SG STRATFIELD GROUP

STRATFIELD MONITOR 2026 · SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE MITTELSTAND

How Germany's hidden champions use social media

A study of which channels they use, how much of it actually lands, and what makes the difference.

AS OF 7 SEPTEMBER 2026 · 100 FAMILY BUSINESSES · ALMOST 5,000 POSTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

LINKEDIN IS THE STANDARD, INSTAGRAM IS THE GROWTH CHANNEL
79% of companies are present on LinkedIn, 63% on Instagram. Instagram has grown by far the most since 2021, while Xing and X have lost significant ground.

PEOPLE AND COMPANIES BEAT PRODUCT COMMUNICATION
Product and technology are the most frequent topics but perform below average. Content about the company, its people and the employer brand generates more engagement.

MORE REACH DOES NOT MEAN MORE IMPACT
LinkedIn has the largest follower base, yet Instagram generates around 2.5 times the engagement per 1,000 followers. The analysis also shows that posting more does not automatically mean more engagement.

FORMAT MATTERS MORE THAN TOPIC
Videos on LinkedIn, and reels and carousels on Instagram, perform well above the respective account average; single images perform well below it.

01 · CHANNELS

LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram as digital communication channels

Regular, targeted digital communication is now firmly established in the German Mittelstand. Four in five hidden champions now link to a LinkedIn page, almost as many to a YouTube channel, and just under two-thirds to an Instagram profile. Instagram has grown by far the most: five years ago just under **40 percent** had an Instagram profile; today it is over **60 percent**, and rising.

SHARE OF COMPANIES LINKING TO THE CHANNEL

	2021	2026	CHANGE
LinkedIn	70%	79%	+13%
YouTube	70%	77%	+10%
Instagram	39%	63%	+62%
Facebook	55%	56%	+2%
Xing	38%	25%	−35%
X (Twitter)	33%	10%	−70%
TikTok	0%	7%	new

○ 2021 (archived websites) ● 2026 · Change relative to 2021, in percent

X is the clearest loser. In 2021, before the takeover by Elon Musk, a third of companies still linked to a Twitter presence. Today it is 10 percent. An unprecedented collapse.

Xing continues its decline. Germany's one-time flagship network keeps falling: from 36 to 25 percent. Family businesses are withdrawing from Xing. Neither the full takeover by Burda Digital nor the delisting has reversed the trend so far. Its direction is clear.

02 · IMPACT

LinkedIn and Instagram far stronger than YouTube

Among the companies analysed, the median LinkedIn following is just under **10,000**, compared with just over 3,000 on Instagram and around 2,300 subscribers on YouTube. LinkedIn therefore has by far the largest follower base.

Activity tells a different story: companies post at similar frequencies on LinkedIn and Instagram, around 100 posts a year each. Only YouTube lags well behind, with 21 videos.

KEY FIGURES PER CHANNEL · MEDIANS

	LINKEDIN	INSTAGRAM	YOUTUBE
Followers or subscribers	9,710	3,003	2,330
Posts per year	101	102	21
Engagement per post	47	55	8
Engagement per 1,000 followers	5.5	13.4	1.5

What matters in the end is engagement. While the number of posts on LinkedIn and Instagram is close, Instagram generates around **two and a half times** the engagement per 1,000 followers that LinkedIn does, and almost ten times that of YouTube.

Little return on YouTube: Almost 80 percent have a YouTube channel. Views and engagement, however, are remarkably low, with a median of 240 views per video, and the prevalence of outdated URL formats points to a legacy channel that is losing practical relevance for most companies.

Examples such as **Miele and Paul Hartmann** show, however, that the channel remains relevant and useful for topics such as tutorials and service. For the remainder of this analysis it is excluded, and as part of a digital strategy we recommend using it selectively.

Companies vary in how active they are. They typically publish roughly two to thirteen posts a month. The more they post, the harder it becomes to engage followers: measured per 1,000 followers, the most active accounts achieve only around a ninth of the engagement of the least active.

Companies such as **HOPPECKE** show that high engagement is possible even with above-average activity: the battery manufacturer achieves twice the engagement per follower of accounts with similar activity. How? That, among other things, is what the following sections explore.

03 · CONTENT AND FORMATS

Company and people beat marketing and technical content

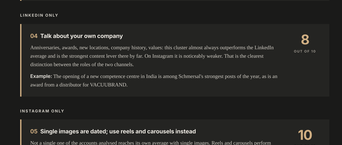
Almost **5,000** posts from the past twelve months were assigned to seven content clusters. They reveal the strategies German family businesses use to present themselves online and the topics they choose to talk about.

CONTENT CLUSTER	SHARE	EXAMPLE
Product and technology	26%	Woodworking tool maker Leitz presents a new milling cutter.
Trade fairs and events	23%	Hydraulics manufacturer HAWE shares photos from its own open day.
Brand and company	19%	Tool manufacturer STAHLWILLE announces winning the Wuppertal Business Award.
People and workplace	12%	Battery manufacturer HOPPECKE welcomes its new apprentices.
Customer projects and applications	10%	Machine builder BHS Corrugated reports a production record at a customer's plant.
Tutorials and service	6%	Vacuum pump manufacturer VACUUBRAND trains service technicians from seven countries.
Knowledge and context	4%	Screening technology maker HAVER & BOECKER shares the story of how its wire mesh was used in Apollo-era space flight.

Frequency and impact are not of step. Product and technology are the most common content, yet they attract markedly less engagement than alternatives such as brand and company. The figures are similar for LinkedIn and Instagram.

Half of the companies with both channels repurpose content, posting it on LinkedIn and Instagram alike; among these, a median 62 percent of LinkedIn posts are reused. The analysis found no evidence of lower engagement for reused content. Repurposing is therefore recommended as an efficient approach.

IMPACT BY CLUSTER · DEVIATION FROM THE ACCOUNT'S OWN AVERAGE



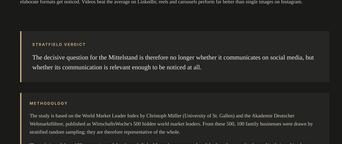
Each cluster is first compared against the other posts within the same account, then the accounts are combined. +0.23 means 23 percent more engagement than the rest of the same company's posts.

English dominates, at least on LinkedIn, where almost 80 percent of posts are in English; on Instagram the figure is almost 50 percent. The analysis did not identify a clear difference in engagement associated with the language used.

Format matters more than topic

On Instagram, three formats can be distinguished: the single image, the carousel of several photos, and the reel as a short video. On LinkedIn, what matters most is whether a video is included.

FREQUENCY AND IMPACT OF FORMATS · DEVIATION FROM THE ACCOUNT'S OWN AVERAGE



04 · RECOMMENDATIONS

The key findings at a glance

First, a word on channels: given Xing's declining relevance and the low engagement on YouTube, two channels stand out, LinkedIn and Instagram. They can be run in parallel and carry largely the same content. The following findings refer to these two. The number in the right-hand margin indicates how robust each finding is.

ACROSS BOTH CHANNELS

01 · Moving image over still image

9 OUT OF 10

On LinkedIn, only a quarter of posts contain a video; on Instagram, every third post is a single still image. Yet moving images work markedly better, on every topic. The videos need not be long: half of the Instagram videos analysed are shorter than 30 seconds, four in five shorter than a minute.

Example: Sawmill technology manufacturer LINCK achieves five times its usual engagement with a short video on plant efficiency. Elsewhere, the same manufacturer presents a control function as plain text and receives exactly one reaction.

02 · Include a named person and their role in every post

9 OUT OF 10

Posts that feature a named person with their role come out ahead. This holds regardless of topic and adds to the video effect. It is expressly our employer branding: trade fair reports and product launches also gain when someone appears in them.

Example: STAHLWILLE announces its Wuppertal Business Award win in a post featuring a simple photo, naming the award, the people and the region, and achieves twelve times its usual engagement. It can also be done in passing: HOPPECKE writes on Instagram, in a single sentence, "He only wanted the 50 euros, now we have a new apprentice", and lands eight times its usual engagement.

03 · Name others and let them speak

7 OUT OF 10

Naming the actual company rather than "a customer in the energy sector", linking to its account or simply sharing its own post achieves noticeably more engagement. The point is not extra reach through the link, but that the post brings in another voice.

Example: AKE Knebel goes further: a tradesman had stored a saw blade and posted about it in his own words; the manufacturer shared the post. The result is the account's most successful post of the entire year, nine times its usual engagement.

LINKEDIN ONLY

04 · Talk about your own company

8 OUT OF 10

Anniversaries, awards, new locations, company history, values: this cluster almost always outperforms the LinkedIn average and is the strongest content lever there by far. On Instagram it is noticeably weaker. That is the clearest distinction between the roles of the two channels.

Example: The opening of a new competence centre in India is among Schmersal's strongest posts of the year, as is an award from a distributor for VACUUBRAND.

INSTAGRAM ONLY

05 · Single images are dated; use reels and carousels instead

10 OUT OF 10

Not a single one of the accounts analysed reaches its own average with single images. Reels and carousels perform equally well, so the choice between them should be driven by content, not by production budget. The carousel is the best effort-to-impact trade-off in the entire dataset: three photos instead of one, no video production required, and engagement comparable to a reel.

Example: HAWE Hydraulik achieves five times its usual engagement with a carousel from its own open day. Conversely, a laboratory equipment manufacturer gets a single like on a single image announcing a discount.

WHAT THE STUDY MEANS FOR THE MITTELSTAND

PEOPLE CREATE MORE IMPACT
The channels are in place. What is missing is communication that sticks. People-focused content performs better than self-promotion: those who show individuals, roles and concrete stories achieve more engagement than companies that mainly put their products in the shop window.

RELEVANCE BEATS FREQUENCY, EVERY TIME
The most active companies post far more often but achieve substantially less engagement per follower. More output is no substitute for relevance. Without a clear reason to post, a person to feature or a compelling story to tell, do not post just to fill the editorial calendar.

THE RIGHT FORMAT AMPLIFIES THE CONTENT
Many companies spend too long debating topics and too little on how to present them. Even a strong topic underperforms in the wrong format. More elaborate formats get noticed. Videos beat the average on LinkedIn; reels and carousels perform far better than single images on Instagram.

STRATFIELD VERDICT

The decisive question for the Mittelstand is therefore no longer whether it communicates on social media, but whether its communication is relevant enough to be noticed at all.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the World Market Leader Index by Christoph Müller (University of St. Gallen) and the Akademie Deutscher Weltmarktführer, published as WirtschaftsWoche's 500 hidden world market leaders. From these 500, 100 family businesses were drawn by stratified random sampling; they are therefore representative of the whole.

The websites of these 100 companies and the channels linked from them were analysed, both as they stand today and in their archived state from 2021. Almost 5,000 posts from the past twelve months were then analysed on the leading platforms. Reactions to the posts serve as the indicator of attention and engagement achieved.

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