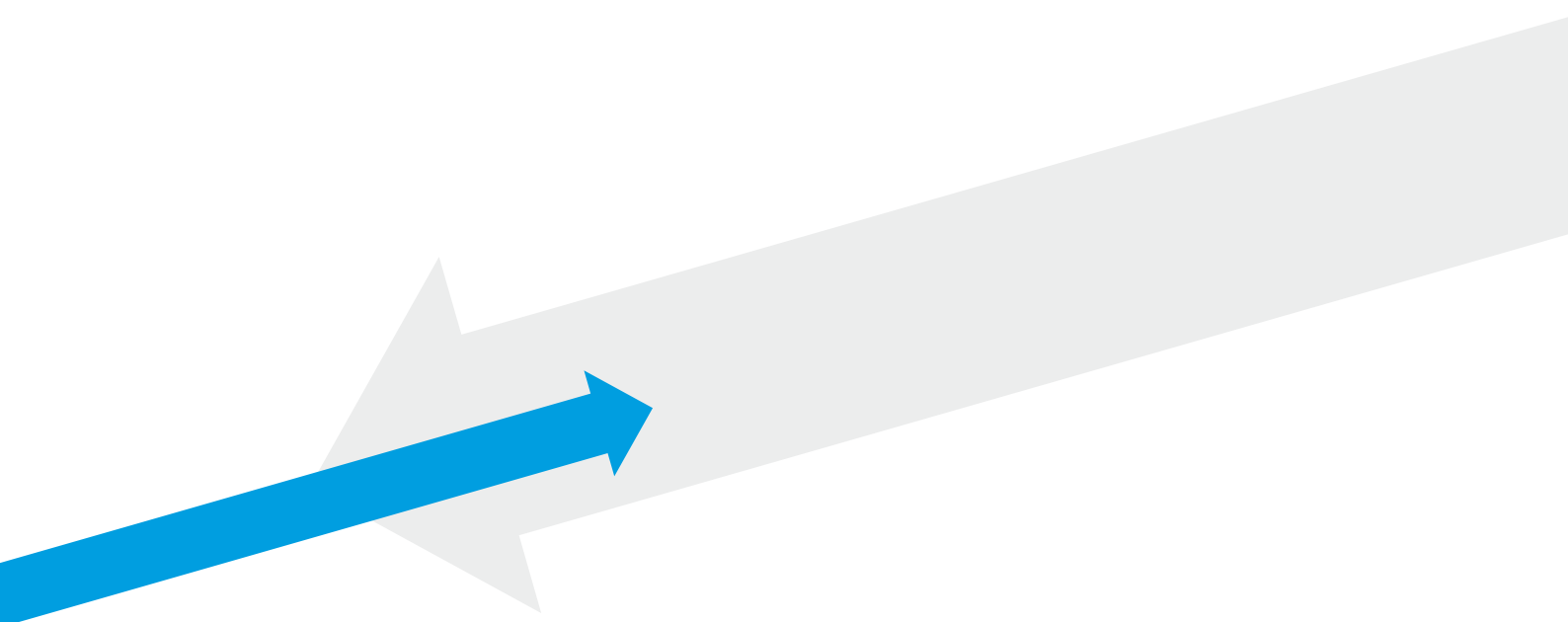
Knowledge, information, incentives and engagement are all important drivers in bringing about carbon reducing action (CSIRO 2009). Social media marketing (SMM) - which is the online application of social marketing - provides a possible model to cost effectively educate businesses for the purpose of carbon reduction. However, SME's "use" (MYOB 2008) of interactive technologies is still quite low (MYOB 2008), suggesting there would be a barrier to overcome in encouraging the take up of the technology. The demographic of the Australian business owners' in the sector are mostly male and a large proportion are over the age of 50 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006), indicating a potential lack of online experience and exposure, thus reducing the likelihood of interactivity. Given the primary use of the internet for SMEs is to send and receive emails and to seek information and resources for their business (Sensis 2009), if SMEs were to use web 2.0, it would likely need to relate to core business activities. The lack of web 2.0 technologies and platforms that specifically target small businesses could be a contributing factor to their low uptake rate. Furthermore, understanding the meaning of "use" should be explored to differentiate where it means **content contribution** or posting of content (in other words, they are leveraging the interactive capability of the technology or platform), from **reading of content** that does not involve contributing or posting content. However, research has shown that there is a participation inequality where typically users of web 2.0 technology follow a 90:9:1 participation rule (90-9-1.com, 2010). This means for every ninety readers, there are nine infrequent content creators and one regular content creator. The assumption is that given the SME sector is time poor they are more likely to be readers rather than content creators.

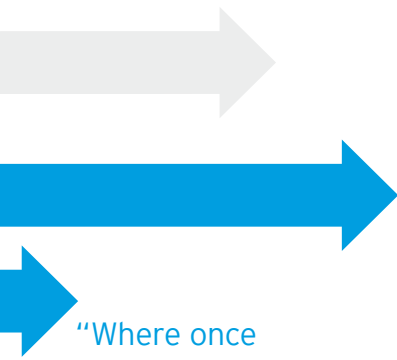
By increasing the amount of relevant content for SMEs, those who are online will gain greater value from web 2.0 participation, and therefore drive further uptake. Without sufficient interactivity however, the potential to change behaviour becomes limited. Consequently, the need for business relevant, credible **content creators** emerges.

The debate in Australia regarding how we politically respond to climate change has created public confusion of the human contribution to climate change which to overcome, requires distribution of credible information regarding the scientific facts. Additionally, for businesses to understand what they can do in their business to reduce their carbon footprint, they will require information that is relevant for their business. This includes articulating the upfront costs, time required and the return on investment (Marques & Brandao 2010).

To create this volume of knowledge, the way in which it is generated is critical. Participation will be required from all sectors of the community, in particular government, environmental and scientific non government organisations (NGO), schools and universities (Marques & Brandao 2010). Additionally, businesses themselves are the richest source of applied knowledge. Encouraging the early adopters of low carbon behaviours to share this will help to inform other businesses and knowledge workers of the barriers and drivers to adoption.

As Leary and Bullock (2008) state, the advantages of SMM compared with traditional marketing strategies are efficiency, affordability, effectiveness, and interactivity. In theory, SMM could facilitate the large volume of knowledge generation and sharing required for businesses to adopt low carbon behaviours. However, the practical demonstration of a mass undertaking such as this - especially within the business sector - is arguably limited to two case studies. One highlights the advent of a web 2.0 communication platform, the other shows the successful application of social media.





“Where once academics and specialists were the major contributors to knowledge generation, Wikipedia has democratised the knowledge generation process, enabling contributions from a much wider audience.”

Wikipedia is a well known example of the utilisation of a web 2.0 technology to generate and share knowledge. The website is based on a technology known as a wiki, which allows users to edit web pages. The site was established to rival the hard copy encyclopedias which, due to their infrequent publications, created a need for up to date information. It has truly revolutionised the way we generate information and knowledge. At the time of writing there were nearly four million articles published, nearly 13 million registered users and 1,750 administrators (Wikipedia 2010). It has challenged the way we think about expertise. Where once academics and specialists were the major contributors to knowledge generation, Wikipedia has democratised the knowledge generation process, enabling contributions from a much wider audience. While this is advantageous to the volume and speed of knowledge creation, it has created difficulties for readers to quickly establish the credibility of the source of information. A currency of reputation (Gladwell 2010) must exist so as to complement the volume and speed of knowledge generation that wikis enable. This would assist with overcoming any trust concerns that businesses have with climate change related information.

The presidential campaign of Barack Obama in 2007 is a well cited example of how to successfully utilise web 2.0 tools and strategies. It is also arguably the only online example of a non-commercial social media marketing campaign where a mass audience has been engaged and mobilised at a scale and depth that begins to emulate what is required for the response to climate change. Obama and his advisors energised Americans and raised millions of dollars through the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Leary & Bullock 2008). This coordinated use of all technologies to reach voters was unprecedented, and was conducted in a way that embodied what Libert and Faulk (2009) suggest to be one of the core social media marketing principles which is “it’s not mass marketing, it’s understanding the masses”. In other words, in order to penetrate and mobilise the masses it must simulate a conversation which involves listening, understanding and two-way interaction.



“The combination of Mavens and Connectors in the field of business sustainability could facilitate the distribution of relevant knowledge to more businesses and act as a driver to mass behaviour change amongst Victorian SMEs.”

Research

As discussed earlier, the 90:9:1 rule suggests that most SMEs will fall within the reader category, with the assumption that the rule could be even more skewed for this audience, given their time poor nature. This leaves a need for content generation if we are to educate and change business behaviours using web 2.0 technologies as the driver. An understanding of the current utilisation and willingness for further uptake of web 2.0 amongst sustainability professionals and ambassadors will help to inform this topic. The assumption is that this group is already creating and sharing knowledge on the topic, therefore increasing their use of web 2.0 could help to extend their distribution to Victorian SMEs. Malcolm Gladwell (2000) introduced the terms Mavens and Connectors in his book 'The Tipping Point'. He describes Mavens as knowledgeable on a particular topic, and Connectors as the trusted person in their often wide network. The combination of the two in the field of business sustainability could facilitate the distribution of relevant knowledge to more businesses and act as a driver to mass behaviour change amongst Victorian SMEs.

Research Methodology

Potential mavens and connectors were sourced primarily from two databases - the contacts database of the Sustainability Services department within the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) and the mailing list subscribers to Carbon Compass (www.carboncompass.com.au), which is an interactive business sustainability website targeting Victorian SMEs. The Sustainability Services database was screened by name, position title and organisation to remove contacts perceived not to be relevant to the research such as stakeholders in industries other than sustainability related ones and vendors. The remaining list was then cross checked with the Carbon Compass database to remove duplicate email addresses.

The survey was delivered online using formsite (www.formsite.com) and was piloted with three respondents face-to-face before it was edited and distributed first to the Sustainability Services database and then to the Carbon Compass database. See Appendix 2 to overview the survey.

A total of 542 email addresses were sent to and 27 bounce backs were received. Respondents had 12 days in total (from Friday 8th October to Wednesday 20th October) to submit their responses. A reminder email was sent to each database four days from the initial email. See Appendix 1 for an example of the email invitation sent to the email lists.

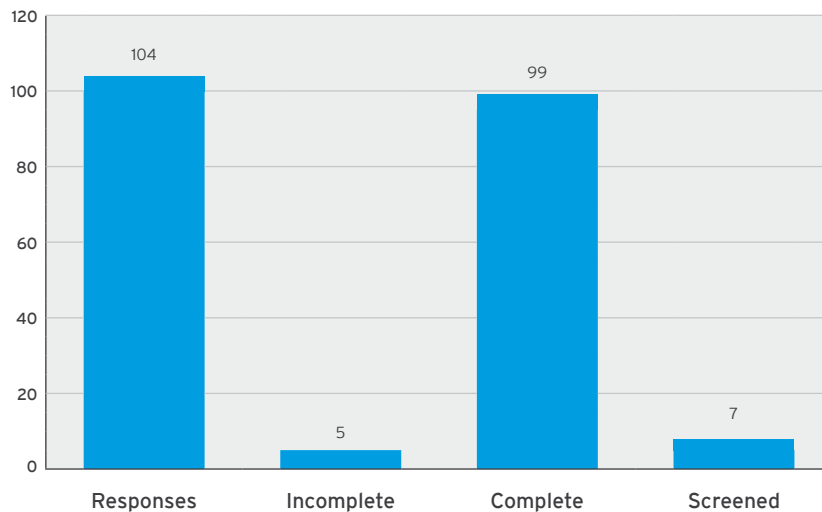
Results

Overview of Survey Respondents

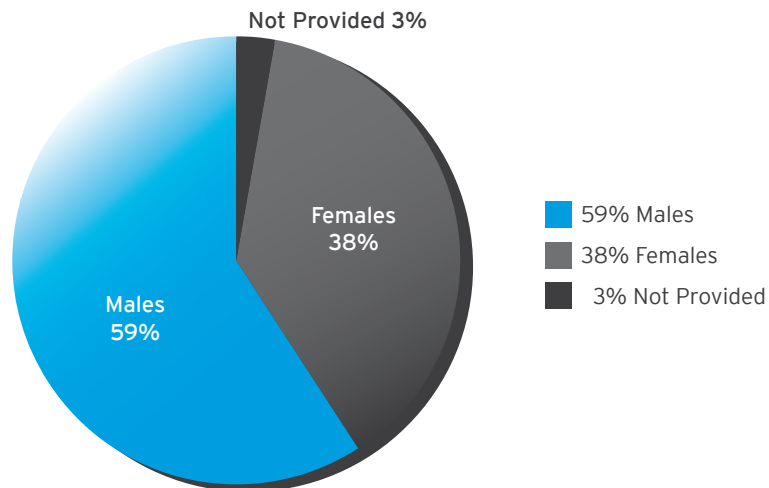
In total 104 responses were submitted of which five were incomplete and a further seven screened from the final sample leaving a total of 92 results that were analysed.

- 60% of respondents were male, 37% female and 3% unknown.
- 5% were aged between 18-25, 37% between 26-35, 22% between 36-45, 26% between 46-55 and 9% over 55.
- The majority of respondents (54%) were from the private sector, while those remaining were almost evenly split between the public (24%) and not-for-profit (22%) sectors.

Overview of respondents



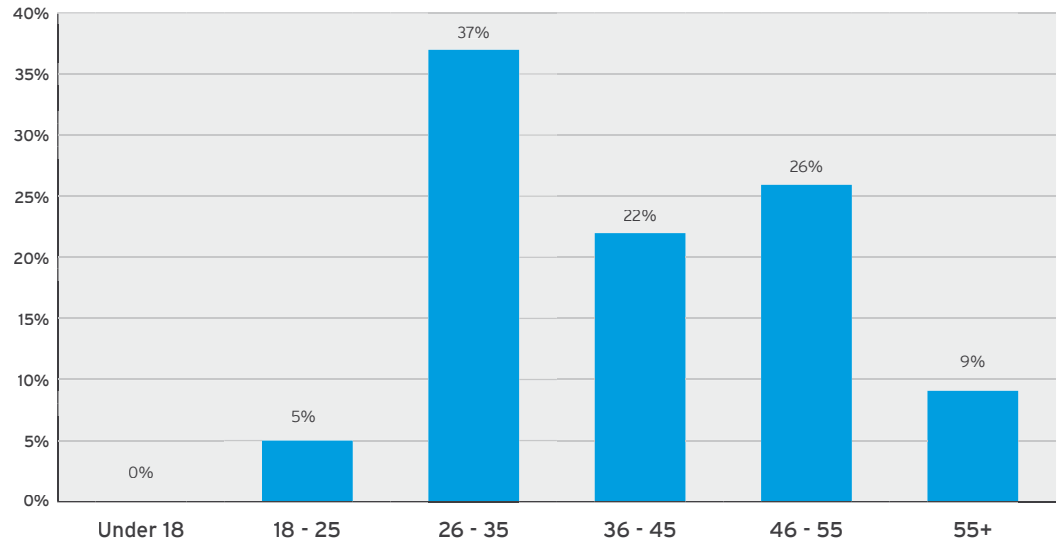
Question 1: Gender





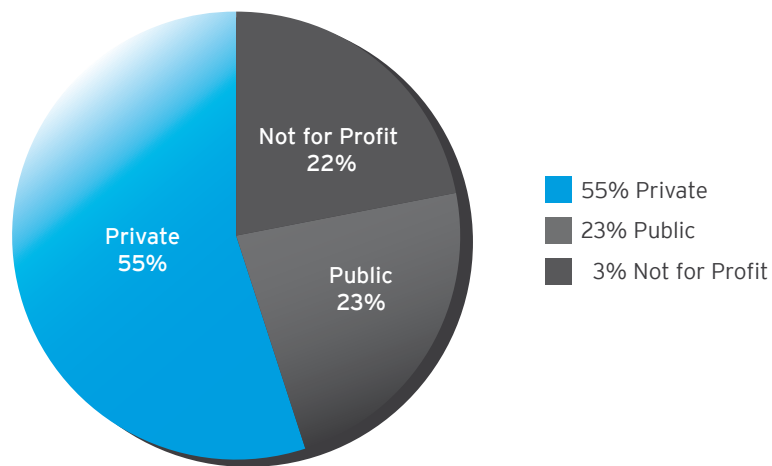
Question 2:

Age



Question 5:

Sector Type



Respondent types: Mavens and Connectors

All respondents were asked to answer the following question which enabled categorisation of responses by type: Maven, Connector, Both and Neither.

Question 16:

RESPONDENT TYPE	
Would you consider yourself to be:	
- Knowledgeable about sustainability/climate change	Maven (45%)
- An active networker in the sustainability/climate change industry	Connector (8%)
- Both of the above	Both (39%)
- None of the above*	Neither* (7%)

*Respondents who selected Neither were screened from results.

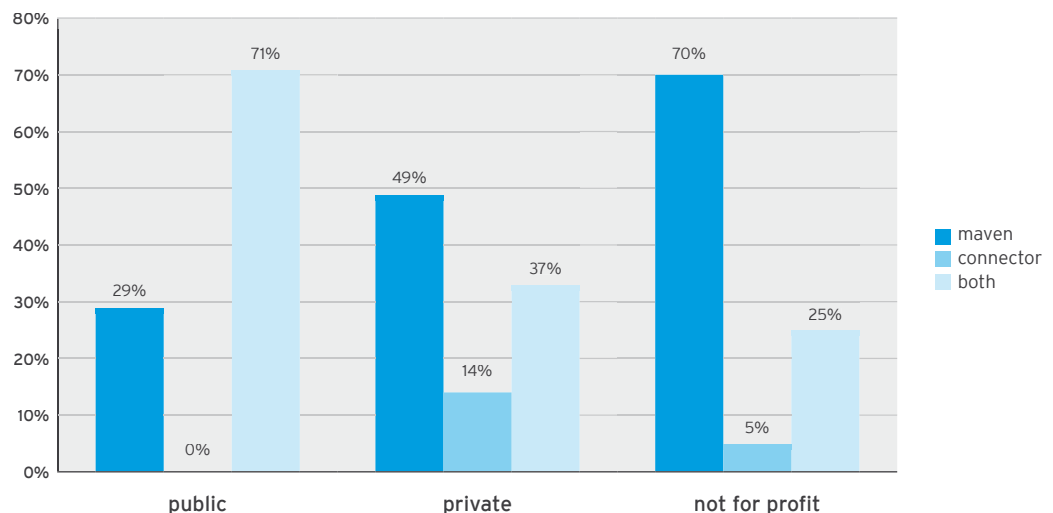
- While in most cases respondents considered themselves as Mavens (45%), they were least likely to consider themselves as a Connector (8%).

The distribution of respondent types in the identified sectors gives further insight where:

- The public sector had strong representation from workers who were Both mavens and connectors (71% of their sector's responses and 38% of all responses categorised as Both), presenting an opportunity to leverage this group for their knowledge and networking capacity
- The private sector had a good spread of respondent types, in particular a high proportion of Connectors compared to other sectors (14% compared with 0% from the public sector and 5% from the Not for Profit sector)
- The majority of Mavens were from the Private sector (56%) and then the Not for Profit sector (31%). This suggests that while these sectors have the knowledge, they are for various reasons (eg commercial sensitivities, lack of resources) not individually sharing it with businesses.

Question 5:

Sector type breakdown





Information and Knowledge Sharing

Questions 16 and 17 in the survey differentiated two types of knowledge - high level and practical. High-level knowledge refers to broad information about climate change and sustainability such as climate change scientific facts and policy information. Practical knowledge refers to the 'How-to' information required by business to implement solutions that reduce their impact on the environment. These questions were asked to ascertain frequency of information and knowledge sharing with businesses which is summarised in the graph called "Frequency of information and knowledge distribution" on the following page.

Question 16:

HIGH-LEVEL

How actively do you share **information and knowledge** with businesses about climate change and/or sustainability?

1 - never

2 - infrequently

3 - often

4 - regularly

5 - very actively

Question 17:

PRACTICAL

How actively do you share information with businesses about **how to** reduce their environmental impact?

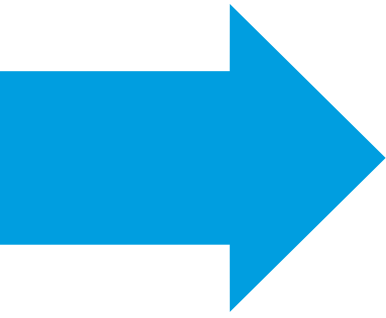
1 - inactively

2 - infrequently

3 - often

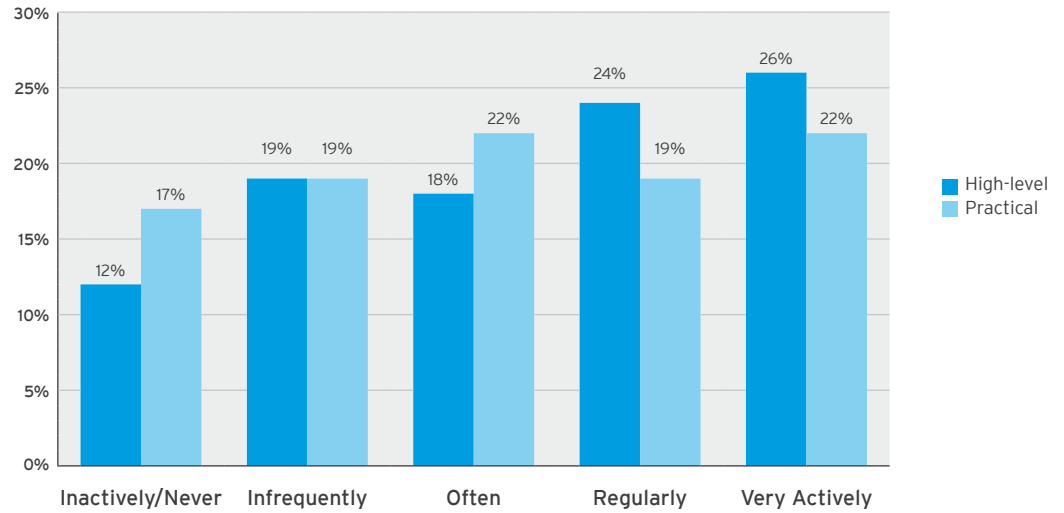
4 - regularly

5 - very actively



Question 16 and 17:

Frequency of knowledge distribution

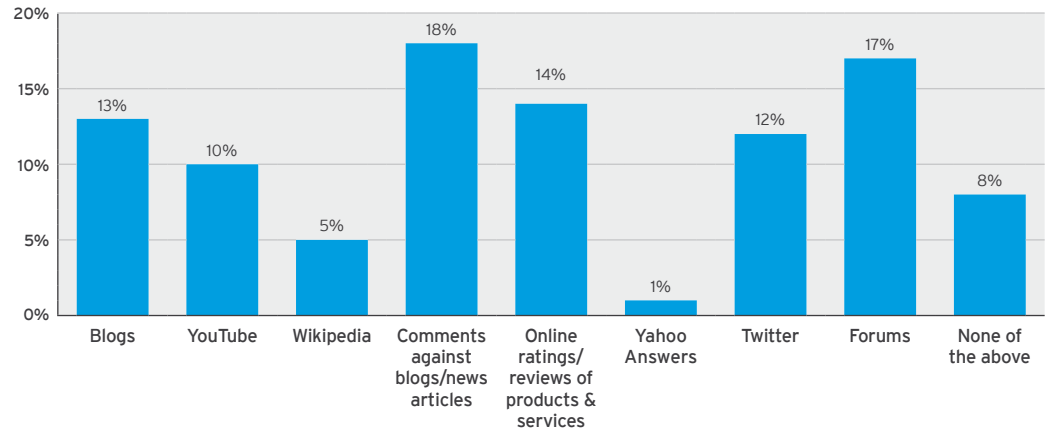


- There is more frequent distribution of high-level knowledge when compared to practical knowledge;
- The not-for-profit sector more frequently distributed both types of knowledge and information compared to the other two sectors.

Use of Web 2.0

Question 6:

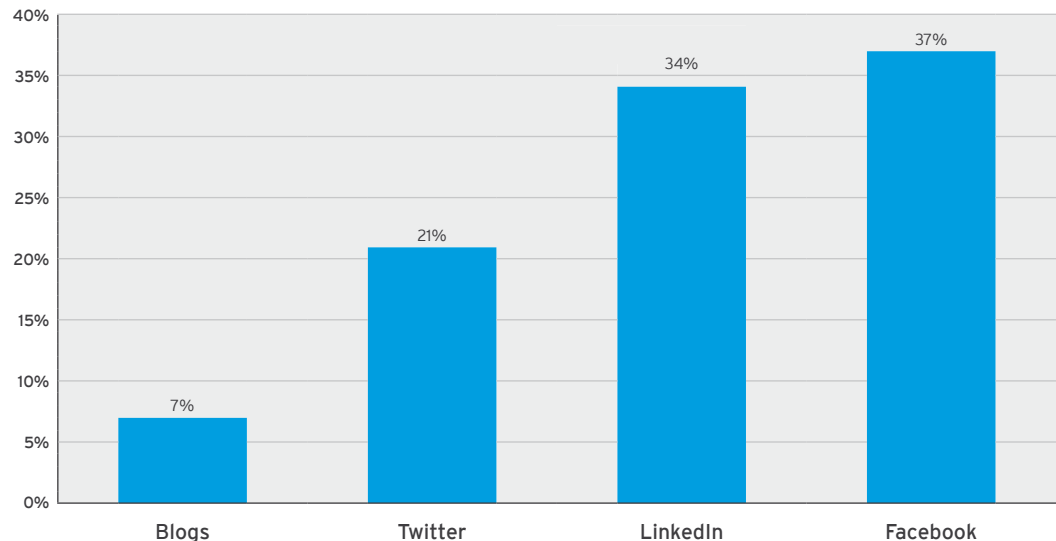
Use of web 2.0 technology



- While forums and comments against blogs and news articles received the most responses (18% and 17% respectively), there was only 8% difference between the top 6 activities;
- The use of these technologies by the target audience appears to be still developing.

Question 7 - 10:

Type of web 2.0 accounts



- 37% had Facebook accounts, 23% of which used it for professional purposes;
- The second most popular account ownership was of LinkedIn 34%, the similar ownership rate to Facebook perhaps reflecting the business audience that the survey was targeted to.

Potential growth in online content creation & networking

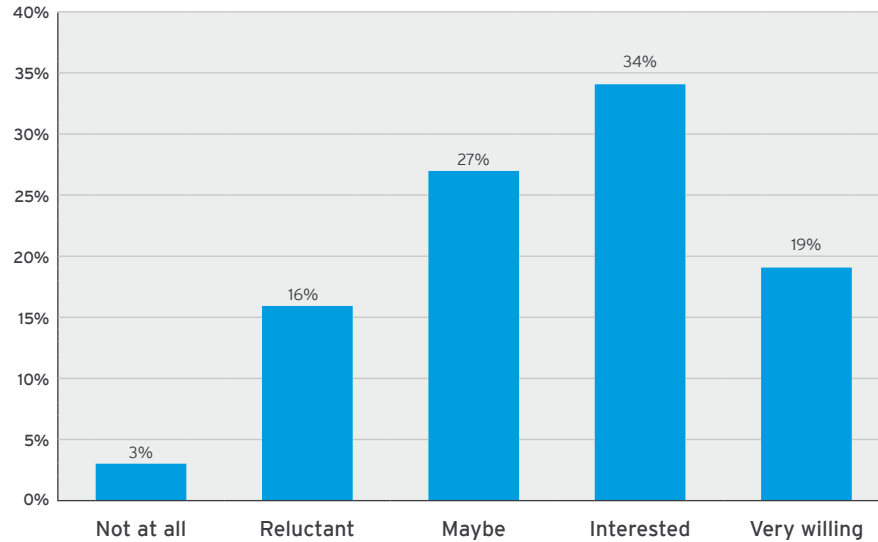
Comparison of frequency of networking and content creation

	Face-to-face networking (Q11)	Online networking (Q12)	Online content creation (Q13)
Never	8%	22%	30%
Infrequently	29%	51%	42%
Often	31%	12%	13%
Regularly	15%	6%	5%
Very Actively	16%	9%	9%

- The industry is largely inactive when it comes to online networking and content creation;
- However, if we group the responses to Question 13 as Never and Infrequently 72%, Often and Regularly 18%, and Very Actively 9% and compared this with the 90:9:1 rule, this group has proportionately more content creators compared to the general public;
- 49% of Mavens either Never or Infrequently face-to-face network;
- Mavens Very Actively networked online (11%) more than face-to-face networking (9%);
- Respondents in the Both category are the most active networkers with 28% reporting they Very Actively face-to-face network;
- Connectors were overall the most active online networkers and content creators.

Question 14:

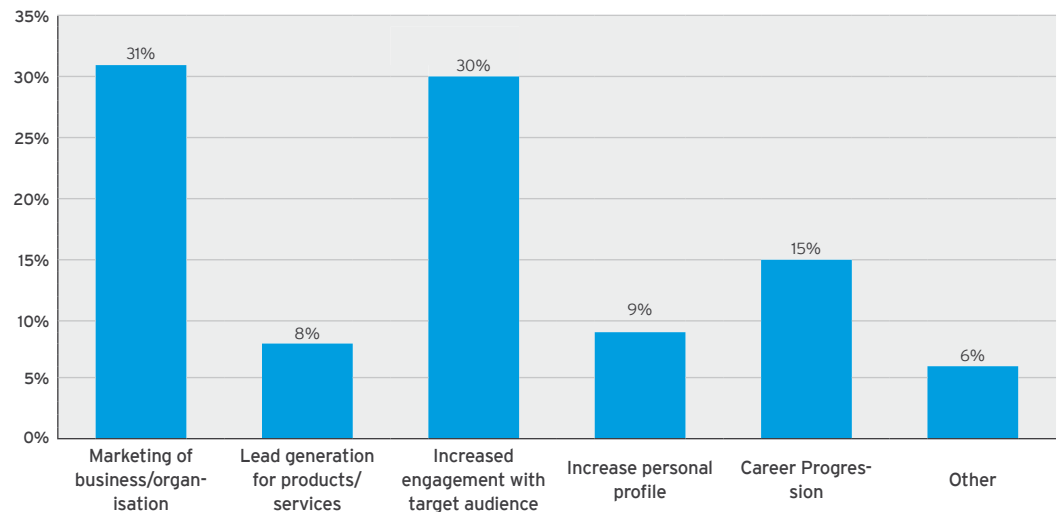
Willingness to increase online profile / presence



- The majority of respondents (53%) are Interested and Very Willing to increase their online profile for professional purposes.

Question 15:

Motivation to increase online profile



- Majority of respondents (61%) were motivated to increase their online profile, either to market their organisation or to increase engagement with their target audience.

Research Limitations

- The small sample size increases the likelihood of bias in the results.
- The respondents were sourced from VECCI's networks, impacting on how representative the responses are of the wider industry.
- The questions that were investigating frequency were not defined, and so relied on the respondent's interpretation of terms such as infrequent, often, regularly, and very actively.
- The terms "knowledgeable" and "active networker" were not defined as part of the respondent type question (question 18), and therefore relied on the respondent's interpretation
- Potential Connectors not actively networking within the sustainability industry were excluded from the research.
- There was a high response rate from people aged 26-35 which could overstate the use of web 2.0 and willingness to increase online profile amongst the network.

Findings

- Analysis of the current levels of online activity and the willingness for further activity suggests there is potential to increase online dissemination of climate change information.
- The number of Connectors was relatively low, suggesting that if increased could also help to disseminate information. Targeting individuals outside of the sustainability industry could help to tap into other business networks.
- There is more high-level climate change information being distributed than how-to information highlighting the need for the latter type of business information. Arming the industry with quality information will assist to distribute out to businesses.
 - Further questions should be explored, in particular
 - Understanding SMEs “use” of social media to differentiate whether they are creating content, reading content or not using social media at all; and
 - Understanding the barriers to uptake of social media and web 2.0 amongst SMEs and the climate change and sustainability professionals.

Implications of Findings

The outcome of this research will inform the social media strategy used to encourage Victorian businesses’ to adopt low carbon behaviours as part of the Carbon Down initiative (a partnership between the Victorian Employers’ Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Victorian Government).



Conclusion

In order to mobilise Victorian SMEs to reduce their carbon footprints, relevant and trustworthy information is required. However, research shows that there is a gap in the distribution of how-to information to assist businesses in finding ways to reduce their carbon emissions. The interactive functionality of web 2.0 could assist in filling this information void, however, although it is understood that SMEs do participate online, the manner in which they do so remains not well understood.

Increasing the amount of web 2.0 content could assist to inform and educate SMEs about climate change, serving to simultaneously increase the value of participation in web 2.0 for SMEs. However, the potential to change SME behaviour via web 2.0 becomes diminished with limited interaction. Potential risks associated with online engagement for SMEs may rest with the nature of web 2.0 technologies, with tools such as wikis highlighting the question of credibility within user generated content.



This mass mobilisation of a large and varied audience can take place, as demonstrated by now President Obama's social media campaign during the 2008 American Presidential election. This successful engagement was the outcome of a well executed strategy, incorporating the use of wide ranging online communication platforms.

The mass mobilisation of SMEs will require a similarly wide reaching, considered social media strategy. The challenge will lie in developing a strategy that encompasses the wide range of target audiences and differing industry sectors. Furthermore, the need to address motivating factors for these SMEs, and the level at which they are currently engaged in social media is clear, as is further investigation of the barriers to uptake amongst this group.

Importantly, research has shown that there is an appetite amongst the Victorian sustainability network to increase their online activity and content creation. With an apparent need and want for web 2.0 participation and knowledge dissemination amongst SMEs, the opportunity in educating and mobilising this group using online communication technologies is evident.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Email invitation to complete survey



The role of social media in responding to climate change: short survey

Dear Carbon Compass user

Carbon Down is sponsoring research to explore the current use of social media amongst the climate change and sustainability network in Victoria.

The results will inform our understanding of the role social media could play in raising awareness and educating Victorian SMEs about their role and what they can do in their response to climate change.

I'd appreciate 5-10 minutes of your time to complete the following survey:
<http://fs16.formsite.com/vecci/socialmedia/index.html>




The survey will close next Wednesday (20th October). If you're interested in receiving the results of the survey please provide your email address at the end of the survey.

Regards

Kate Elborough | Manager, Government Programs
Department of Sustainability Services
VECCI - Melbourne | 486 Albert Street | East Melbourne | www.vecci.org.au
D: 03 8662 5483 | T: 03 8662 5196 | M: 0401 695 149 | F: 03 8662 5489

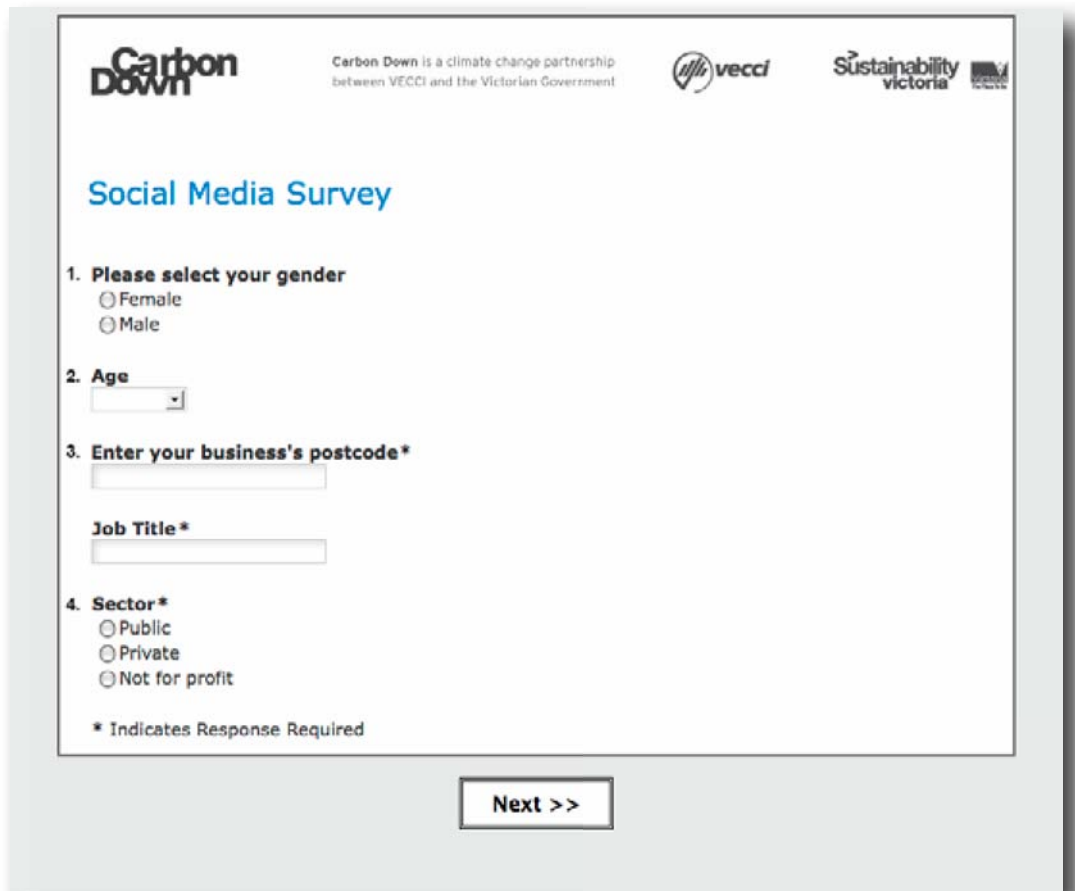
[▲ TOP](#)

Carbon Down is a climate change partnership between VECCI and the Victorian Government.





Appendix 2: Survey questionnaire



The screenshot shows a web-based survey form. At the top left is the 'Carbon Down' logo. To its right is the text: 'Carbon Down is a climate change partnership between VECCI and the Victorian Government'. Further right are the logos for 'vecci' and 'Sustainability victoria'. The title of the survey is 'Social Media Survey'. The form contains four numbered questions:

- 1. Please select your gender**
 Female
 Male
- 2. Age**
[Dropdown menu]
- 3. Enter your business's postcode***
[Text input field]
- Job Title***
[Text input field]

4. Sector*
 Public
 Private
 Not for profit

* Indicates Response Required

At the bottom center of the form is a button labeled 'Next >>'.

Progress: 25% Complete



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Social Media Survey - Page 2 of 4

6. Have you ever posted or contributed content to any of the following:

- Blogs
- YouTube
- Wikipedia
- Comments against blogs/news articles
- Online ratings/reviews of products & services
- YahooAnswers
- Twitter
- Forums

7. Do you have your own blog? *

Yes ▾

7a. How many readers does your blog have?

▾

8. Do you have your own Twitter account? *

Yes ▾

8a. How many Twitter followers do you have?

0 ▾

9. Do you have a LinkedIn profile? *

Yes ▾

9a. How many LinkedIn connections do you have?

▾

10. Do you have a Facebook account?*

Yes ▾

10a. Is your Facebook account for personal or professional use?

▾

* Indicates Response Required

<< Previous

Next >>

Progress: 50% Complete



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Social Media Survey - Page 3 of 4

11. How actively do you face-to-face network (for professional purposes)? *

- 1 - never
- 2 - infrequently
- 3 - often
- 4 - regularly
- 5 - very actively

12. How actively do you network online (for professional purposes) via mediums such as LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, Facebook, online forums etc? *

- 1 - never
- 2 - infrequently
- 3 - often
- 4 - regularly
- 5 - very actively

13. How actively do you post or create content (for professional purposes) via mediums such as LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, Facebook, online forums etc? *

- 1 - never
- 2 - infrequently
- 3 - often
- 4 - regularly
- 5 - very actively

14. How willing are you to increase your own professional online profile/presence? *

- 1 - not at all
- 2 - reluctant
- 3 - maybe
- 4 - interested
- 5 - very willing

15. What would your main motivation be for doing so? *



* Indicates Response Required

<< Previous

Next >>



Progress: 75% Complete

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Social Media Survey - Page 4 of 4

16. How actively do you share *information and knowledge* with businesses about climate change and/or sustainability? *

- 1 - never
- 2 - infrequently
- 3 - often
- 4 - regularly
- 5 - very actively



17. How actively do you share information with businesses about *how to* reduce their environmental impact? *

- 1 - inactively
- 2 - infrequently
- 3 - often
- 4 - regularly
- 5 - very actively

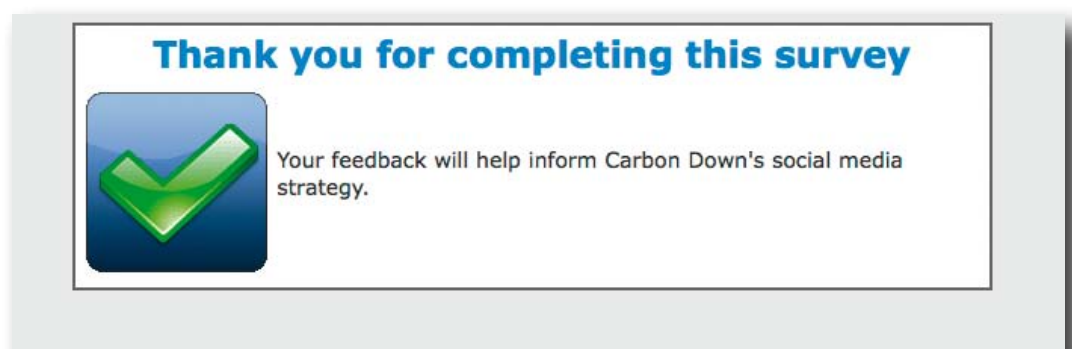
18. Would you consider yourself to be: *

- Knowledgeable about sustainability/climate change
- An active networker in the sustainability/climate change industry
- Both of the above
- None of the above

If you'd like the results from this research, please enter your email here

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* Indicates Response Required

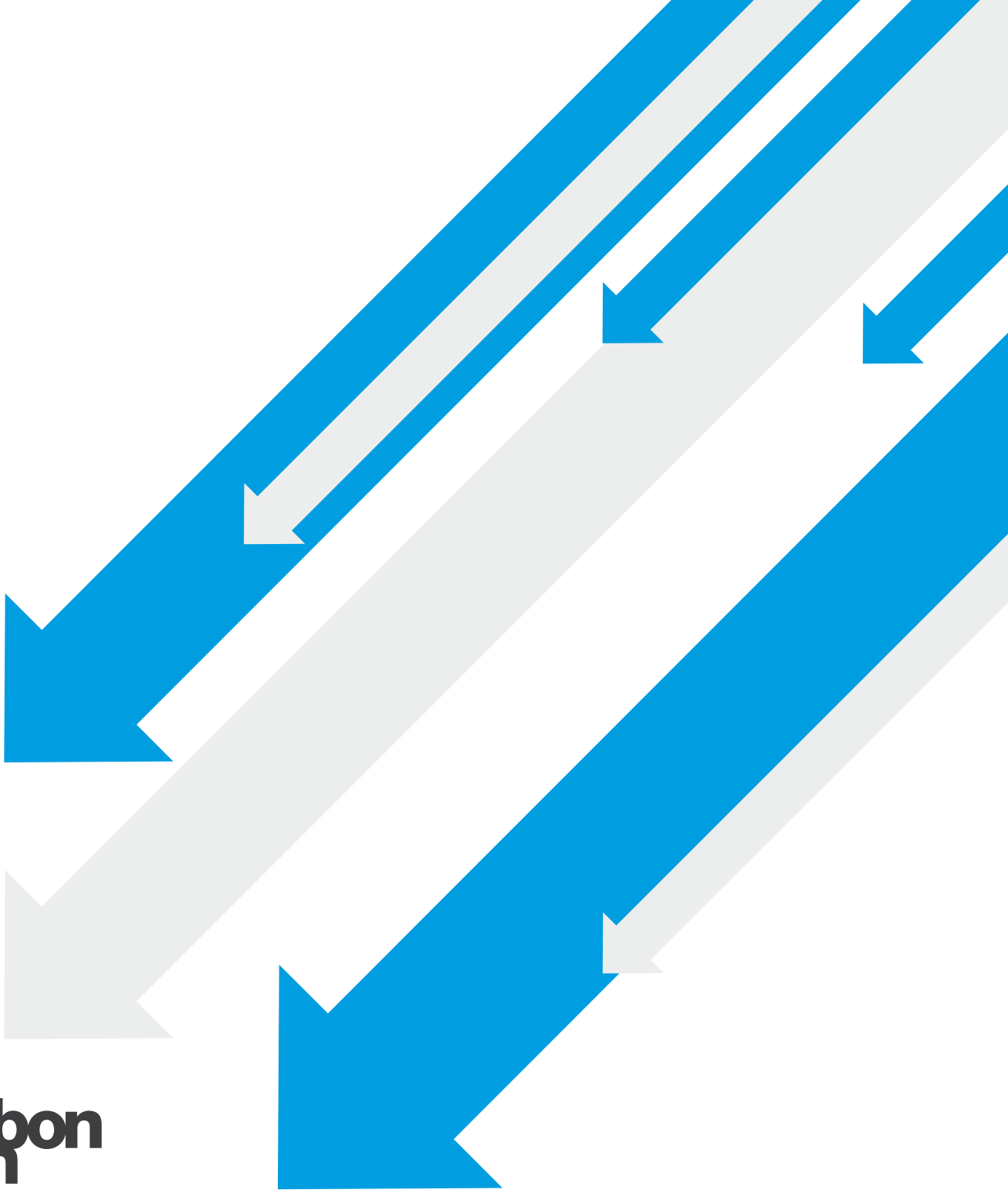




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