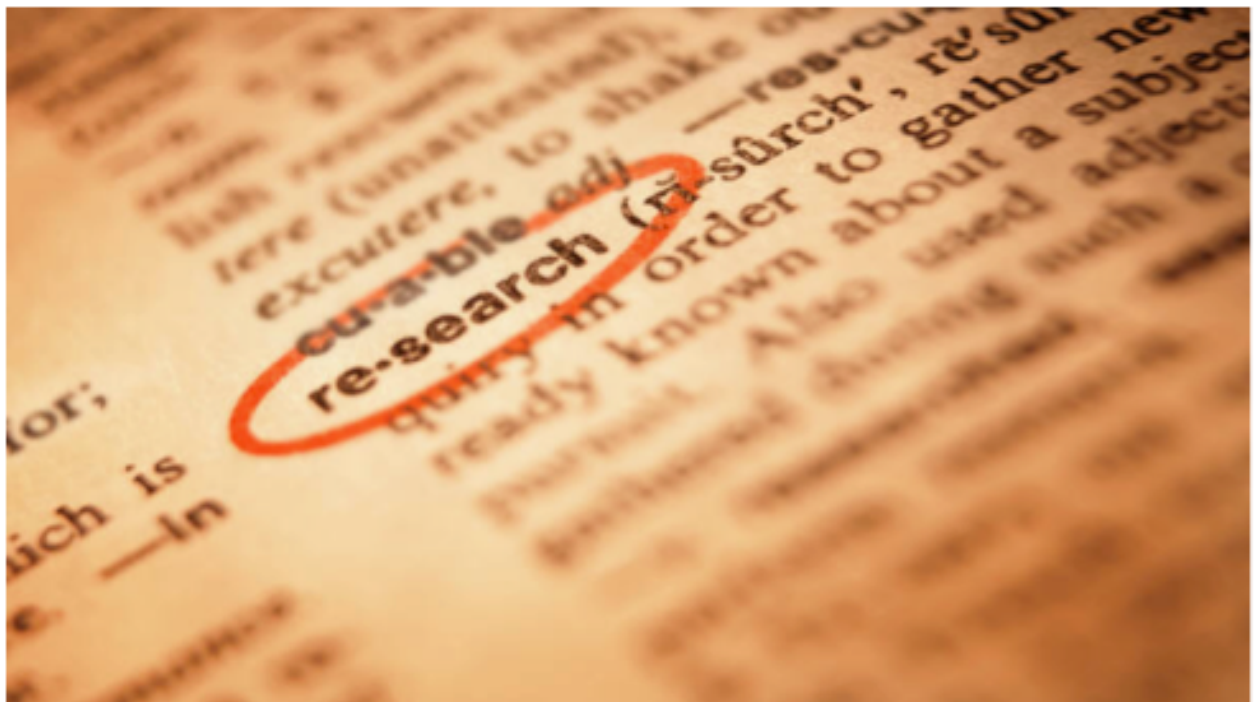


Final Report

Social Media use by Purchasing Professionals

Results of a websurvey amongst NEVI members



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Introduction

Social media use is growing rapidly. Today more than 70% of Europeans are using social media (InSites, 2010). Recent developments in social media have brought forward countless new applications and social network sites that allow individuals to connect, communicate and exchange all kinds of content (e.g. conversations, text, presentations, pictures, videos). The B2C sector is exploiting the potential of social media for reaching out to customers, and there, social media is already regarded as an essential component of the marketing mix. However, social media is not only about marketing. Big B2C companies with big marketing budgets were among the early adopters of social media tools and networks. But social media has also much to offer to other disciplines, like Procurement; especially in terms of more effective, more cost- and time-efficient collaboration, communication, creativity, customer service, market and supplier research (Hall, 2011).

Still, there is little academic evidence for the importance of social media use in a B2B context in general (Bernoff et al, 2008; eConsultancy, 2010). A recent report on the status quo of B2B social media use by Accenture (2011) reports that nearly two-thirds (=65%) of 200 surveyed executives considered social media as a 'very important' to 'extremely important' channel through which to interact with customers, prospects, (supply) partners and other stakeholders¹. When asked for the current level of company engagement in social media, however, merely 42% of respondents indicated to "(very) heavily" leverage social media. Apparently, there are still lots of questions as how to fully leverage social media.

We are curious to find out whether this apparent gap between perception and behaviour is also the case in the specific context of Purchasing. As social media facilitates purchasing professionals to easily connect, communicate and collaborate with a large number of colleagues, business partners and suppliers, it seems logical to expect that procurement professionals would be keen on making full use of social media in their daily work. This expectation is further fuelled by a number of blogs and social media platforms that discuss the potential contribution social media can make to Purchasing (Albert, 2010). On the one hand, bloggers and experts characterize purchasing professional's hesitance as well as skepticism towards using social media resulting from the myths associated with social media use and that are still widely prevailing amongst purchasing professionals (see Hall, 2011; Ranson, 2011a). On the other hand, they observe growing awareness and attention among procurement managers seeking for ways of enhancing the purchasing function and the way it is managed (Barnato, 2011; Busch, 2011). However, from an academic perspective, research on social media in purchasing is still very scarce (O'Leary, 2011).

The overall question we aim to answer is whether the use of social media networks by purchasing professionals leads to increased levels of social capital in their supply networks. In order to explore this further we formulated the following research questions:

¹ See enclosures for some examples of companies that are already leveraging social media.

- a) What is the main motivation for purchasing professionals to participate in social media networks?
- b) What content (e.g. news, information, etc) are purchasing professionals sharing on social media networks and in what way (e.g framing, writing style, etc) do they share that?
- c) What's the contribution to social capital of using social media networks as perceived by purchasing professionals?

Sample and data collection

A questionnaire has been designed to investigate the impact of the use of social media networks by purchasing professionals on social capital. Our main target group consisted of the members of the Dutch Association of Purchasing Management (NEVI), more specifically we aimed at the alumni of the **NEVI-3 Executive program**, the **Young Purchasing Professionals (YPP)** network and the **NEVI CPD network**. Through different channels (i.e. NEVI website & newsletters, LinkedIn groups and Twitter accounts) we approached the different NEVI member-communities and invited them to participate in the survey. Posting messages about our study on social media networks resulted in some additional respondents from other communities and/or countries (e.g. Germany, Belgium, USA, Brazil). Overall about 80% of the respondents came from the Dutch NEVI community and 20% was coming from other communities/countries. Questionnaires have been collected over a period of 21 days with daily follow-ups. In total, **141 useable responses** have been received.

The average age of the 141 respondents was 42,35 years (SD= 8,57) and most of the respondents were man (**78,7%=man and 21,3%=female**). Further almost all respondents (83%) reported to use social media networks (also) for business purposes, the rest (17%) indicated to use it only for private purposes. The social media networks that are **most often used are LinkedIn, Twitter² and Facebook**. Also, a number of respondents (37,6%) indicated that they are using company specific (internal) social networking applications.

Table 1) Social Media Networks used

Name of Social Media Network	Number of respondents	% of respondents
LinkedIn	129	91,5
Twitter	60	42,0
Facebook	59	42,5
Company internal networks	53	37,6
Xing	11	11,8
Hyves	9	6,4
Yammer	7	3,5
Other	13	9,2

² See Enclosure 2 for a Top-25 of Procurement related Tweeps

How much time do purchasing professionals spend on social media? The average session time varies between 5-30 minutes, but probably lies around the 15 minutes each time they look at their social media platforms. Respondents indicate to spend in total between 1-5 hours a week on social media platforms, indicating that they have several sessions a day. Our results further indicate that purchasing professionals are on average present at more than 2 different Social media networks (A=2,39) and they have between 251-500 friends/followers/contacts in their networks. The number of words in their profile lies around the 150 words, given the average score of 2,89 (see table 2 below).

Table 2 – Use of social media networks

Items	Average	SD	Conclusion...
Approximately how many hours do you spend every week on social media networks?	2,16*	0,91	1-5 hrs per week
Approximately how long is the average session you spend in social media networks?	2,27	0,79	5-30 minutes per day
Approximately to how many other users are you related in social media networks?	3,09	1,11	251 – 500 friends
Approximately how many words are written in your profile page?	2,89	1,28	51 – 300 words

* NB: All scores on 5-point Likert scale

About 77% of the respondents indicate that they agree or fully agree with the statement that their **social media use will significantly increase over the next two years** (see table 3). This is in line with other studies, both in the USA and Europe, that are available on-line. Using social media is considered to be a **great way to improve: purchasing and supply management performance, collaboration with suppliers and the quality of sourcing decisions**. Only a small number of respondents agree with the statements about social media taking too much time and about social media lacking benefits. So respondents seem to be convinced of the potential benefits of social media.

Table 3 – Use of social media networks

Statements	Number	% of 141	Average	SD
Currently, I do not use social media because it takes too much time	17*	12%	2,04	0,97
Currently, I do not use social media because I don't see the benefit	18	13%	1,99	1,01
I expect that my use of social media will increase significantly over the next two years	108	77%	3,89	0,90
Using social media is a great way to improve...				
- our collaboration with suppliers	68	48%	3,35	0,93
- our purchasing and supply performance	80	57%	3,52	1,00
- the quality of our sourcing decisions	71	50%	3,34	1,06

* NB: indicates that 17 respondents score 4 or 5

Since there is much discussion about the different generations and their use of social media, we also analyzed the differences between Generation Y (23-35 years), Generation X (36-45 years) and the Baby boomers (46 years and older). Table 4 shows that the **scores are not so different between the different generations**. The only big difference can be found in their opinions about whether social media can contribute to improved collaboration with suppliers. It appears that Generation X is less positive on that topic than Generation Y and the Baby boomers. Overall, we could say, maybe unexpectedly, that the Baby boomers are slightly more positive than the two younger generations about the potential of social media to improve purchasing and supply performance. Social media is not only for the young professionals!!

Table 4 - Differences between the generations

	Generation Y (23-35 years) (N=32)		Generation X (36-45 years) (N=43)		Baby boomers (46 years and older) (N=62)	
	Agree / totally agree	%	Agree / totally agree	%	Agree / totally agree	%
Currently, I do not use social media because it takes too much time	4	13%	8	15%	5	9%
Currently, I do not use social media because I don't see the benefit	5	16%	6	12%	6	12%
I expect that my use of social media will increase significantly over the next two years	18	75%	28	73%	29	81%
Using social media is a great way to improve our collaboration with suppliers	12	50%	16	35%	30	60%
Using social media is a great way to improve our purchasing and supply performance	12	53%	18	50%	29	65%
Using social media is a great way to improve the quality of our sourcing decisions	15	56%	21	48%	19	49%

What drives purchasing professionals to use social media? We investigated both **motivation to collect information** and **motivation to network**. In table 5 below we see that their primary motivation relates to collecting information on suppliers, which is not a surprise given their background. However, the score is not so much higher than that of collecting information about competitors and customers. Apparently, purchasing professionals do not use social media networks to collect information about their internal colleagues.

Table 5. - Motivation to collect information

I participate in social media networks because I want to collect information on... (n=141)		
	Average	SD
...Suppliers	3,60	0,99
...Customers	3,46	1,02
...Competitors	3,43	1,04
...Supply markets	3,30	1,06
...Internal departments (i.e. colleagues)	3,14	1,06

Besides collecting information, social media networks are enabling **collaboration between different people**. The respondents indicate that their primary network motivation lies in getting access to experts in the field (score 4,16) and to advance their professional career through social networking (score 4,16). Another motivation includes contributing to the development of the profession, by sharing best-practices, lessons learned, latest news, etc. with their social network (score 3,92). So, the social networking seems to involve mainly peer-to-peer networking. Purchasing professionals meet with purchasing professionals to exchange information and to discuss about their profession. Our data shows less support for social networking with internal colleagues from other functional areas (e.g. Production, Marketing, Logistics, R&D) and also not with suppliers. Which is rather strange given the importance for purchasing professionals to know whom they are dealing with at the supplier side. Some smart buyers already use Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to get a clearer picture about the account manager or Sales director they are dealing with. Currently, respondents do not seek social media as a means to influence supply partners (score 3,15). In the B2C sector it is not exceptional that customers try to influence their 'supplier' by openly complaining or bad talking on different discussion platforms and/or Facebook and Twitter. In theory, professional buyers could try to do the same by openly spreading their opinions and frustrations (either true or untrue). However, we could not find evidence for this.

Table 6 - Motivation to Network

I participate in social media networks because I want to... (n=141)		
	Average	SD
Get access to specialists/experts in the purchasing community	4,16	0,76
Advance my personal career	4,16	0,78
Contribute to the development of the purchasing profession	3,92	0,89
Improve my networking within my firm	3,66	0,85
Improve my networking with suppliers	3,52	0,88
Influence supply partners	3,15	0,96

Social media is not only about being present on social media networks and collect professional information and search for experts in the field. Social media is also about **sharing your content** (i.e. text, presentations, pictures, video, brochures, etc) with your friends and followers. What are purchasing professionals sharing on social media networks? According to our data, purchasing professionals are mainly sharing **news**, and **purchasing practices** (see table 7).

Table 7 – Sharing content on Social Media

I share the following content on my social media networks: (n=141)		
	<i>Average</i>	<i>SD</i>
News	3,64	0,98
Information about purchasing practices	3,58	0,91
Information about job opportunities	3,30	0,97
Industry specific information	3,28	0,96
Task specific information	3,16	0,95
Firm specific information	2,96	1,06
Information about my private life	2,46	1,11
Experiences with supply partners	2,70	1,01

To a lesser degree purchasing professionals share job opportunities, industry specific information and task/firm specific information. Also, there is little evidence that information about their private life and experiences with supply partners are being shared in the virtual community. So, at this moment the **information being shared is rather general and not very specific**, while that kind of information is probably most valuable for their network. It could be that this valuable information is still being shared via face-to-face meetings instead via social media. Are social media enabling and facilitating **personal interaction** among the members of a social network? It shows that respondents know their network friends and followers on a personal level, they maintain close relationships with them and communicate frequently with them. However, **they do not spend a lot of time interacting** with their friends and followers .

Table 8 – Personal interaction

Personal Interaction (n=141)		
	<i>Average</i>	<i>SD</i>
I know some members in the virtual community on a personal level.	4,14	0,73
I maintain close social relationships with some members in the virtual community.	3,58	1,02
I have frequent communication with some members in the virtual community.	3,43	0,96
I spend a lot of time interacting with some members in the virtual community.	2,93	1,02
I am not interested in participating in the virtual community.	2,03*	1,00

* Reverse question

When purchasing professionals share content on social media networks, in what way are purchasing professionals framing their messages and posts? Do they pay special attention to spelling and grammar? Do they put a lot of care in formulating messages in a narrative way? In table 9 below, we see that respondents indicate that they are, to some degree, carefully communicating on their social media platforms. They pay attention to spelling and grammar (3,94). To a lesser degree, they secure consistency across their messages and posts (3,55) and they try to stimulate responses by formulating in a narrative way (3,72) with simple words (3,46). Overall, it shows that purchasing professionals pay attention to their communication on social media platforms.

Table 9 – Framing messages and postings

When posting messages on social media networks, I pay special attention to formulate my messages... (n=141)		
	Average	SD
...with correct spelling and grammar	3,94	0,84
...in a narrative way to stimulate a response	3,72	0,77
...portraying a consistent picture across all my different posts	3,55	0,87
...with simple words	3,46	0,75

Perceived Social Capital

Social capital is defined as:

“a valuable asset that stems from access to resources (i.e. people, knowledge, information, capital, markets, etc.) made available through close social relationships”.

Social capital can represent a sustainable source of advantage. Blonska et al. (2011) and Soonhong et al. (2008) demonstrate the influence social capital can have on supply chain performance and recommend to lever social capital. The purchasing department has a strong influence on the formation of social capital in the supply chain as they play a key role in developing and managing buyer-supplier relationships (Bernardes, 2010). Social capital that exists within these buyer-supplier relationships is part of the backbone of value creation (Lawson, et al. 2006).

Recently, social media networks are suggested as a tool capable of supporting the creation of social capital. Boyd and Ellison (2007) describe social networks are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections”. However, the link between social media networks and social capital is still in a premature phase. Positive effects of using and/or participating in social media networks include strengthening existing relationships (Shah et al, 2001), improving weak ties (Kenski et al, 2006), as well as enabling collective action (Valenzuela et al., 2009).

The results show a relatively low score on the trust dimension (3,15 is the highest score), indicating that respondents do not fully trust members in their social networks. This might be related to the fact that not every virtual ‘friend’ is a real friend and probably regarded as just being a professional business contact. From other studies we know that purchasing professionals always to some degree show fear for opportunistic behavior, which is reflected in the very low scores for ‘*keeping promises*’ and ‘*taking advantage of others*’ (i.e. opportunistic behavior).

Table 10. - Do purchasing professionals trust their social networks?

Members of social networks..... (n=141)	Average	SD
...behave in a consistent manner.	3,15	0,90
...are truthful in dealing with one another.	3,11	0,90
...would not knowingly do anything to disrupt the conversation.	3,00	0,82
...will always keep the promises they make to one another.	2,77	0,98
...will <u>not</u> take advantage of others even when the opportunity arises.	2,52	0,93

The results show also relatively low scores for the level of identification with the social network (see table 11). The ‘highest’ score (3,34) is related to having positive feelings towards the social network. That is too low to make strong conclusions about whether purchasing professionals feel really a close connection with their social networks. The respondents do not seem to identify with their social networks and have a low feeling of belonging to their social networks.

Table 11. – Do purchasing professionals identify with their social network?

Identification with social network (n=141)	Average	SD
I have a strong positive feeling toward my social network	3,34	0,80
I feel a sense of belonging towards my social network.	3,24	0,98
I am proud to be a member of my social network.	3,21	0,84
I have a feeling of togetherness / closeness in my social network.	3,06	0,94

Contrary to the first two dimensions (i.e. trust and identification), the results for **reciprocity** show relatively high scores (all scores between 3,67 and 3,99). Respondents indicate that **it is fair to help each other and they expect others to help them in return** (see table 12).

Table 12. – Do they help their social network?

Reciprocity (n=141)		
	Average	SD
It is fair to help each other in a social network	3,99	0,59
I know that other members in my social network will help me, so it's only fair to help the other members	3,74	0,78
I believe that members in my social network would help me if I needed it	3,67	0,72

So in general one can conclude that the social network of purchasing professionals is mainly based on a transactional understanding and more cognitive than affective at this moment in time. It can be summarized as: *I do not trust you, I do not identify with you, but I help you because I expect that you'll help me in return. You do me a favor and I'll do you a favor.* It seems that there is little room yet for altruistic behavior in social networks of purchasing professionals.

Conclusions

After exploring social media use of purchasing professionals, it is viable to confirm its potential to foster the creation of social capital. Using social media positively influences the motivation to network and the content that purchasing professionals share in their social media networks, which in turn help to develop social capital.

Nonetheless, we have the impression that the use of social media networks by purchasing professionals is still in its infancy. Having a deeper look at the data collected, it became obvious that social media use of purchasing professionals is not so socially driven. Currently, purchasing professionals are mainly focused on their personal benefit. Though many respondents (fully) agreed with the general statement, the detailed data shows that they do not yet regard social media as a great tool to foster collaboration across the supply chain. There is still little evidence of motivation to network with external parties. Also, the content being shared does not yet support supply chain collaboration.

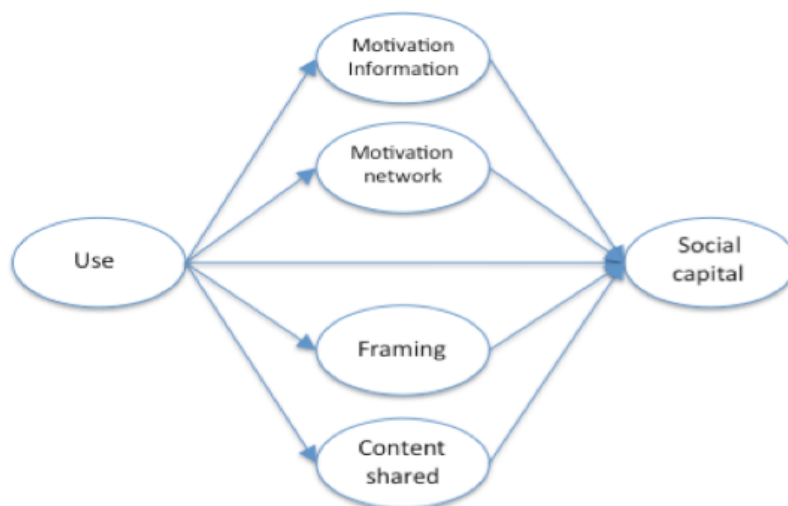
Table 13 – Relationships between the different constructs

Relationship	Path coefficient	T	P value
Content shared -> Social capital	0,191	1,502	0,067*
Framing message -> Social capital	0,228	2,133	0,017**
Motivation to collect information -> Social capital	-0,159	1,109	0,134
Motivation to network -> Social capital	0,368	3,190	0,001***
Use -> Content shared	0,446	5,458	0,000***
Use -> Framing message	0,415	5,243	0,000***
Use -> Motivation to collect information	0,396	3,928	0,000***
Use -> Motivation to network	0,379	3,960	0,000***
Use -> Social capital	0,289	2,498	0,006***

What we can learn from table 13 is that the more purchasing professionals are using social media, the more they tend to share content themselves (instead of only looking at what others share). They also tend to frame their messages in a more careful manner and are more motivated to collect information and collaborate with their network members. Based on the fact that respondents expect that their social media use will increase significantly the coming two years (see table 3), we expect that the content shared, framing, motivation to collect information and to network will also increase in the coming two years. This will lead to a more effective use of social media networks.

Based on our results we can conclude that when purchasing professionals are motivated to collaborate with their social networks and when they share more content that is framed in a careful manner, then social capital in their social networks will increase (see figure 1). When purchasing professionals are only motivated to collect information and mainly looking at what others share on the web, this will not contribute to building up social capital in their social networks.

Figure 1 - Conceptual model



In the end, based on other studies, we can conclude that social media enables purchasing professionals to create social capital. When there is more social capital present in the social networks of purchasing professionals, these social networks will be more valuable for the purchasing professionals and their companies.

Already today there are numerous social media platforms and applications available for purchasing professionals. There are several B2B platforms that aim at peer-to-peer exchange of knowledge and experiences (www.mysouringteam.com and www.globalscm.net). Further, we can use wiki-like websites (www.esourcingwiki.com) to collect knowledge. Recently a new B2B platform was launched (www.vendorrator.com) where purchasing professionals are invited to openly share their opinions about certain suppliers. Finally, also in the non-profit social media is used. For example, to ‘crowdsource’ ideas for improvement amongst suppliers (www.betterbuyproject.com). In the coming two years we expect a further rise in the number of social media platforms and applications. **So, let’s go social!**

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Enclosure 1)

Below we mention some of the companies that are known for leveraging social media to support their business strategy and processes. This is just a small selection of what we could find on the internet.

Company	Social Media Use	Tools
Best Buy	Ask for customer feedback online om how to improve product / service	Facebook, Twitter
FEDEX	Establish reliable and trusted reputation, employees are considered "brand ambassadors"	Facebook, Twitter
HP	Connect people and share knowledge across divisonal and geographical boundaries	HP Watercooler
IBM	Keep in contact with business partners	Facebook, Twitter , Blogs, Youtube
Levi's	Enhance purchasing, customers advice other customers, make use of "like" function on FB	Facebook, Twitter
Oracle	Engage with business partners, sharing expertise online	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube
P&G	Set up an online community for its employees to share expertise and drive innovation	P&G own community
SABIC	Connect order / purchasing / tracking system with customers and suppliers	SABIC eBusiness
Sourcing3	Connect purchasing professionals with global suppliers	"Facebook-styled" interface
Tesco	Marketing tool to attract customers, but failed because of their set conditions	Facebook, Twitter
UPS	Connect with suppliers and customers to improve SC performance	Facebook, Twitter

Enclosure 2) Top 25 Tweets (October 25, 2011)

Top 25 Tweets (25102011)		# Followers	# Tweets
1	http://twitter.com/#!/procurement	Procurement Intelligence Unit (UK)	4981 13665
2	http://twitter.com/#!/SE_blog	SupplyExcellence Blog (Ariba experts) USA	1982 2026
3	http://twitter.com/#!/NPI_Procurement	National Procurement Institute (USA)	1968 3901
4	http://twitter.com/#!/ProcurementMag	Procurement Leaders Magazine (UK)	1876 1420
5	http://twitter.com/#!/TheSocialCPO	The social cpo.com	1820 132
6	http://twitter.com/#!/steve_bagshaw	Editor Supply Management & CPO Agenda	1806 2704
7	http://twitter.com/#!/purchasing	Purchasing & Supply Management, Association (Ireland)	1720 315
8	http://twitter.com/#!/markperera	CEO of the Procurement Intelligence Unit (UK)	1668 5916
9	http://twitter.com/#!/psbdelegation	PSB Delegation Consulting - Latherine Caughran (USA)	1623 7376
10	http://twitter.com/#!/ism	Institute for Supply Management, Association, USA	1522 782
11	http://twitter.com/#!/MaxHenry	Global Supply Chain Council Asia	1343 8250
12	http://twitter.com/#!/spendmatters	Spend matters, Consultant, USA	1268 2210
13	http://twitter.com/#!/procurementasia	Procurement Asia Magazine	1204 1459
14	http://twitter.com/#!/nextlevelpurch	Chas Dominick, Next Level Purchasing Consulting USA	1037 747
15	http://twitter.com/#!/bellweth	John Wilkerson (Executive, Author) USA	1035 3250
16	http://twitter.com/#!/purchaseinsight	Purchasing Insight, Consultant, UK	808 2286
17	http://twitter.com/#!/cipsnews	CIPS, Association, UK	789 535
18	http://twitter.com/#!/LuukvanKreij	Luuk van Kreij (Attorney at Law) NL	717 1441
19	http://twitter.com/#!/LucKikkert	Luc Kikkert NL	664 702
20	http://twitter.com/#!/procurementpaul	Journalist Supply Management & CPO Agenda, UK	651 486
21	http://twitter.com/#!/NewsProcurement	Marc Kloepfel Consulting (DE)	584 644
22	http://twitter.com/#!/procuresourcing	Procure Sourcing, Consultant, Australia	562 25
23	http://twitter.com/#!/david_rae	David Rae, Editor/journalist UK	561 2673
24	http://twitter.com/#!/ATKPAS	ATKearney Procurement & Analytic Solutions	509 341
25	http://twitter.com/#!/sourcingchick	Linda Michels (USA) Principal ADR Consulting	480 437



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