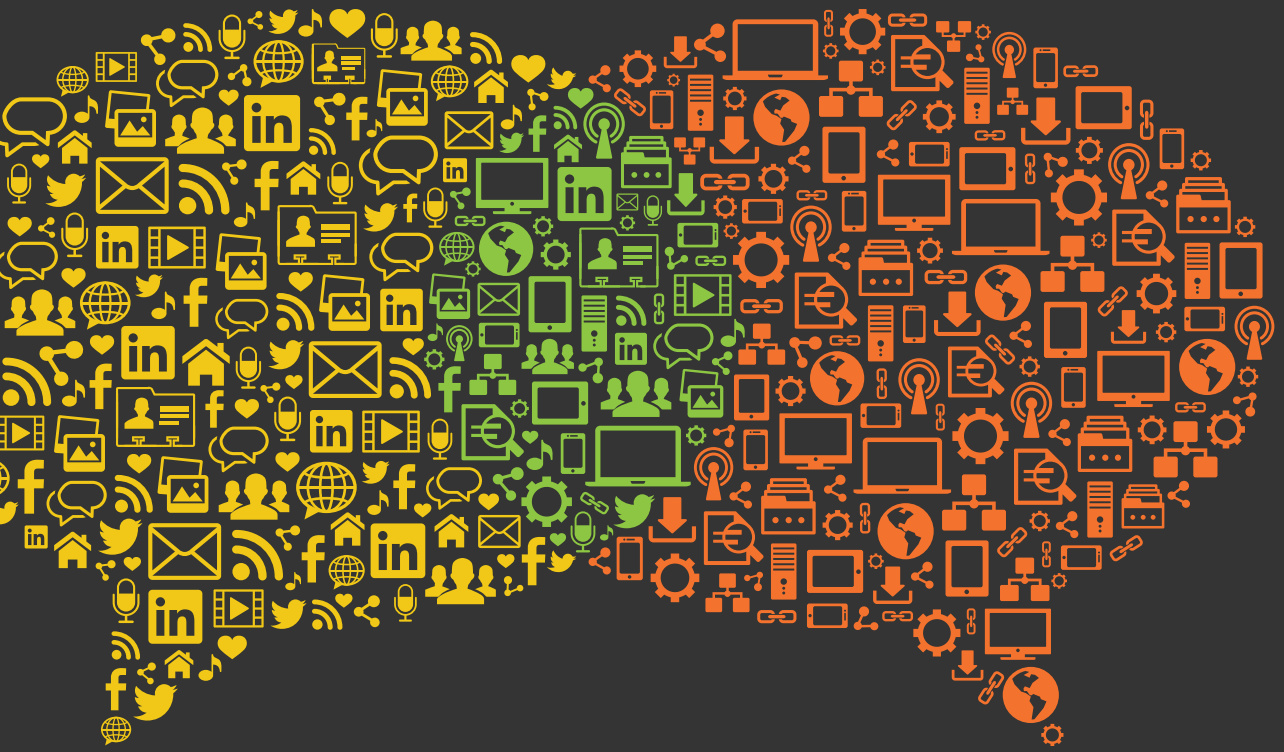
COMMISSIONED BY LinkedIn™



# IT Purchasing Goes Social

How social networks have transformed the B2B purchasing process – and best practices to make it work for your marketing

**NORTH AMERICA**

CONDUCTED BY FORRESTER® research now™

# Getting social with IT decision makers

## This report explores the dramatic impact social networks have on the B2B IT purchase process.

Why and how do today's IT decision makers (ITDMs) use social networks to inform their purchase decisions? Which social platforms are most valuable? How can IT marketers effectively leverage social to influence decision makers? To answer these questions, LinkedIn commissioned Forrester Consulting and Research Now to conduct two separate surveys of 400 IT decision makers across a diverse range of industries throughout North America.

The results reveal a dramatic shift in sources of influence, as ITDMs turn to social to help them quickly validate information, and learn from peers and experts. The implication for marketers is clear: to meet the changing needs of ITDMs, it is essential to engage them through social platforms with the content and context they are looking for. Be sure to read the 5 Best Practices for IT Marketers at the end of this document.

# Summary of key findings

## IT decision makers use social networks regularly for business purposes.

- 88% of IT decision makers visit a social network at least monthly
- 85% use at least one social network for business purposes
- 73% have engaged with a vendor on a social network

## Decision makers turn to social for trust, efficiency, relevance, and access (TERA).

**Top reasons ITDMs use social for business:**

- Trust: 58% want to learn from trustworthy peers and 39% want to learn from experts
- Efficiency: 40% want to quickly find info
- Relevance: 37% want relevant context to connect with vendors
- Access: 49% want access to a broader network

## Social networks are a critical source of influence across the entire IT purchase process.

- Three in five ITDMs are influenced by at least one social network during their involvement in the decision-making process
- In each of the five phases of decision making, social networks influence nearly half of all ITDMs involved in that phase

## LinkedIn is the preferred social network for IT decision makers, and they incorporate it into their regular work routines.

- Out of all IT decision makers who have used social networks for business, 95% use LinkedIn, 45% use personal social networks, and 44% use microblogs**
- 75% use LinkedIn monthly or more, while 70% use personal social networks and 48% use microblogs**

Unless otherwise indicated, all data is from a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of LinkedIn, August 2012.
** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012

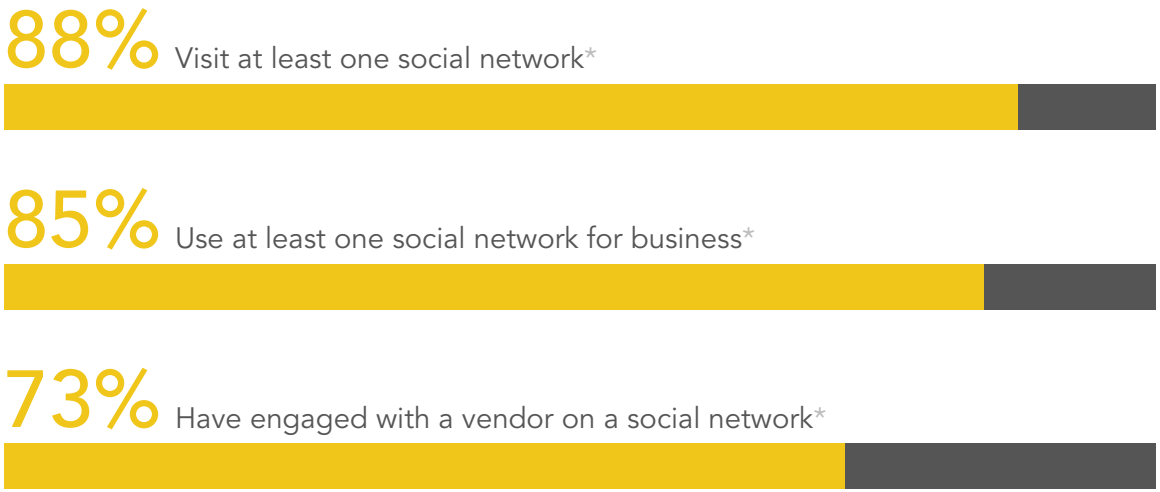
# Social networks: An invaluable decision tool

IT purchase decisions have grown more complicated than ever. New technologies and best practices emerge every year—putting unprecedented pressure on IT to adapt. To add to this complexity, IT decision makers (ITDMs) are bombarded with information from every direction: trade events, blogs, vendor websites, newsletters, conferences—each with its own version of reality.

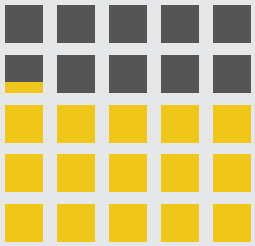
ITDMs are turning to their social networks to validate the sheer amount of information they receive, and as a result the buyer is taking the lead for when and where to engage with marketers.

## Social usage high among IT decision makers

IT leaders are avid adopters of social media for business. Most critically from a marketer's perspective, 73% of ITDMs have engaged with a vendor on a social network*—underscoring the value of the channel for direct two-way conversations between buyers and sellers.

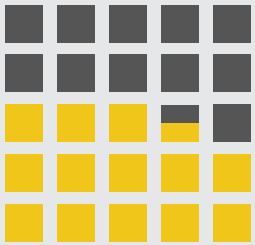



**They are also active participants, sharing their own views while amplifying others'.**



61%

Post or contribute at least monthly*



54%

Share, like or retweet others' content monthly*

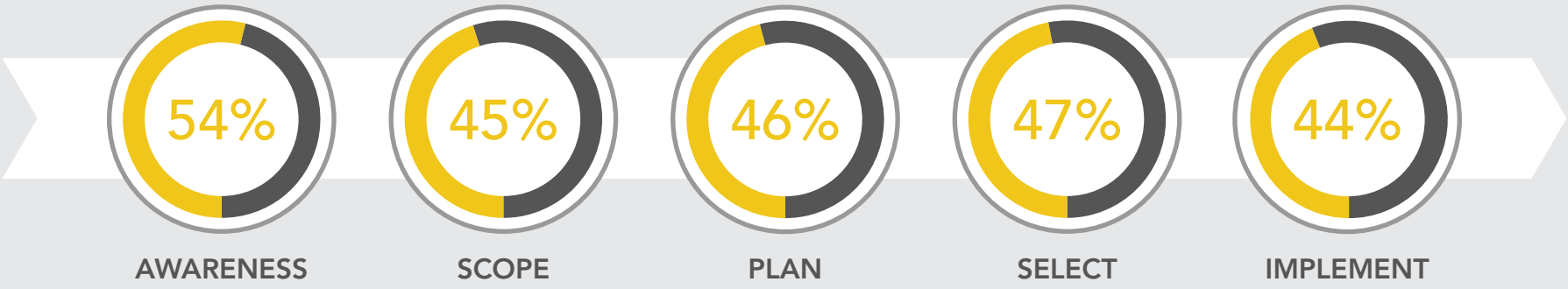
* Commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of LinkedIn, August 2012

## Social networks influence the entire purchase process

Contrary to the common misperception that social media's value for marketers is restricted to awareness, social networks are a critical source of influence across the entire IT purchase process. In each of the five phases of decision making, social networks influence nearly half of all ITDMs involved in that phase.

Today, more ITDMs are influenced in their buying decisions by social networks (59%) than by online general media publications (46%).*

**Influence of social at each stage of decision making***

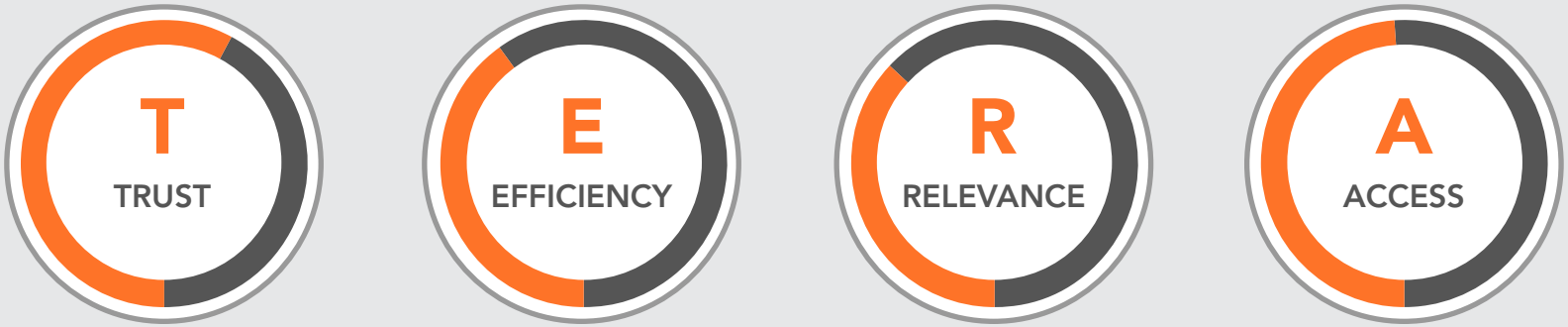



* Commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of LinkedIn, August 2012

# Key drivers for social network usage

What explains the rapidly rising popularity of social media among ITDMs? Social networks help them address key needs best represented by the acronym TERA: Trust, Efficiency, Relevance, and Access.

## Top reasons ITDMs use social networks for business*




**58%**
Learn from trusted peers

**40%**
Quickly find information

**37%**
Relevant context to connect with vendors

**49%**
Access to a broader network

* Commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of LinkedIn, August 2012

## How the major social networks compare

ITDMs who use social networks overwhelmingly agree that LinkedIn delivers on trust, efficiency, relevance, and access. This differentiates LinkedIn from other networks.

**ITDMs consider LinkedIn a trusted channel to validate information****

29% Microblogs
35% Personal Social Networks
71% LinkedIn

29% Microblogs
37% Personal Social Networks
58% LinkedIn

32% Microblogs
43% Personal Social Networks
55% LinkedIn

** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012

## ITDMs find more relevant insights and context on LinkedIn

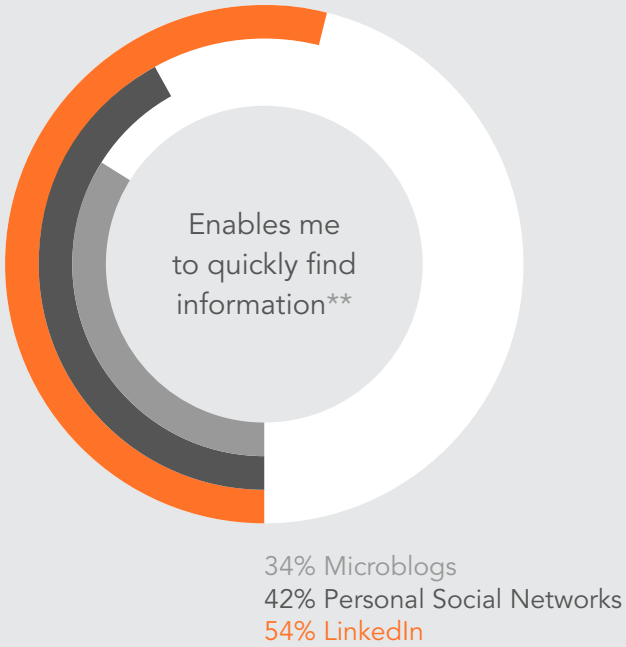
Nearly three-quarters of ITDMs who use LinkedIn say that it provides a relevant context to connect with vendors. 71% of ITDMs also report that it surfaces insights, information, and opinions that are relevant to their needs.**

**Provides relevant context to connect with vendors****

**Surfaces insights relevant to my needs****

## LinkedIn allows ITDMs quicker access to information

54% of ITDMs say that LinkedIn helps them get information, opinions, and answers quickly.**




** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012

## LinkedIn helps ITDMs tap into a broader network of peers and experts

LinkedIn greatly expands the universe of expertise and viewpoints available to ITDMs. 86% say that LinkedIn provides access to a broader network of peers to ask questions or seek opinions and recommendations.**

54% Microblogs
54% Personal Social Networks
86% LinkedIn

44% Microblogs
46% Personal Social Networks
74% LinkedIn

35% Microblogs
49% Personal Social Networks
70% LinkedIn

** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012

# Preferences for social networks

When it comes to business, IT decision makers favor professional social networks over other types of social networks. LinkedIn is their clear network of choice, used by 95% of ITDMs who use social networks for business.**

** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012

## LinkedIn usage is high among ITDMs

This social activity is also incorporated into their regular work routines as a resource for professional insights. 75% of ITDMs use LinkedIn monthly or more, compared with 70% for personal social networks and 47% for microblogs.**

**% of ITDMs who visit each social network monthly or more****

**% of ITDMs who read content on each social network monthly or more****

**% used among ITDMs who use social networks for business**

95%
LinkedIn**

45%
Personal Social Networks**

44%
Microblogs**

** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012

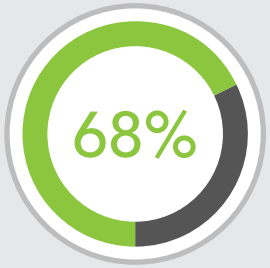
Most importantly for B2B marketers, IT buyers engage with vendors more on LinkedIn than on other social networks. 68% of ITDMs have followed a vendor's page or joined its group on LinkedIn – well above the roughly 55% who follow vendors on personal social networks or microblogs.***

The gap between LinkedIn and other channels will only grow. Nearly a quarter of ITDMs plan to increase their usage of LinkedIn over the coming year. In fact, LinkedIn leads growth among current users of all information channels, traditional and digital.**

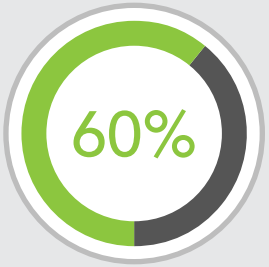
> **"I find LinkedIn is the only social networking site I would use when IT decision making is concerned."**
>
> **– IT MANAGER**

** LinkedIn/Research Now study of ITDMs in North America, August 2012
*** LinkedIn internal data, August 2012

**ITDMs are especially active on LinkedIn**




have followed a vendor's page or joined its group on LinkedIn




more likely to use LinkedIn Today

**3x**

more connected

**4x**

more likely to follow tech companies

## Global trends

We conducted this research in other markets and found that the pervasive influence of social networks was consistent around the world.

India and Brazil lead other countries in social network usage. In fact, 100% of ITDMs in India and 98% in Brazil visit at least one social network monthly, compared to a global average of 89%. As a result, ITDMs in these two countries are 29% more likely to engage with vendors than the global average.*

| | GLOBAL AVG. | UK | FRANCE | GERMANY | INDIA | AUSTRALIA | BRAZIL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Visit at least one social network monthly | 89% | 90% | 86% | 77% | 100% | 87% | 98% |
| Visit at least one social network for business | 84% | 81% | 83% | 75% | 92% | 78% | 95% |

* Commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of LinkedIn, August 2012

# Best practices for IT marketers

## 01

### Develop a trusted presence on the most relevant channels

Be present in the social channels that are most trusted and relevant—including LinkedIn, where ITDMs agree the level of trust with vendors is greater. Establish trust by providing the expertise and information your audience needs. Sometimes, this means helping people make a purchase decision, but just as often it can involve objective expertise on a particular technology, standard, or trend.

## 02

### Add value during the entire purchase process

Social influences the entire purchase process. Therefore brands need to be prepared to respond to their audience's needs from the awareness phase, all the way to purchase and implementation. Make sure you understand what kind of information your buyers need, and when—and make sure you don't stop adding value once the deal has been closed.

**Top 3 types of content sought in each stage of IT decision-making**

| | AWARENESS > | SCOPE > | PLAN > | SELECT > | IMPLEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Case studies | Best practices | Best practices | Product solution demos | Case studies |
| 02 | IT industry news | Case studies | How-to guides/ checklists | Best practices | Best practices |
| 03 | Best practices | Product solution demos | Product solution demos | Expert ratings, reviews, testimonials | Diagnostic or assessment tools |

## 01

### Develop a trusted presence on the most relevant channels

Be present in the social channels that are most trusted and relevant—including LinkedIn, where ITDMs agree the level of trust with vendors is greater. Establish trust by providing the expertise and information your audience needs. Sometimes, this means helping people make a purchase decision, but just as often it can involve objective expertise on a particular technology, standard, or trend.

## 02

### Add value during the entire purchase process

Social influences the entire purchase process. Therefore brands need to be prepared to respond to their audience's needs from the awareness phase, all the way to purchase and implementation. Make sure you understand what kind of information your buyers need, and when—and make sure you don't stop adding value once the deal has been closed.

**Top 3 types of content sought in each stage of IT decision-making**

| | AWARENESS > | SCOPE > | PLAN > | SELECT > | IMPLEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Case studies | Best practices | Best practices | Product solution demos | How-to guides/ checklists |
| 02 | IT industry news | Case studies | How-to guides/ checklists | Best practices | Best practices |
| 03 | Best practices | Product solution demos | Product solution demos | Expert ratings, reviews, testimonials | Diagnostic or assessment tools |

03

## Target influencers who can spread your messages

Given the importance of peer opinions and recommendations, target your marketing to the most active and influential individuals who can amplify your message. Many marketers overlook one of the simplest and most effective ways to do this on social: posting updates to their followers. These should include not only company and product announcements, but also comments on industry news, trends, and other relevant developments of interest to your target audience.

04

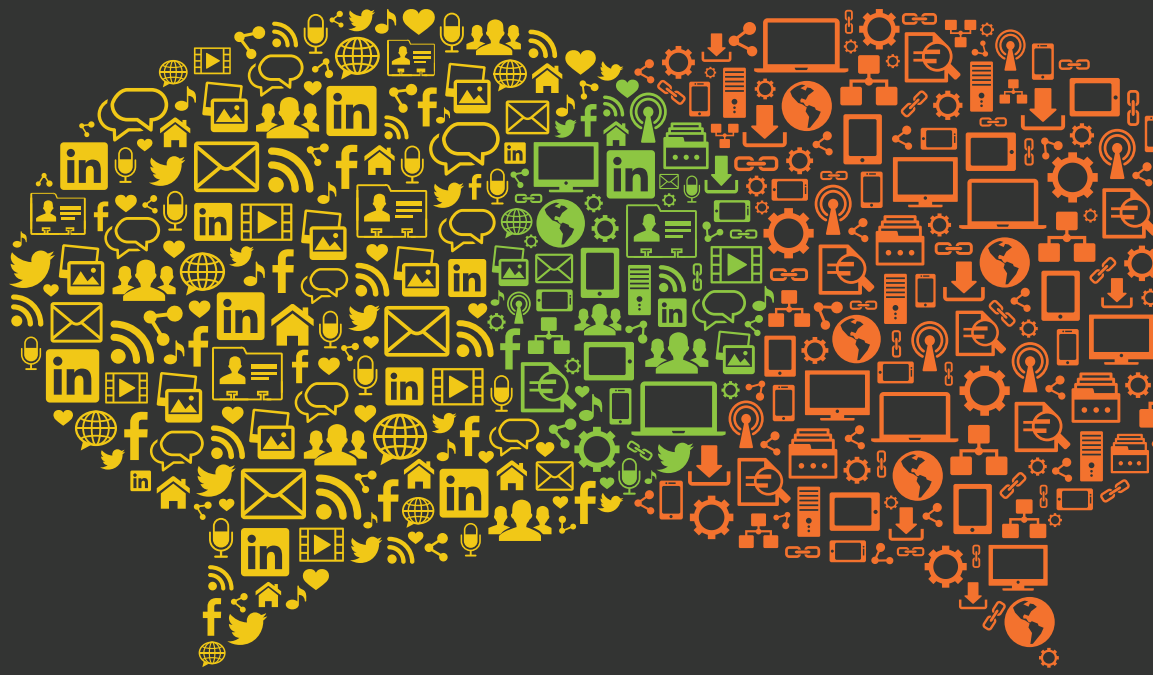
## Provide insights that match your customers' needs

Today's buyers dictate when and where they want to engage. As a result, marketers must attract customers with content that helps to solve their needs. Lead with insights and solutions, not your product. And focus on quality of content, as that is most influential in motivating IT decision makers to follow your brand. Content developed by respected thought leaders and experts will be more credible and valuable for buyers while highlighting your industry leadership and connections.

05

## Listen to when, where, and how ITDMs want to engage

Pay attention to when, where, and how your audience wants to engage, and encourage dialogue among customers as well as with your brand. Think of yourself as hosting a gathering of industry professionals rather than giving a presentation at a conference: are you listening as well as speaking?



# Engage IT decision makers in the right context.

Let LinkedIn help. Contact us at marketing.linkedin.com/contact.

These two research studies were commissioned by LinkedIn and conducted by Forrester Consulting and Research Now in August 2012. Two separate surveys were conducted of 400 IT decision makers in North America (305 U.S., 95 Canada). Respondents' job functions included approximately 70% in IT and 30% in business.

LinkedIn