



## THE SECRET ONLINE LIVES OF UK MANAGERS



**A GOODPRACTICE REPORT  
PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION  
WITH COMRES**

Owen Ferguson, Chief Operating Officer  
Stef Scott, Content Marketing Manager

November 2016





## FOREWORD

When we commissioned ComRes to run the survey that resulted in our 2015 report **The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers**, we wanted to better understand the learning habits of our core audience: managers working for mid-to-large scale organisations. The results of that report gave us an indication that, when faced with an unfamiliar challenge, the ease of access and how quickly “good enough” advice was presented were the two most important factors in how frequently managers adopted a particular approach.

However, the results from that study were fairly broad. We knew that external websites were part of the learning mix, but we didn’t know whether managers meant specific websites they were familiar with or the extent to which they used external and internal social networks.

This report is the result of our follow up to **The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers** report. In it, we dig deeper into the online learning habits of managers. Which social networks do they use most often and how useful do they find them? What content and usability attributes of websites most affect how frequently they get used? Are there any useful demographic variances in how managers use online tools to tackle workplace challenges?

Some of the results presented in this report are confirmations of assumptions and hunches many L&D practitioners have had. We believe it’s useful to have some evidence to back them up. Other findings highlight the challenge L&D faces in getting engagement with some online technologies.

I hope this report sparks as much conversation and debate as our previous efforts and look forward to any feedback you have.

**Owen Ferguson**  
**Chief Operating Officer**

**November 2016**



# CONTENTS

1.	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
2.	<b>THE HEADLINES</b>	<b>5</b>
	— Search engines are the top online tool for solving workplace management challenges	5
	— External websites are used if they fulfil specific criteria	5
	— External social networks don't live up to the hype	6
	— External social networks trump internal social networks	6
3.	<b>HOW MANAGERS RESPOND TO WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES</b>	<b>7</b>
	— Tech versus traditional approaches to solving challenges	8
	— Online approaches (other than internet search) ranked lowest	8
4.	<b>HOW MANAGERS USE THE INTERNET TO HELP WITH WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES</b>	<b>11</b>
	— Internet search versus visiting specific websites	11
	— High profile versus less well known websites	12
	— Impact of website attributes on usage	15
5.	<b>HOW MANAGERS USE SOCIAL NETWORKS TO HELP WITH WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES</b>	<b>19</b>
	— Social networks are not frequently used	19
6.	<b>DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES</b>	<b>22</b>
	— Age is a factor	22
7.	<b>FOUR TAKEAWAYS FOR L&amp;D</b>	<b>25</b>
8.	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>29</b>
9.	<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b>	<b>30</b>
10.	<b>ABOUT GOODPRACTICE</b>	<b>31</b>



# 1. INTRODUCTION

At GoodPractice we've been developing online learning tools to improve the performance of leaders and managers for more than 15 years. Whether we are developing content for our performance support toolkit or our bespoke e-learning, the needs of our core audience inform the evolution of our products and how we work with our clients. We conduct an ongoing programme of manager-focused research to better understand the learning habits and preferences of managers today.

Our 2015 report **The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers** looked at how managers like to learn, and the factors that influence how they learn.<sup>1</sup> Earlier this year we followed this up with our **Inside the Heads of UK Managers** report, which investigated the things that managers find most difficult and challenging about their roles.<sup>2</sup> This latest report builds on these earlier findings by delving into the secret online lives of UK managers.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Most people have access to the internet at work as well as at home. Many of us are regular users of social networks, using them to communicate and collaborate with colleagues and peers, both inside and outside the organisation in which we work.

This report aims to investigate the specific role that the internet and social media networks play in the lives of today's managers. How do they influence and contribute to the overall mix of online learning activities that managers undertake? To what extent do managers rely on the internet and social media networks to get help with the challenges they face at work?

As with our previous research reports, we commissioned specialist research consultancy ComRes to gather the data for this study. This approach gave us a bigger sample size to work with and also reduced the potential for sample bias.

Beginning with an overview of the key findings, we take a closer look at the different ways in which managers respond to workplace management challenges and highlight some notable preferences. We then consider how the internet, content-focused external websites and internal/external social media networks are being used by managers to solve day-to-day challenges. As with our previous reports, we also investigate key demographic differences in the results and draw comparisons with our previous manager-focused research studies. The report concludes with some practical takeaways for L&D practitioners about what these findings mean for the profession.

---

1. Owen Ferguson and Justin Anderson, *The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers*, A GoodPractice and ComRes Research Report (November 2015). Available at: [www.goodpractice.com/ld-resources/the-secret-learning-life-of-uk-managers](http://www.goodpractice.com/ld-resources/the-secret-learning-life-of-uk-managers).

2. Owen Ferguson and Stef Scott, *Inside the Heads of UK Managers*, A GoodPractice and ComRes Research Report (May 2016). Available at: [www.goodpractice.com/ld-resources/inside-the-heads-of-uk-managers](http://www.goodpractice.com/ld-resources/inside-the-heads-of-uk-managers).



## 2. THE HEADLINES

**This section summarises four key findings from the report. These reveal how managers are using information they find online and social media networks to support them as they face a variety of challenges.**

### **SEARCH ENGINES ARE THE TOP ONLINE TOOL FOR SOLVING WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES**

The immense popularity of using Google and other internet search engines to find content to help with workplace management challenges is clear from this report. Managers find search engines a highly effective way to get the answers they need to solve workplace management challenges. This is a consequence of our familiarity with search engines, their accessibility and the speed with which results can be obtained.

However, this preference has important consequences for learning and development departments. Internal online learning tools, whether that's e-learning, intranets or other digital solutions, compete with Google and other search engines for learners' attention. If internal solutions are to have an impact on organisational performance, they need to provide a similar, high quality, 'consumer grade' experience.

### **EXTERNAL WEBSITES ARE USED IF THEY FULFIL SPECIFIC CRITERIA**

Although significantly less popular than using search engines to find relevant content to overcome workplace management challenges, managers also use a number of external content-focused websites to help solve day-to-day challenges. Sites such as ACAS and the CIPD, that have a high degree of perceived credibility and which offer managers immediate practical advice, tend to be used most frequently and are rated as the most effective. A wide range of other, niche sites were also highlighted by managers as being very effective in helping address workplace management challenges. This suggests that once a manager discovers a site that provides them with trusted advice, they tend to return to it.



## EXTERNAL SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS DON'T LIVE UP TO THE HYPE

Despite commentators in the L&D community highlighting the benefits of social media networks such as Twitter and LinkedIn as tools to aid learning and performance, this hasn't filtered into managers' everyday working practice. Although there is evidence of some effective communities of practice emerging from technical and design disciplines, in our survey we found little data to suggest that managers are leveraging social networks for work on a regular basis.

While our survey demonstrates that social media networks are not frequently used, the majority of UK managers who do use them say they are effective. The majority of UK managers, however, don't use them, and don't view them as tools to help them to overcome workplace management challenges.

From our analysis two possible scenarios emerge from this finding:

- 1. External social networks have wide application and benefits but are not being used effectively by managers. This presents L&D with an opportunity to help managers in their organisation engage more effectively with them.**
- 2. External social networks have limited relevance to most managers at present. L&D would therefore benefit from finding out whether relevant online communities exist for their colleagues.**

## EXTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORKS TRUMP INTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

Despite the hype around internal social networking tools such as Yammer and Slack and the benefits these can bring in terms of improved communication and collaboration, our survey results show these are not well used by managers as a means of solving workplace management challenges. External social networks appear to be used by a higher percentage of managers than internal social networks. 51% of UK managers say they have used at least one of the external social networks tested compared to 23% who say they have used at least one of the internal social networks tested.

Our previous research found that managers prefer to use external search engines and websites they trust before trying internal online resources and tools provided by their organisation.<sup>3</sup> This is also true when it comes to their use of social networks. More managers appear to turn to external social networks for help with solving workplace management challenges despite the wide adoption of internal social networking tools by many organisations.

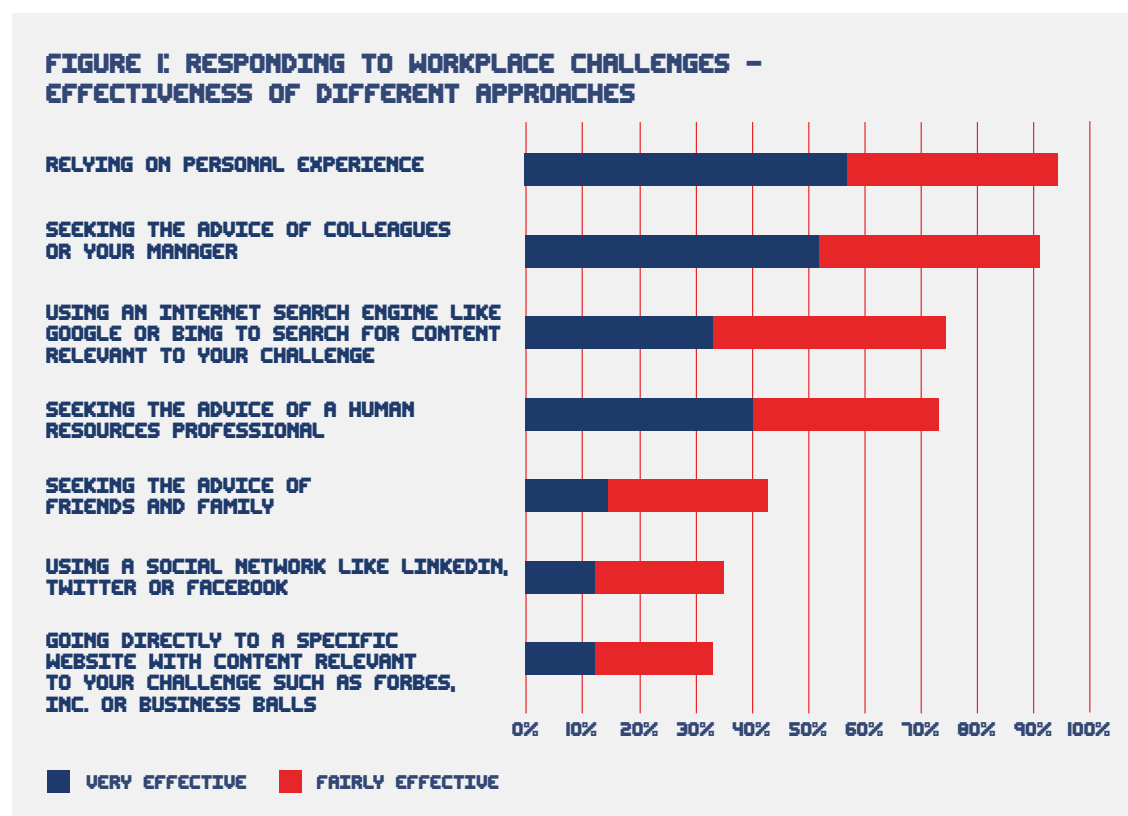
---

3. Owen Ferguson and Justin Anderson, The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers, A GoodPractice and ComRes Research Report (November 2015). Available at: [www.goodpractice.com/ld-resources/the-secret-learning-life-of-uk-managers](http://www.goodpractice.com/ld-resources/the-secret-learning-life-of-uk-managers).

### 3. HOW MANAGERS RESPOND TO WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

The **Secret Learning Life of UK Managers** established that, when looking for help with workplace management challenges, managers use a search engine or trusted external websites before trying internal online resources or e-learning provided by their organisation. This is because most managers find external options provide them with better advice faster than internal options.

One of the questions we sought to answer in this report is the extent to which managers rely on external websites to find content to help with their challenges, compared to discovering suitable content using search engines. Figure 1 shows a range of ways that managers can respond to common workplace management challenges and the reported effectiveness of each approach.<sup>4</sup>



4. Figure 1 is based on survey data resulting from the question "Based on your own experiences, how effective or ineffective do you find each of the following when it comes to overcoming workplace management challenges?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).



## TECH VERSUS TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO SOLVING CHALLENGES

### Managers prefer non-tech approaches to solving challenges

The majority of UK managers say that non-tech approaches such as **relying on personal experience** and **seeking advice from colleagues or managers** are effective when it comes to addressing their workplace management challenges. 95% and 91% say these approaches are effective. A slightly higher percentage say relying on personal experience is very effective (57%), compared to advice from colleagues and managers (51%).

### Looking online is rated effective by the same proportion as talking to HR

75% said that **using an internet search engine** such as Google to discover content relevant to their specific issue is effective in helping them face workplace management challenges. Managers report that search engines are as effective as **talking to a Human Resources professional** – with 75% rating this as effective. However, a slightly higher percentage of managers rate advice from HR colleagues as very effective (40%), compared to 34% who say that using a search engine is very effective.

## ONLINE APPROACHES (OTHER THAN INTERNET SEARCH) RANKED LOWEST

### The effectiveness of social networks is in doubt

The results for **using a social network** such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook as a means of addressing workplace management challenges are less clear cut. Although 35% of managers say this is an effective way of addressing workplace management challenges, 32% say the opposite – that this approach is ineffective. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5: How managers use social networks to help with workplace management challenges.

### High profile content-focused websites ranked lowest in effectiveness

Around a third of managers (32%) say that **going to a specific website** which has content relevant to their particular issue is an effective way of addressing workplace management challenges.<sup>5</sup> This is the lowest net effective score for all the different approaches we asked about. However, this is almost certainly because most managers discover content via search engines. The majority of managers who do visit external websites directly, rate them as highly effective.

### Comparison of internet search versus high profile websites

Figure 2 compares responses for the relative effectiveness of internet search versus using external content-focused websites to tackle management challenges.<sup>6</sup>

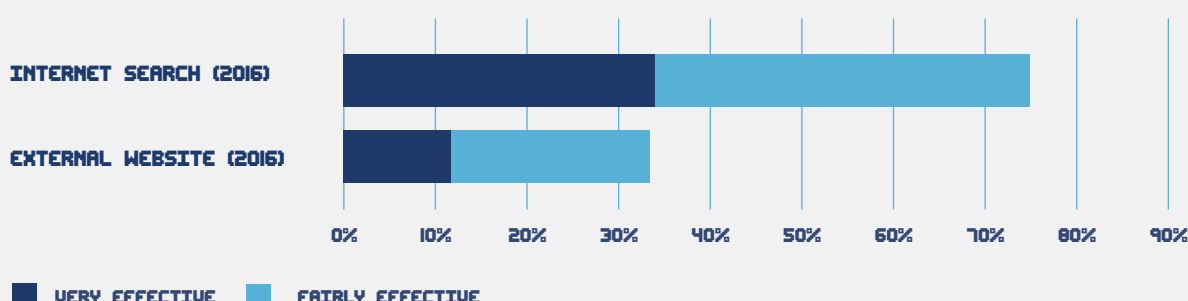
---

5. The specific range of websites we asked about includes the CIPD, ACAS, Forbes, Harvard Business Review, MindTools, Entrepreneur, Inc, Business Balls and WikiHow.

6. Fig 2 is based on survey data resulting from the question "Based on your own experiences, how effective or ineffective do you find each of the following when it comes to overcoming workplace management challenges?" 2016 Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).



**FIGURE 2: EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNET SEARCH AND HIGH PROFILE EXTERNAL WEBSITES**



A greater proportion of managers rate using an internet search engine like Google or Bing to search for content relevant to their challenge as effective, than those who rate going directly to a specific website with content relevant to their challenge effective. 75% of managers report that internet search engines are effective in helping them address workplace management challenges (net), compared to 32% who report that external websites are effective.

The result for internet search engines is comparable to a similar question we asked in the survey for our 2015 study, **The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers**. However, the result for external websites was lower than we expected.

The question asked for our 2016 survey was:

**“Based on your own experiences, how effective or ineffective do you find each of the following when it comes to overcoming workplace management challenges?”**

Two of the response options were:

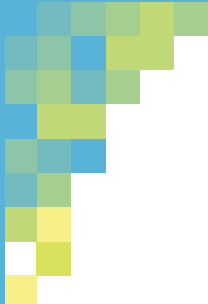
- **Using an internet search engine like Google or Bing to search for content relevant to your challenge.**
- **Going directly to a specific website with content relevant to your challenge such as Forbes, Management Today, Inc. or BusinessBalls.**

We asked managers a similar (but not identical) question in our 2015 survey:

**“Please now think about when you are faced with an unfamiliar challenge in your role as a manager. How effective or ineffective have you found each of the following in helping you in your role?”**

Two of the response options were:

- **Internet search via a search engine, e.g. Google.**
- **External websites that I use regularly.**



Although the questions asked are different, there is very little difference in the results for the effectiveness of internet search between the two surveys. In the 2015 survey 72% of managers rated 'internet search via a search engine e.g. Google' effective, compared to 75% in this latest study who rated 'using an internet search engine like Google or Bing to search for content relevant to your challenge' as effective.

There is more difference in the responses relating to the effectiveness of websites between the survey for this report and the one for The Secret Learning Life of UK Managers in 2015. For this study, 32% rated external websites as effective, but the 2015 result was much higher – 76%. There are a number of possible explanations for this difference:

- 1. Different phrasing of the question in each study. For this report, we used a question which gave examples of specific high profile websites (including CIPD, ACAS, Forbes, MindTools, Entrepreneur, Inc, Business Balls and Wikihow). Our 2015 study did not offer examples.**
- 2. When managers responded to our earlier study, they were perhaps thinking about discovering external websites via organic internet search rather than going directly to these websites.**
- 3. Managers in the 2015 survey also considered external social networks as sites they used regularly which could have also contributed to the increased percentage.**

## 4. HOW MANAGERS USE THE INTERNET TO HELP WITH WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

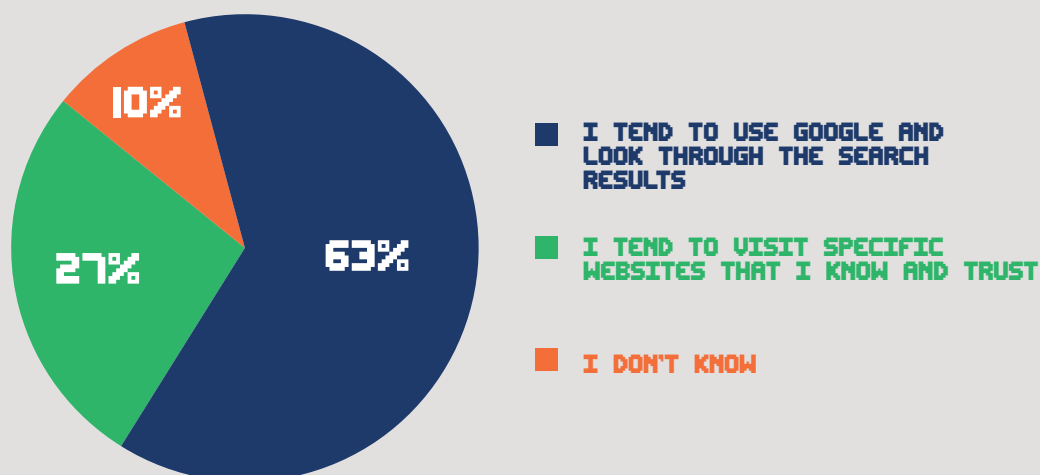
We asked a number of questions to uncover more detailed insights about how UK managers use the internet to support them at work. The main findings are summarised as follows:

### INTERNET SEARCH VERSUS VISITING SPECIFIC WEBSITES

Three quarters (75%) of UK managers say that using an **internet search engine** such as Google to look for content that's relevant to their particular workplace management challenge is effective. This compares to around a third (32%) who say that going to **specific, trusted websites**, with content relevant to their particular challenge, is effective.

We asked managers whether they prefer to use Google and look through the search results, or visit specific websites which they know and trust, when overcoming workplace challenges. As shown in Figure 3 below, when asked to choose between using Google and specific, trusted websites, more than three in five managers (63%) said they prefer to use Google.<sup>7</sup> Around a quarter (27%) say they prefer to visit websites they know and trust to help overcome workplace management challenges.

FIGURE 3: HOW MANAGERS USE THE INTERNET



7. Figure 3 is based on survey data resulting from the question "When it comes to searching online for content to help you overcome management challenges, which of the following is your preferred option?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).



## The problem with just ‘Googling it’

Our survey shows that ‘Googling it’ is the preferred option for managers when they use the internet to help address workplace management challenges. Research by Chitika shows that the top result from Google’s organic search gets 33% of the overall traffic, with the second result getting around 18%. In total, Page 1 results garner 92% of the overall traffic from an average search.<sup>8</sup>

We know that managers are regularly using the content they find on Google to help them make decisions about their day-to-day work. However, the quality of the guidance for managers provided by the top search results is variable. Although finding content to help with workplace management challenges is quick and easy, the quality, credibility and integrity of the advice isn’t guaranteed. This is an important issue for L&D to consider. How well equipped are managers to evaluate the credibility of advice discovered through online searches?

It seems that managers are turning to Google and other search engines most frequently because it gives them ‘good enough’ results to help them address the challenges they face. The question for L&D is how to provide high quality information that managers can access just as quickly as Google, or indeed, whether to bother doing this at all. We address this in more detail in Section 7: Four takeaways for L&D.

## HIGH PROFILE VERSUS LESS WELL KNOWN WEBSITES

### High profile websites are moderately used, but are effective

We asked managers to tell us how frequently they use a range of high profile websites with content relevant to leaders and managers to help overcome workplace management challenges. The specific websites we asked about were ACAS, CIPD, WikiHow, Business Balls, Forbes, Entrepreneur, MindTools and Inc. These were identified from a pre-survey we conducted to identify high profile websites with content relevant to leadership and management roles.

These websites are used on a fairly moderate basis. Between 4% and 14% of managers say they use this range of websites to overcome workplace management challenges more than once a month. Of all the specific websites we asked about, the CIPD and ACAS are used by the most managers – 45% visit ACAS more than once per year, and two in five (38%) visit the CIPD website more than once per year.

We also asked how effective managers found these websites in helping them overcome workplace management challenges. Figure 4 shows the reported effectiveness of the external websites we asked about and the median value of all the websites.<sup>9</sup>

---

8. ‘The Value of Google Result Positioning’ (June 2013). Available at: <https://chitika.com/google-positioning-value> (accessed October 2016).

9. Figure 4 is based on survey data resulting from the question: “Thinking about each of the websites you have used, how effective or ineffective was the content you found in helping you overcome a workplace management challenge?” Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees who have used: ACAS (n=66); CIPD (n=70); Business Balls (n=29\*); Entrepreneur (n=23\*); WikiHow (n=36); Inc (n=19\*); Forbes (n=29\*); Mind Tools (n=23); Other (n=67).

**FIGURE 4: EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTERNAL WEBSITES**

WEBSITE	VERY EFFECTIVE	FAIRLY EFFECTIVE	NET: EFFECTIVE
ACAS	48%	38%	86%
CIPD	56%	34%	90%
BUSINESS BALLS	45%	45%	90%
ENTREPRENEUR	26%	61%	87%
WIKIHOW	36%	53%	89%
INC	32%	53%	85%
FORBES	55%	41%	96%
MIND TOOLS	48%	43%	91%
MEDIAN	46.2%	44%	89.5%

Despite the fairly moderate usage, managers who use external websites say they are effective. Although based on a low number of respondents who use external websites to solve management challenges (32%), a substantial majority of this group say they are effective in helping them meet the day-to-day challenges of their role. As Figure 4 shows, the median net effective score across all the websites asked about was 89.5%, with a median score of 46.5% rating the sites as “very effective”.

#### **Less well known websites are part of the learning mix**

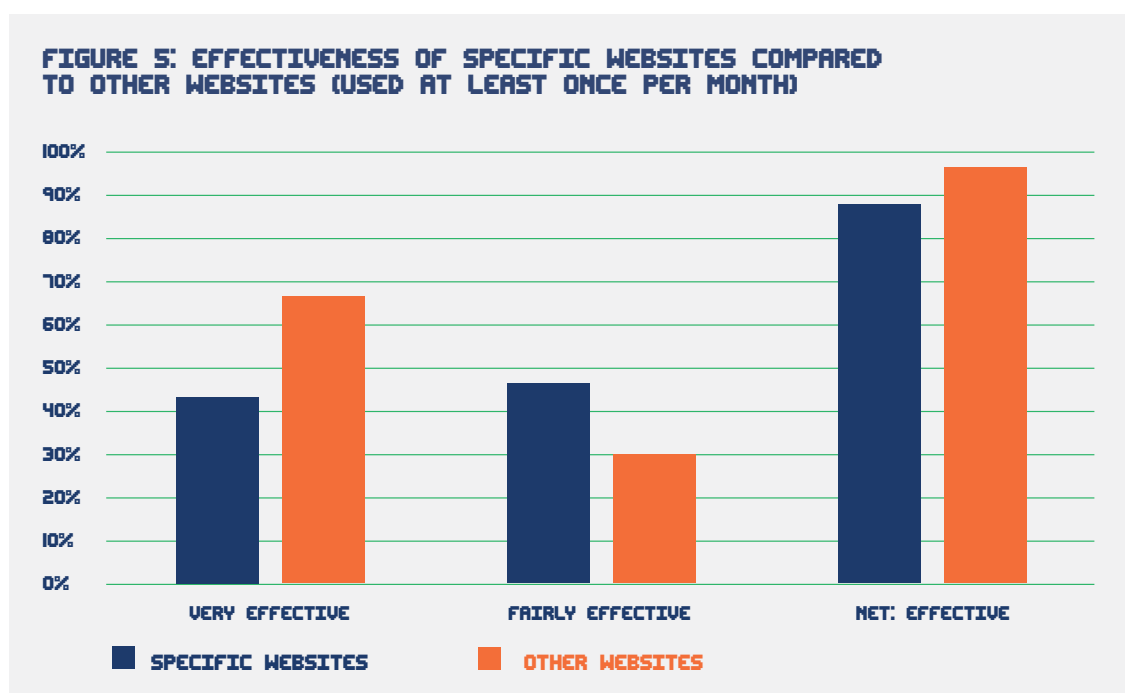
As well as indicating how frequently they use websites on the prescribed list established by the pre-survey, we also asked managers to indicate how frequently they used any other websites. 13% of managers said they return to additional websites for help with leadership and management challenges once or more a month, and 27% visit them less than once a month, but more than once a year.

More than 80 different sites were on the list of other websites highlighted by managers. These range from less well known leadership and management content specific websites, to profession-specific sites and government sites such as HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions.

## Less well known websites rated more effective than high profile websites

Figure 5 compares the effectiveness of the high profile leadership and management websites we asked about with the other less well known websites managers named themselves, using the median value for the high profile leadership and management websites.<sup>10</sup>

97% of managers who use external websites to help overcome a workplace management challenge at least once a month rated the websites they cited themselves as effective compared to 89% for the list of specific websites. 67% said that the other websites they used were very effective in helping them address workplace management challenges, compared to 43% who said that the specific list of websites were very effective.



97% of managers who use less well known external websites to help overcome a workplace management challenge at least once a month rate these as effective. This compares with a median net effective value of 89.50% for the specific list of high profile sites that we asked about. 67% said that the other websites they used were very effective in helping them address workplace management challenges, compared to a median value of 46.5% for the specific list of high profile websites.

It is surprising to note that around 10% of people who visit specific sites more than once a month (i.e. on a fairly frequent basis) indicate that they don't find them effective.

10. Figure 5 is based on survey data resulting from the question: "Thinking about each of the websites you have used, how effective or ineffective was the content you found in helping you overcome a workplace management challenge?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).

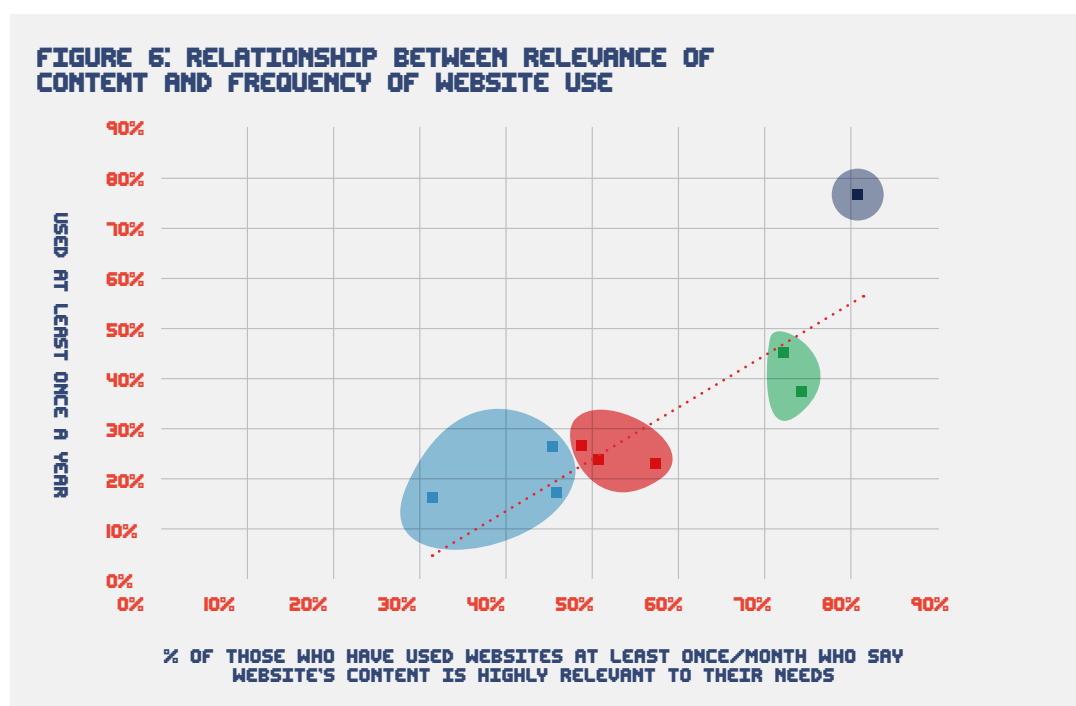
## IMPACT OF WEBSITE ATTRIBUTES ON USAGE

We wanted to understand the extent to which a website's content and usability affects how frequently it is used by managers. To do this we asked questions about the content managers find on external websites and analysed how well this correlates with overall usage. This helped us establish the strength of the relationship between frequency of visits to a specific website and a range of different website attributes.

The website attributes we asked about included:

- The content is highly relevant to my needs.
- The content I need is easy to find.
- The content is credible and reliable.
- The website is easy to use.
- The website is attractive.

The scatter-plot in Figure 6 shows a strong positive relationship ( $r=0.84$ ) between how **relevant the content** is for managers and **how frequently** the website is used.<sup>11,12</sup>



11. Correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) measure the strength and direction of a relationship between variables, and are usually illustrated on a scatter-plot. An  $r$  value of 0.70 and above indicates a strong positive linear relationship.

12. Figs 6-10 are based on survey data resulting from two questions:

"How frequently or infrequently, if at all, do you use each of the following external websites to help overcome a workplace management challenge?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees ( $n=504$ ).

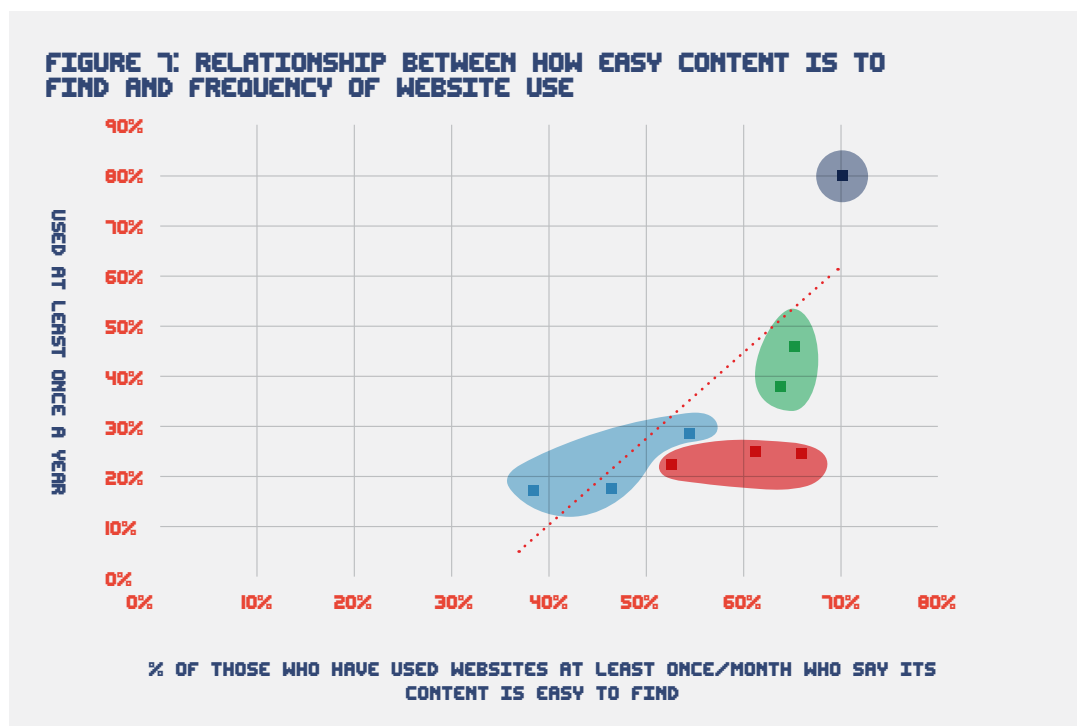
"Thinking about the websites you use at least once a month, which of the following statements apply to each of them? The content is highly relevant to my needs; the content I need is easy to find; the content is credible and reliable; the website is easy to use; the website is attractive." Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees who have used: ACAS ( $n=66$ ); CIPD ( $n=70$ ); Business Balls ( $n=29^*$ ); Entrepreneur ( $n=23^*$ ); WikiHow ( $n=36$ ); Inc ( $n=19^*$ ); Forbes ( $n=29^*$ ); Mind Tools ( $n=23$ ); Other ( $n=67$ ).

Of all the website attributes we looked at, **relevancy of the content** is the most important factor which determines whether managers will use a site more frequently.

Figure 6 also shows an interesting cluster where websites of a particular type are rated similarly. These are:

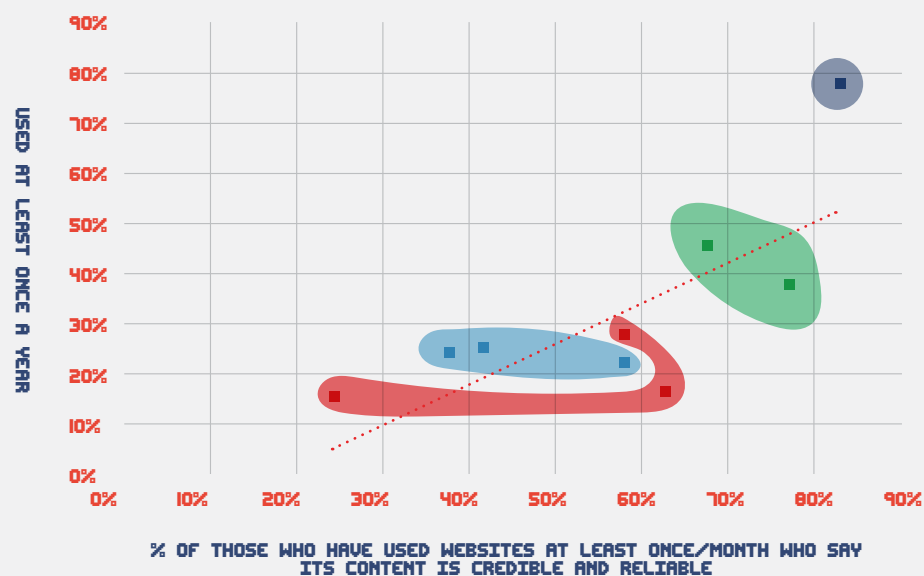
- Magazine style websites with a focus on news and features, e.g. Forbes and Inc.
- General, how-to websites with freely accessible content, e.g. WikiHow and Business Balls.
- Professional, authoritative sources with a focus on highly practical, credible content, e.g. CIPD and ACAS.
- Other websites managers cited when asked.

We repeated the analysis for each website attribute, to test whether any had a noticeable impact on the frequency of website use. The results for each attribute are shown in Figures 7 to 10. These show that in addition to the relevancy of website content, the **ease with which content can be found** ( $r=0.74$ ), the **credibility and reliability of the content** ( $r=0.71$ ) and **how easy the website is to use** ( $r=0.72$ ) are all important factors in determining how frequently managers use a site to help with workplace management challenges.

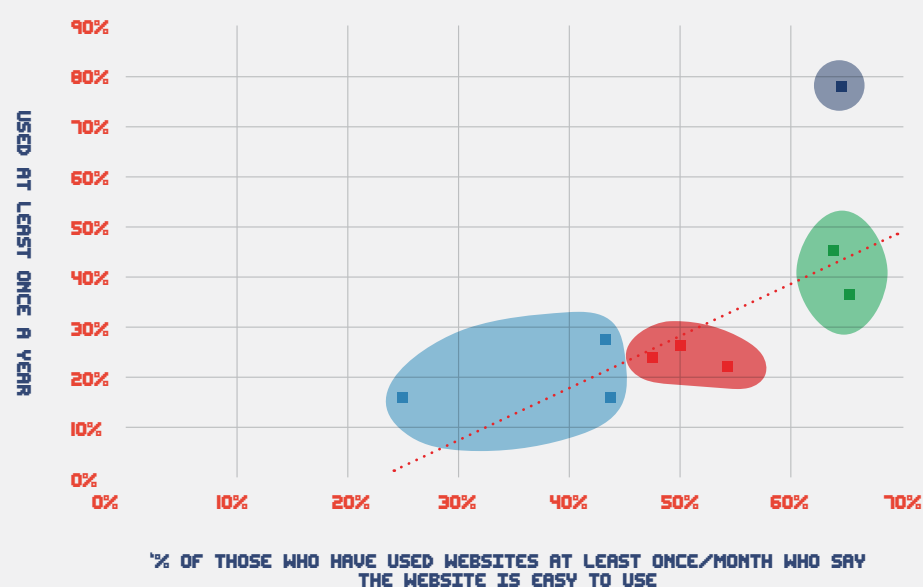




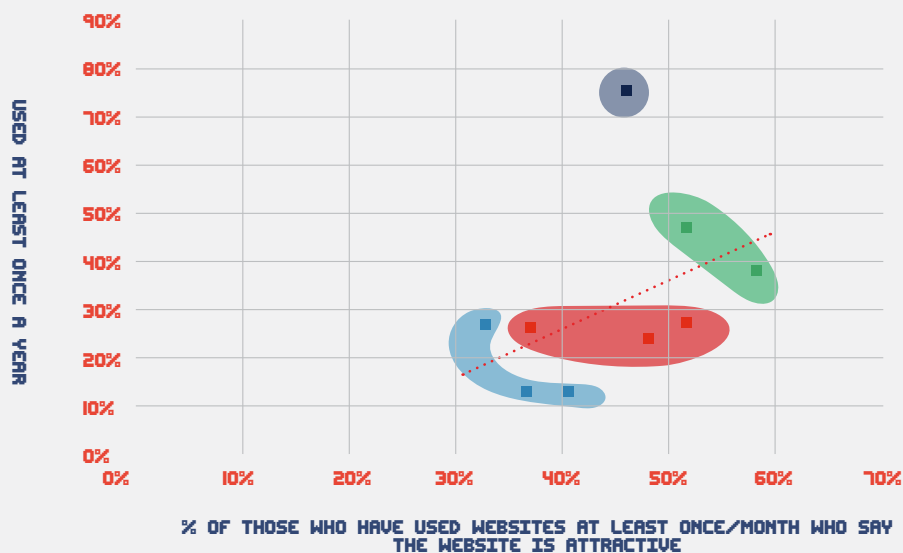
**FIGURE 8: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREDIBILITY AND RELIABILITY OF CONTENT AND FREQUENCY OF WEBSITE USE**



**FIGURE 9: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOW EASY WEBSITE IS TO USE AND FREQUENCY OF WEBSITE USE**



**FIGURE 10: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WEBSITE ATTRACTIVENESS AND FREQUENCY OF WEBSITE USE**



However, as highlighted by Figure 10, the **attractiveness of a website** has a limited impact on how frequently managers use the site ( $r=0.31$ ). Similarly, the perceived attractiveness of a website also has little impact on how effective managers find the content in helping them solve day-to-day challenges.<sup>13</sup>

The results give us some useful guidelines for developing web-based learning solutions. The more relevant managers perceive the content of an online solution to be, the higher the likelihood that they will use a solution more frequently. This is discussed in more detail in Section 7: Four takeaways for L&D.

13. Figures 6-10 are based on survey data resulting from two questions:

"How frequently or infrequently, if at all, do you use each of the following external websites to help overcome a workplace management challenge?". Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).

"Thinking about the websites you use at least once a month, which of the following statements apply to each of them? The content is highly relevant to my needs; the content I need is easy to find; the content is credible and reliable; the website is easy to use; the website is attractive." Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees who have used: ACAS (n=66); CIPD (n=70); Business Balls (n=29\*); Entrepreneur (n=23\*); WikiHow (n=36); Inc (n=19\*); Forbes (n=29\*); Mind Tools (n=23); Other (n=67).

## 5. HOW MANAGERS USE SOCIAL NETWORKS TO HELP WITH WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

We asked questions to determine how UK managers use external and internal social media networks to solve management challenges they face at work. The key findings are summarised as follows:

### SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE NOT FREQUENTLY USED

#### External social networks

Social media networks have a moderate influence on the daily working lives of UK managers. We found that half (51%) of managers say they have used at least one external social media networking site such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ or Facebook to help them overcome workplace management challenges at all. However, just 18% of UK managers say they use LinkedIn more than once a month to help overcome a workplace management challenge, despite it being the platform which managers say they are most likely to use. Social networks are used, but not particularly frequently.

FIGURE 11: FREQUENCY OF USE – EXTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORK

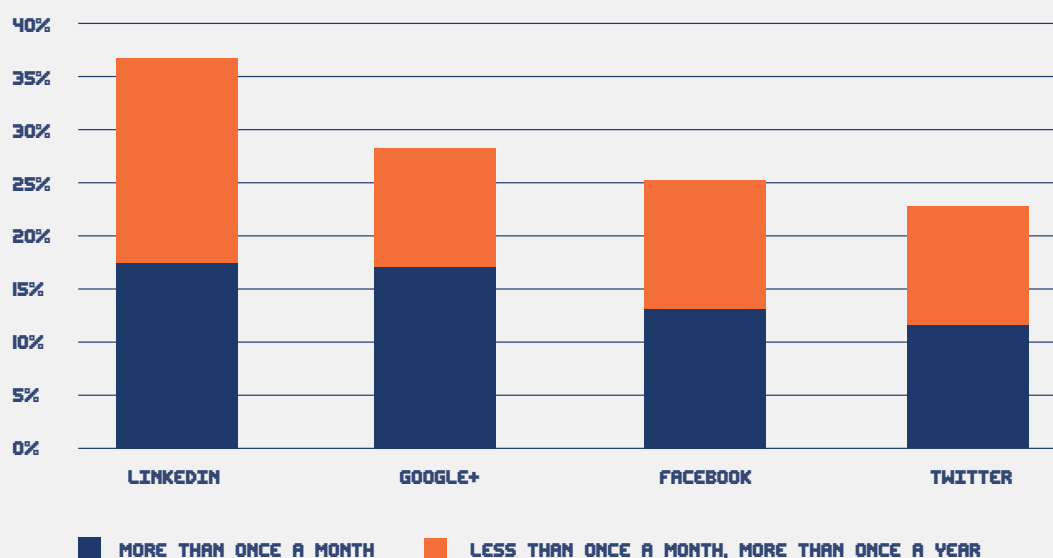
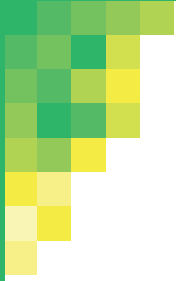


Figure 11 shows the full picture of how frequently external social media networks are used.<sup>14</sup>

Of the networks tested in our survey, LinkedIn is the most popular external networking site for managers. 36% of UK managers say they use it once or more per year to help overcome workplace management challenges. However, as discussed, far fewer use it with any great regularity.

<sup>14</sup> Figure 11 is based on survey data resulting from the question "How frequently or infrequently, if at all, do you use social networks to help overcome a workplace management challenge?"  
Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).



Twitter is the least popular of the social media networks we asked about, with 22% of managers who report using it once or more per year to help solve management challenges. Only 11% say they turn to Twitter more than once a month to solve challenges, and only 11% say they use it less than once a month but more than once a year.

It is clear that most managers do not view Twitter as a place where they can get support for workplace management challenges (although this may not be true for other professions such as L&D or graphic design, where Twitter appears to be more popular).

In terms of relative effectiveness, 89% of managers who use social networks at least once a month said they found at least one external social media network effective in helping them overcome their workplace management challenges. Put simply, managers who use social networks get value from them, but not many managers are engaging with social media regularly.

The perception of external social networks as a destination mainly for leisure rather than a tool for work is supported by research from the Pew Research Center on the use of social media in the US workplace. It suggests that:<sup>15</sup>

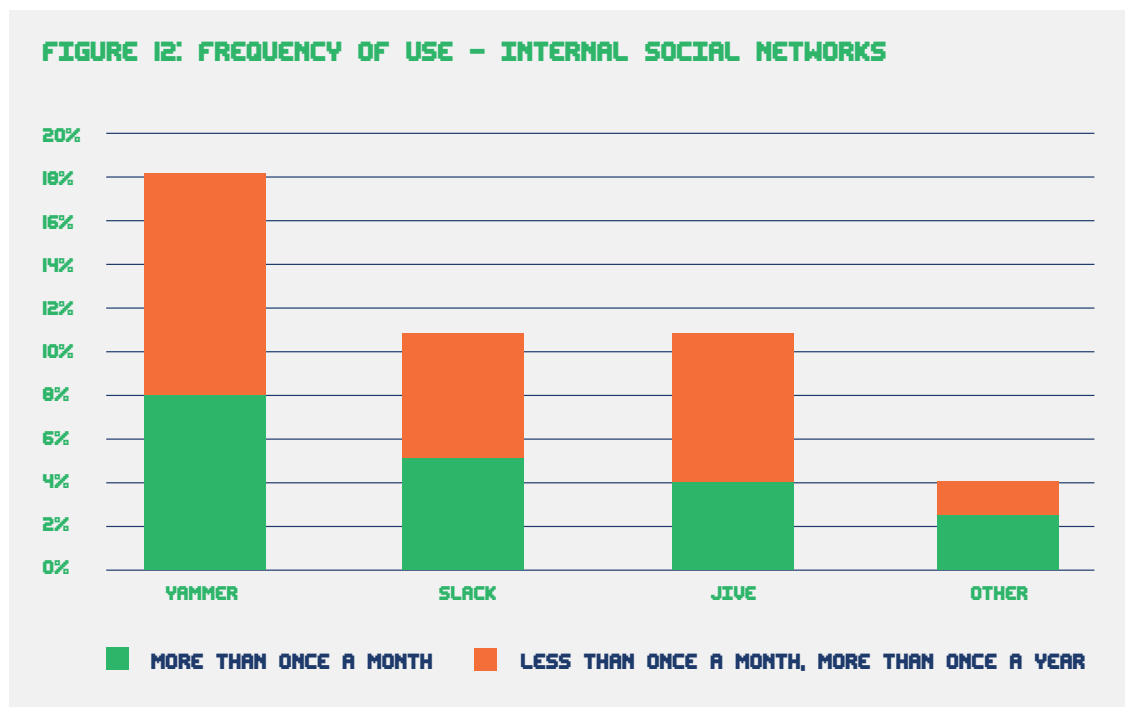
- 34%** use it to take a mental break from work
- 24%** use it to make or support professional connections
- 20%** use it to get information to help solve problems at work
- 12%** use it to ask work-related questions of people **outside** their organisation
- 12%** use it to ask work-related questions of people **inside** their organisation

---

15. Pew Research Center, Social Media and the Workplace (June 2016). Available at: [www.pewinternet.org/2016/06/22/social-media-and-the-workplace/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/06/22/social-media-and-the-workplace/) (accessed 31 October 2016).

## Internal social networks

Figure 12 shows that internal social enterprise networks such as Slack, Yammer and Jive are only used by a minority of UK managers to help overcome workplace management challenges. Only 23% of managers say they have used any internal social network for this purpose.<sup>16</sup>



Looking at the individual networks, Yammer is reported to be used more than once per year by 17% of UK managers. However, only 8% say they use Yammer more than once a month, and 10% use it less than once a month but more than once a year. Slack and Jive are less popular, with both reported to be used more than once a year by only 11%. Only 5% of UK managers say they use Slack more than once a month, and 4% use Jive more than once a month.

These findings echo research conducted by the Altimeter Group, which found that less than half of all deployed social and collaborative networks are used regularly by employees.<sup>17</sup> After an initial spike in adoption, usage falls to almost zero. However, although based on a small number of respondents who use internal social networks 87% of managers who use social networks at least once a month said they found them effective in helping them overcome workplace management challenges.

16. Figure 12 is based on survey data resulting from the question "How frequently or infrequently do you use each of the following internal social networks to help overcome a workplace management challenge?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504).

17. Charlene Li, 'Why No One Uses the Corporate Social Network', Harvard Business Review (7 April 2015). Available at: <https://hbr.org/2015/04/why-no-one-uses-the-corporate-social-network> (accessed 31 October 2016).

## 6. DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

As with our previous research analysis, it is interesting to examine how different demographic groups within the overall data set have responded. Slicing the data in this way can reveal quite a different picture for specific segments or demographic groups. With this in mind, when we split the data by respondent age, there were a number of notable differences worth highlighting.

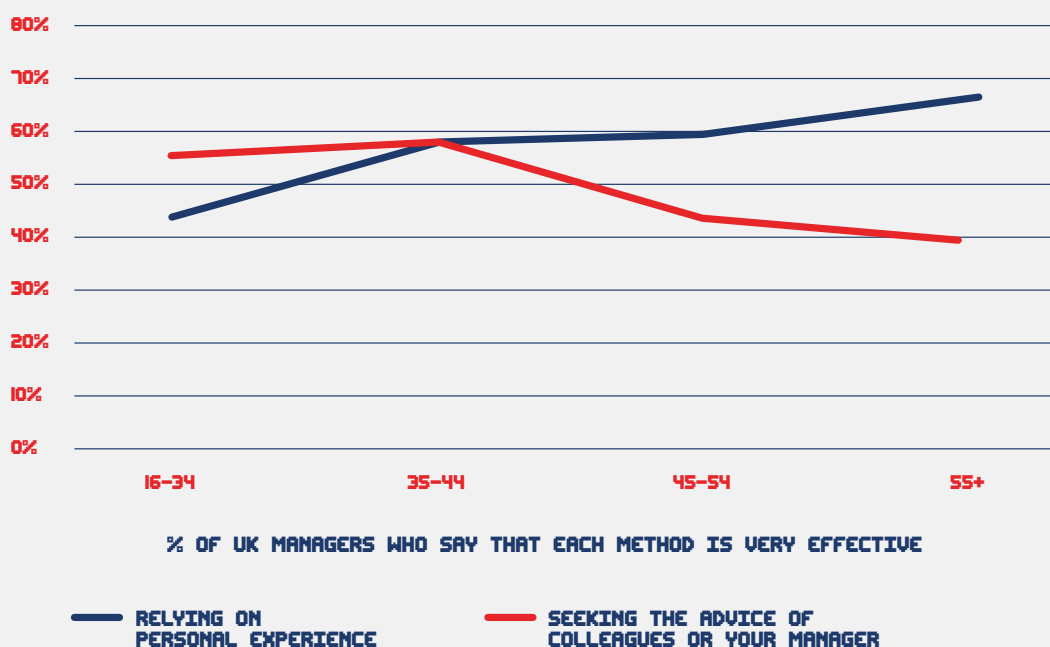
### AGE IS A FACTOR

#### Reliance on personal experience increases with age

As shown by the blue line in Figure 13, the percentage of managers who rely on personal experience to solve challenges increases with age. For example, 45% of managers aged 16-34 say that relying on personal experience is a very effective way of overcoming workplace management challenges. This increases to 67% of managers aged 55+.<sup>18</sup>

Conversely, seeking advice from colleagues or your managers decreases with age – as shown by the red line on Figure 13. 54% of managers aged 16-34 say that this is a very effective way of addressing workplace management challenges, compared to just 40% of managers aged 55+.

**FIGURE 13: RELYING ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE VERSUS SEEKING ADVICE FROM COLLEAGUES OR YOUR MANAGER**

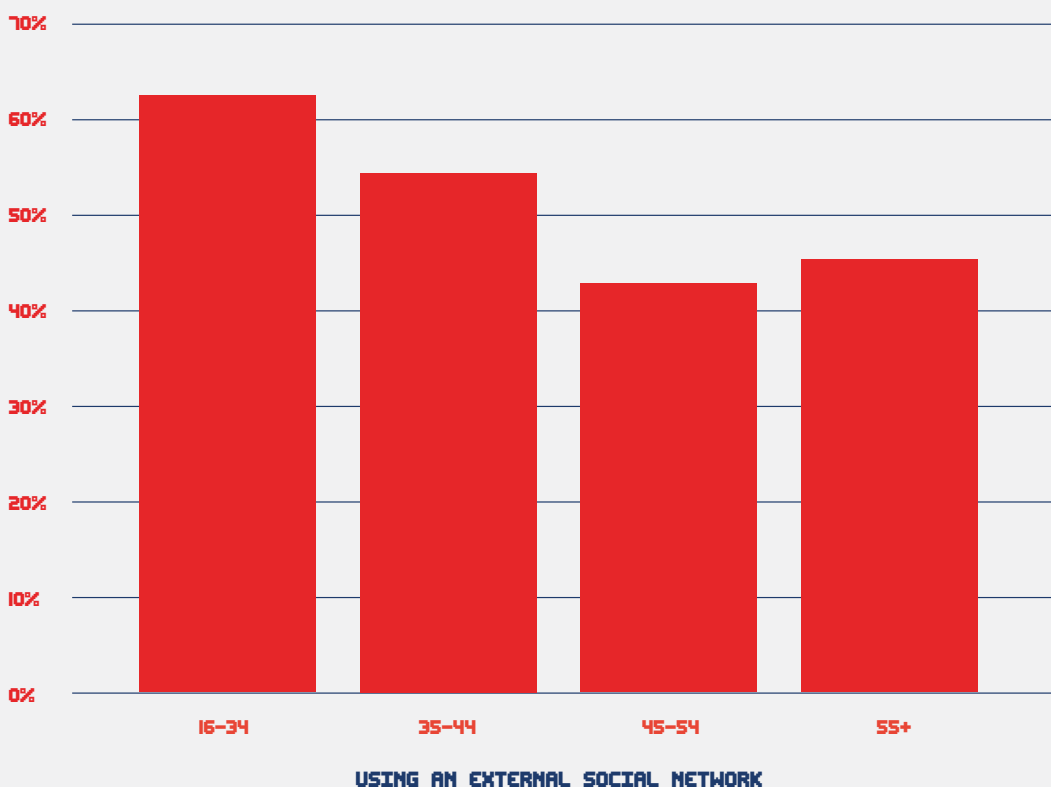


18. Figure 13 is based on survey data resulting from the question "Based on your own experiences, how effective or ineffective do you find each of the following when it comes to overcoming workplace management challenges?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504); Aged 16-34 (n=128); 35-44 (n=132); 45-54 (n=137); 55+ (n=95).

## Older managers less likely to use external social networks

As shown in Figure 14, a notable trend is that older managers are less likely than younger managers to say they use external social networks like LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook to help them overcome workplace management challenges. 44% of managers aged 55+ say they use social networks (and 42% of managers aged 45-54) compared to 63% of managers aged 16-34.<sup>19</sup>

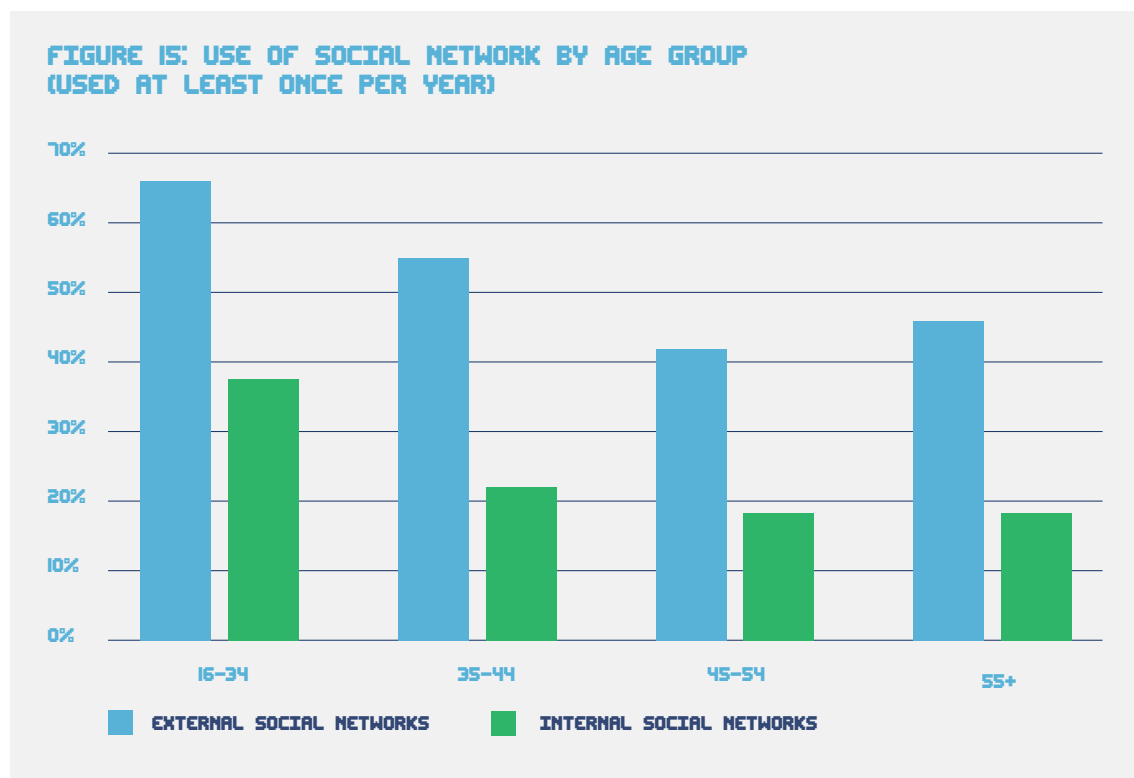
**FIGURE 14: PERCENTAGE OF MANAGERS WHO USE EXTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORKS TO SOLVE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES**



19. Figure 14 is based on survey data resulting from the question "How frequently or infrequently, if at all, do you use social networks to help overcome a workplace management challenge?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504); Aged 16-34 (n=128); 35-44 (n=132); 45-54 (n=137); 55+ (n=95).

## Younger managers find social networks more effective

Figure 15 shows the difference in usage of social networks by age. A higher percentage of managers in the younger age groups (16-34) and (35-44) say they use internal and external social networks more than once per year.<sup>20</sup> 63% of managers aged 16-34 use external social networks, compared to 44% of managers aged 55+ (a notable difference of 19%). For internal social networks, 37% of managers aged 16-34 use them, compared to 18% of managers aged 55+ (a 19% difference).



## An important caveat regarding demographics

Looking at a single demographic is a fairly rudimentary way of segmenting and drawing conclusions from a larger data sample. Although our data suggests that older managers are less likely to use the internet and external social networks to help tackle workplace management challenges, generalisations should not be made across an entire particular age group.

20. Figure 15 is based on survey data resulting from the question "How frequently or infrequently, if at all, do you use social networks to help overcome a workplace management challenge?" and "How frequently or infrequently do you use each of the following internal social networks to help overcome a workplace management challenge?" Base: All managers at UK companies with 250+ employees (n=504); Aged 16-34 (n=128); 35-44 (n=132); 45-54 (n=137); 55+ (n=95).



## 7. FOUR TAKEAWAYS FOR L&D

So what does this report mean for L&D?

We've identified four takeaways to help L&D practitioners reflect on their current practice.

### 1. FOR INTERNET SEARCH – MANAGERS WILL BENEFIT FROM GUIDANCE ABOUT HOW TO EVALUATE THE CONTENT THEY FIND.

Our survey found that when it comes to searching online for content to help overcome workplace management challenges, search engines like Google and Bing are the top choice for managers. The advice and guidance found in search results for common management challenges are patchy, however, in terms of credibility, relevance and practicality for managers.

L&D can address this by providing some simple guidance to help managers evaluate the content they find on Google and other search engines based on the following factors:



#### Authorship/publisher

Consider who has produced and published the resource. Also consider the type of website the information comes from. Is it a personal site, a professional source, a newspaper, journal or commercial site?<sup>21</sup>



#### Accuracy and objectivity

Can the facts be substantiated elsewhere? Beware of information that can't be confirmed or that presents a biased view.<sup>22</sup> Looking at more than one source can help corroborate facts – don't simply rely on what is found in the top search result.



#### Timeliness

Is the information current? If there are a number of out-of-date links or references to old sources, what does this say about the credibility of the information?<sup>23</sup>

21. Virginia Montecino, 'Criteria to evaluate the credibility of www sources'. Available at: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/web-eval-sites.htm> (accessed 3 November 2016).

22. Philip Webb, 'Assessing the credibility of online sources'. Available at: [www.webcredible.com/blog/assessing-credibility-online-sources](http://www.webcredible.com/blog/assessing-credibility-online-sources) (accessed 3 November 2016).

23. 'Evaluating online sources', Columbia University Library. Available at: [http://library.columbia.edu/locations/undergraduate/evaluating\\_web.htm](http://library.columbia.edu/locations/undergraduate/evaluating_web.htm) (accessed 3 November 2016).



## **2. FOR ONLINE LEARNING SOLUTIONS – RELEVANCY OF CONTENT IS KING AND USABILITY MATTERS FAR MORE THAN AESTHETICS.**

The findings demonstrate that relevance of content is the most important factor in determining how frequently managers use a website to help them solve workplace management challenges. An understanding of the attributes that make specific external websites popular as a source of support for managers can inform L&D's decision-making when purchasing or developing learning solutions for internal use.

When assessing the potential of a learning solution, the most important factors are:

- **how relevant the content is for your managers**
- **how credible and reliable the content is**
- **how easy it is to find the content**
- **how easy the solution is to navigate as a whole**

It is important not to be sidetracked by the aesthetic appeal of a site, as this has a much smaller impact on how frequently a solution is used. If managers can't find content that's relevant to their jobs and which helps them be more effective, then it doesn't matter if the site looks good. It's possible to have a site or learning solution that is visually attractive on first glance, but which is hard to use in practice.

Assessing the various attributes in this way for your managers is an important step in the evaluation of your existing internal resources, and any new learning resources you plan to introduce.

## **3. FOR EXTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORKS – MORE INVESTIGATION IS NEEDED TO DETERMINE THEIR RELEVANCE AND PRACTICALITY FOR MANAGERS.**

Our research results highlight that social networks are not frequently used. However, they are rated as highly effective by the minority of managers who do use them. It is not easy to determine whether social networks are simply not seen as relevant by a large proportion of managers, or whether managers are just not comfortable using and sharing on external social networks.

There are a couple of things that L&D can do to investigate these issues:

- 1. As a starting point, provide evidence and examples (where these exist) to help managers understand the benefits of using external social networks to help with workplace management challenges.**
- 2. Then, identify whether specific online communities exist that managers in your organisation could be part of, and provide support so managers can begin using them in a practical way.**

An important caveat should be noted here. L&D should be mindful of balancing the potential benefit to managers of doing this against the investment required. It may be that external social media networks only have relevance for specific niche roles, and limited wider benefit to many or most people in their organisation. It is also worth recognising that, based on our research, LinkedIn appears to have the most relevance to managers at this time. This may be because LinkedIn affords more scope for direct, private communication via closed groups than is possible on a highly visible platform like Twitter.



#### **4. FOR INTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORKS – SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES BOTH TECHNOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION.**

Much has been written about the potential of internal social platforms to improve collaboration and cross-functional working. This may indeed be taking place, but what's clear from the results of this survey is that managers do not see them as a destination to get support – yet.

Our view is that this research simply outlines the scale of the challenge that most organisations face in getting managers to engage with workplace social technologies. The very low level of engagement by managers with enterprise social networks is a symptom of a wider problem. Low usage on social platforms means that responses to questions or comments are slow, if they happen at all. This makes those managers that do engage with internal social media less likely to come back. A vicious cycle.

Many organisations underestimate the fact that the adoption of an enterprise social network needs both a cultural and technological transformation. Before any compelling benefits can be gained from an internal social network, support and engagement from an organisation's senior leadership team is required, plus investment of time and resources (not just from L&D).

Achieving the cultural change needed for success is a significant long-term challenge. L&D can play a part in facilitating and encouraging the adoption of internal social technologies, but only if there is an appetite in the organisation as a whole to do so.



## 8. METHODOLOGY

GoodPractice commissioned ComRes to conduct a survey of 504 managers in UK companies with more than 250 employees between 11 August and 2 September 2016. The sample was profiled to be nationally representative by region.

ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables are available at [www.comres.co.uk](http://www.comres.co.uk).

### DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

We received 504 full responses to the survey. The relevant demographic breakdowns of survey respondents are as follows:

#### Gender

Male:	52% (n=260)
Female:	48% (n=244)

#### Age

16-34:	25% (n=128)
35-44:	26% (n=132)
45-54:	27% (n=137)
55+	18% (n=95)
Prefer not to say:	4% (n=12)

#### Seniority

Owner/Principal	2% (n=11)
Board member/Director/Partner	6% (n=31)
Senior management	23% (n=116)
Middle management	43% (n=216)
Lower management	26% (n=131)

All percentages within the report have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Any apparent mathematical discrepancies in the addition of percentages are due to rounding.

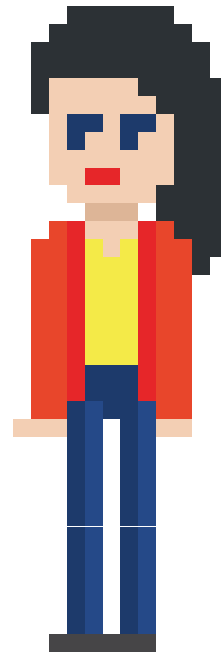
## 9. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN BY OWEN FERGUSON AND STEF SCOTT OF GOODPRACTICE.**

### OWEN FERGUSON

**Owen is Chief Operating Officer at GoodPractice.**

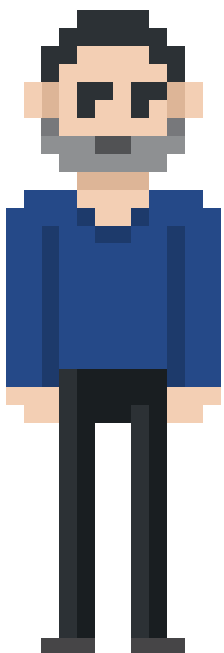
Owen started his career in L&D as an internal consultant, and later manager, with a number of FTSE 100 companies. Seeing the growing potential in learning technologies, he joined GoodPractice ten years ago and was previously director of the Product Development team. Passionate about performance improvement, Owen and his team use data, user-centric design and proactive experimentation to develop and refine online solutions to real world problems. Owen is a Fellow of the Learning and Performance Institute.



### STEF SCOTT

**Stef is Content Marketing Manager at GoodPractice.**

She started her career as an HR Advisor at the University of Edinburgh before moving to GoodPractice in 2007. Stef initially worked as part of the Product Development team, creating content for GoodPractice products as well as working on bespoke client projects. She now works in the role of Content Marketing Manager, developing content to help build awareness of GoodPractice in the UK and globally. Stef is also responsible for delivering GoodPractice's ongoing programme of manager-focused research, which aims to better understand learners and their needs.



## 10. ABOUT GOODPRACTICE

Improving the performance of your leaders and managers isn't just good for business – it's essential.

**GoodPractice can help you make that improvement.**

Over the last 15 years, GoodPractice has earned an enviable reputation for delivering high quality learning tools and resources, designed to improve the performance of leaders and managers everywhere.

We provide online toolkits, custom e-learning and development assessments for a wide range of different organisations.



### TOOLKITS

Our award-winning learning resources provide the on-demand flexible performance support your leaders and managers need to improve their performance and solve day-to-day problems.



### E-LEARNING

We develop interactive, engaging, highly bespoke e-learning modules in close collaboration with our clients.



### PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENTS

Individual and 360 degree assessments for individuals, senior teams and groups of emerging leaders.

These can be utilised as standalone resources or seamlessly integrated into a blended learning solution. All of our products can support a 70:20:10 learning and development strategy.

Over one million people in more than 300 different organisations around the world use GoodPractice's blended learning solutions to make the most of their skills and talents.

— For more information about our solutions, visit our website  
[www.goodpractice.com](http://www.goodpractice.com).

— For all press enquiries about this report, please contact **Stef Scott, Content Marketing Manager** on **0131 221 3100** or email [sscott@goodpractice.com](mailto:sscott@goodpractice.com).

**Thank you for reading.**

**#GPsol**

