

## The basics- you know this already!

### **Social networking - that's where you stand around chatting to people and eating canapés?**

Not quite. If traditional networking means mingling with like-minded people, swapping contact details and making connections that could help you further your business, online social networking offers all this - and a lot more besides. Sure there's no actual flesh-pressing - or wine-quaffing - in cyberspace but the internet means your potential network is very large indeed. And of course the web offers possibilities for sharing a lot more than a few anecdotes - detailed information, say, or media such as photos and video. As a result social networking is booming, with websites dedicated to building online communities of like minded souls attracting users at a very rapid rate.

### **But what exactly is social networking?**

Social networking is the business of engaging and interacting with other internet users in a communal online space. Users typically build an individual profile - which might consist of photos, contact details, a blog or favourite links - and make 'friends' with other users with whom they are linked in some way. They might join up with those who share knowledge or a common interest, be they old school buddies or fellow professionals.

### **Very popular with 10-25 year olds**

Like many aspects of the web, the youth has driven it - creating profiles, uploading photos, posting links and generally spending a lot of time tinkering with their online profiles.

**It's also something that hasn't escaped advertising execs who are getting excited about the opportunities for tailoring marketing on these sites and reaching demographics they are extremely keen to connect with.**

In an interview with silicon.com, Michael Birch, CEO of social networking site Bebo, referred to this new breed of adverts - call it 'advertising 2.0' if you will - as "engagement marketig", adding that it is "a more integrated experience" than traditional online advertising.

But it's not just kids getting into this stuff. While it's currently still most popular with younger age ranges, you'd be wrong to think it's exclusively for the under-25's

## The basics- you know this already!...Continued

### So more savvy advertising... is that the only business opportunity here then?

That's one aspect of it. Businesses are only just starting to realise the potential and explore the possibilities offered by social networks - and much of the talk is about how important these online hubs will be in future.

Some see social networks becoming juggernauts of media consumption and distribution, giving web users a forum for locating and sharing their own media (a natural extension of the web 2 user-generated content trend).

### Anything more for business?

Social networks have potential to be used to drum up new business - as a way of linking suppliers with clients in a global marketplace, say. That's the idea behind a social network called Insight in the pipeline from Reuters. Another network, called the Wireless Industry Partnership, launched last year with a similar idea but specifically focused on wireless technologies. Then there's virtual world-based social networks such as Second life, which have their own currency and offer a variety of in-world money-making and networking opportunities.(but less in the news today)

An obvious corporate use for social networks is as a tool for building a sense of community within an organisation - linking up staff across the business by giving them a shared space to communicate and collaborate. For example Cisco has 1,500 employees using Facebook which means they don't need internal tools to provide community.

### Mobile opportunities

Operators are getting excited about the potential for social networks on the go - and not just as a means of driving more traffic across their networks (and therefore boosting revenues). Users of web stalwarts such as Facebook, Flickr and MySpace have been able to post content to their profiles via their handsets for a while now but there are bigger ideas kicking around out there. GPS-enabled social networking, for one.

Since social-network-alites are more than likely to be owners of mobile phones, there's immediate potential to hook up hardware and software - provided, of course, the hardware in question is GPS-enabled - lending another dimension to social networks by enabling the location of users to be pin-pointed on a map. This is known as 'social mapping' - and brings social networking full-circle, back to real-world meet-ups.

**The basics- you know this already!...Continued****So I could check my phone to see if any of my buddies are hanging out in the local pub?**

Exactly. But before you get too excited, social mapping is currently little more than a gleam in mobile operators' eyes in the UK. However, the tech is more developed across the pond - where services with teen-friendly names such as Loopt, Mologogo and Socialight have been enabling well-heeled US youngsters to hook up.

A slightly less high-tech example of mobile social networking, but one that's not hamstrung by expensive hardware restrictions, is Twitter: a site that enables users to publish SMS messages detailing their current status to the web and to mobiles of whoever has signed up to hear about it. It surely can't be long before 'twittering' enters the lexicon as a word meaning 'random, trivial text-based utterings'.

**Concerns?**

Well, on the flip side, businesses are now having to deal with employees spending time during the working day checking out what their friends are up to online - a classic case of web-facilitated time wasting.

Company reputations could also be put at risk by inappropriate online behaviour by staff. To this end, some businesses bar access to social networking websites.

Another possible corporate concern is the potential for confidential information to leak out via social networks - or for rival organisations to gather intelligence on the people who work at a competitor, whether for staff poaching purposes or to eavesdrop on corporate secrets.

Jobseekers should also be worried - research has shown employers are increasingly checking out job candidates' social networking profiles. And what they find online can have a significant impact on the outcome of a job application.

Of course there are more general privacy concerns too - not everyone is comfortable with the idea of putting so much personal information on the web, even if it's possible to restrict who can view it.

## Getting into Social networking...

1. **Read 10 blogs.** Subscribe to 10 blogs about social networking; The easiest way is to go to [ww.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and set up your own blog then register via google reader.
2. **Comment on 10 blogs.** Posting relevant comments on blogs you read is a simple form of social networking. It's also a good way to get extra visitors to your site or blog.
3. **Join Facebook.** You'd be surprised at how many of your existing contacts have Facebook accounts. With its rich set of tools and large community of active users, Facebook is a great place to observe how people interact in social networks. Once you get your feet wet, you can use Facebook to connect with business contacts you don't bump into often.
4. **Create a Myspce page.** This service is embraced primarily by the young set, but it's a great tool for learning how to build a presence outside of your Web site.
5. **Join Linked In.** This service has been called "the Facebook for business." It's about meeting and connecting with like-minded businesspeople, and it's great for making connections with people who may otherwise be out of reach.
6. **Visit Ning** This is the largest custom social networking service that allows you to create your own community.
7. **Create a Workbench profile.** This tip is a little self-serving, as this is my new social business networking site, but it's a good example of the next wave of personalized business communities for entrepreneurs
8. **Create a Twitter account.** Twitter is pretty silly on the surface: It gives you up to 160 characters to tell your network what you're doing right now. It feels like a giant waste of time, but a large and active community has formed around this kind of microblogging and you should understand how people are using it.
9. **Create a Stumbleupon profile.** This social network is built around discovering and recommending sites you like. Active stumblers can send a lot of traffic your way.
10. **Create a Digg account.** Keep updated with what's happening in the world of business and join other users by submitting content and voting on what you consider most important.

**PS: These sites may not be relevant by 2009!**

## Some Facts...

### Top 10 social networks in the UK, June 2008

Rank	Website	Domain	June 08 market share	May 08 market share	June 07 market share
1	Facebook	www.facebook.com	45.29%	42.88%	15.75%
2	Bebo	www.bebo.com	25.04%	26.82%	33.50%
3	MySpace	www.myspace.com	14.75%	15.28%	29.37%
4	Windows Live Spaces	spaces.live.com	1.59%	1.49%	0.82%
5	Friends Reunited UK	www.friendsreunited.co.uk	1.55%	1.44%	2.64%
6	Club Penguin	www.clubpenguin.com	0.83%	0.95%	0.80%
7	Yahoo! Groups	groups.yahoo.com	0.81%	0.83%	1.69%
8	Nasza Klasa	www.nasza-klasa.pl	0.75%	0.72%	0.00%
9	Faceparty	www.faceparty.com	0.74%	1.17%	3.22%
10	Tagged	www.tagged.com	0.72%	0.48%	0.45%

Note: Data is based on UK Internet visits to a custom category of social networking sites

Source: Hitwise

- Social network Facebook had 123.9m unique visitors in May 2008, compared with 114.6m for MySpace. [Source: comScore, June 2008]
- Facebook had 50.6bn page views compared to MySpace's 45.4bn.

### Top 10 British blogs based on UK Internet visits, May 2008

Rank	Website	Domain	Market Share
1	BBC Blog Network	www.bbc.co.uk/blogs	20.20%
2	Guardian Unlimited Blogs	blogs.guardian.co.uk	12.72%
3	Times Online Comment Central	timesonline.typepad.com	3.49%
4	Telegraph Blogs	blogs.telegraph.co.uk	3.39%
5	News of the World: Extreme Showbiz	blogs.notw.co.uk	2.50%
6	Guido Fawkes' Blog	www.order-order.com	2.33%
7	Gizmodo UK	uk.gizmodo.com	2.21%
8	Neave.com	www.neave.com	1.94%
9	Iain Dale	www.iaindale.blogspot.com	1.93%
10	Tech Digest	www.techdigest.tv	1.59%

For further information please contact Greenfield!