



By Adam Warren

Swimming Through the Social Network Pool

I realize that social networks and online video are getting an awful lot of media time right now (and my apologies if I'm late to the party), but like many of you I am someone who relies on creating, organizing and maintaining relationships — in both my business and personal lives. I have found certain networking sites to be very useful and have made some very basic observations about identity, social network use and the ad-supported nature of some of these networks.

Facebook

Today, Facebook is a household name. I don't use it for professional networking, but more as a place to keep in touch with friends and family.

Facebook is working rather diligently to monetize all of its accumulated eyeballs in some of the most highly sought after demos, but it seems to be a challenge. I get targeted ads and updates based on my personal info and group affiliations. Do I read them? Sometimes. Have I connected with advertisers as a result? No, but that's not to say I won't. Facebook appears to be a great place for promotions-based offerings: coupons, free music/movie downloads for subscription models, and so on.

MySpace

The one-time social network king is now watching Facebook take the throne. All the apps and ads you see on MySpace are the same thing you'll see on Facebook, sometimes being more or less intuitive.

The area that MySpace pioneered and still dominates is music. Every single band has a MySpace page, and many use it as their primary page. Users can hear music and even create custom playlists for their own pages. MySpace is still a tool for new music discovery — a trait few other social networks can boast.

Twitter

Ever "tweeted" before? Twitter is a social network growing faster than Jack's beanstalk. However, it's different from the others because it's solely built around micro-blogging or "status updates." An update on Twitter (called a "tweet") is limited to 140 characters and may also be linked to Facebook to instantly publish

status updates.

What's the marketing connection? Twitter gives you the ability to search any keyword that is being discussed on the site. You can see exactly who is talking about what. Word of mouth can be one of the most important marketing tools, and Twitter allows you to track it down to the individual. Twitter is about bringing individuals together that have similar interests and expressing information to them in bite sized pieces.

LinkedIn

I started using LinkedIn a few years ago and have always focused it on my professional connections. The ability to catalog all of my professional contacts in one place with changes updated automatically as individual people update them, the ability to follow up each time I meet someone new, and group participation capabilities that easily connect you directly with people that have similar interests, potentially leading to business development, are just a few of its great features.

LinkedIn's simplicity in business development is something that I have come to appreciate. Most marketing opportunities occur on the user's home page, and it's rarely overbearing. LinkedIn also gives you options to protect your business connections by deciding which parts of your profile are visible. Bravo!

Plaxo

Plaxo is very similar to LinkedIn. The most interesting difference that the two is that Plaxo can pretty much send an invite to anyone in the Plaxo universe without knowing their E-mail address or even knowing them at all — although rules do imply you should know them.

The one place where Plaxo has managed to create some ad revenue is the E-cards within a subscription model. This is a smart way to stay in front of someone and use these social networks to their fullest potential.

Media companies and advertisers are smart to spend time diving into the world of social and online networks, exploring how they can use them as a tool. In a world of ad-supported content, the advertiser is getting a more targeted and intimate touchpoint with the consumer than they have been able to in the past. ■