



# Social Networking: Should You Care? (Part 1)

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So-called social networking sites are all the rage. Will they fulfill all of their hype as marketing tools? Maybe. Can they be good business tools? Definitely. Read on for a quick summary of two of the more common ones and some thoughts on how you might put them to use. In the next issue, we'll explore a few more.

Not long ago, I'd come home to find that the baby sitter had been on my computer while we were away. Always the paranoid dad, I would check the browsing history and find sites such as MySpace and Facebook. I didn't know much about them, beyond the fact that they were places where teenagers and twenty-somethings wasted inordinate amounts of time. They seemed innocuous enough, so they weren't much concern. Now just a few years later, they are places where grown-ups waste inordinate amounts of time. I bucked the trend for a while, but recently signed up for a few of the more predominate ones in order to speak more intelligently about them when clients asked if/how they should engage this growing medium.

**Facebook.** The Facebook numbers are simply staggering, with the site now boasting 175,000,000 active users. As many of you may have noticed, the fastest-growing group is adults over 35; indeed, although the kids knew about this years ago, we folks with creaky knees and backs have just discovered it, and are embracing it like we're back in the 70's and the CB radio was just introduced! These days, not a day goes by that my inbox doesn't have a new message from an old friend or relative asking to be my Facebook "friend" – and that includes a good family friend in his mid-70's, demonstrating that this phenomenon is not limited to the youngest among us.

By far, the greatest thing about Facebook is the ability to catch up with old friends – to see what they look like, how many kids they have, and where they now live. If you haven't tried it, go

ahead and check it out ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) and sign up for a free account. The site will make it very easy to find folks from your home town, college, high school, etc.

In my opinion, Facebook has some utility as a marketing tool at both the local and national/international levels for small businesses. Let me give you two quick examples. In one, we set up a promotion on the local classic rock radio station for three of our clients, all of whom were advertising on the station at the time. It was a favorite pet contest, in which people sent in photos of their pet and the best one won lots of cool prizes. On the opening day of the contest, I posted a message on my Facebook page and sent it to all of my "friends" in order to give the promotion lots of traction and interest. Sure enough, in probably less than eight hours, dozens of great photos were on the radio station's web site, inspiring others to follow suit. So at the smaller scale, you can use a tool like this to turn out bodies for some type of event. Is your firm raising money for your local Rotary club? Imagine how much more money you could generate my tapping into hundreds of contacts in this manner.

On a more national scale, I was recently contacted by a woman in California who makes baby clothes branded with the logos of two prominent universities in the southwest. She was disappointed with the number of sales from her website and needed some help. So I looked into Facebook's advertising tool, which at first glance appears similar to Google's adwords, where you can buy pay-per-click ads that are context-specific in accordance with the search terms someone enters. But here's where Facebook is so different: it displays ads (unobtrusively, by the way) not by search terms, but according to the demographics of the Facebook user. So a 60-year-old married male user might see an ad for Viagra, while a 30-year old married

female with no children might see an ad for fertility treatments. For our baby-clothes maker the answer was simple; target only those users who listed one of the two schools as their alma mater. A quick search of Facebook's advertising tool showed that almost 50,000 users over age 22 had graduated from those schools. So we recommended a pay-per-click ad campaign where the client's ad would show up only on the pages of those alumni, with a headline such as "USC Baby Clothes" and a cute accompanying photo. At an average cost of well less than a dollar per click (probably more like 20 or 30 cents), depending on competition for that demographic, Facebook turned out to be a great example of very targeted marketing when you consider that just about every alumnus is a good prospect. Recent grads may be having babies themselves or have friends who are, and older grads may have grandkids on the way. In this way, Facebook is one of the best deals out there, because opportunities to target your marketing according to a user's demographics are few and far between.

**Linked-In.** Compared to Facebook's gawdy 175 million-user statistic, Linked-In's 30 million seems puny, but its demographic profile is much more impressive. Around 60% of its users have incomes of at least \$93,000, and those with \$200,000 to \$350,000 incomes are seven times more likely to have 150 connections than lower-income users. So what does this mean for your business development? Honestly, I have no idea. For several years now, I've been part of this network, accepting connections when a colleague requests to link together, but I've never really seen the benefit to someone who is fully- or self-employed. As far as I can tell, the theory is sort of like six degrees of separation (or six degrees of Kevin Bacon, for those of you who know about that). If I want to contact the CEO of IBM, I supposedly contact his golfing buddy who's linked to the VP of sales at the company that makes the hinges for

laptops, who is connected to a banker, who goes to church with a guy I used to drink beer with in college. Now really, what are the chances that anyone in that chain are going to take my call or respond to my email?

On the other hand, I have seen Linked-In help people in search of jobs. Just last month a friend called to say that his company was interviewing someone for a job. When they did a Google search for this person, they noticed that I was linked to her via Linked-In and contacted me for a reference. I had great things to say about her, which only confirmed their own assessment. Ultimately, she got the job. But imagine what would have happened if I had a negative view? She could have performed well in the interview, presented a good resume, and given excellent references for them to call. But if they discovered multiple negatives through their search of the various social networking sites, she might have lost the job and never known why.

And this brings us to the final point of this column. Although there are many great tools available in the social media world, they potentially lay bare your whole personality, religious views, and political orientation, which can derail

many business endeavors. So as you explore these many tools, be careful to think about the consequences of anything you post on any site. The old adage used to be “don’t write anything you wouldn’t want to see on the front page of the newspaper”. That holds true, only now your words live for eternity in cyberworld and are only a couple of clicks away.

In the next issue, we’ll discuss a few more of the so-called Web 2.0 tools, including **Twitter** and **YouTube**. Until then, drop me a note and let’s “connect”!

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