

Seeding to Social Networks: Top Tips (21/07/07)

Introduction

Since the beginning of the internet web-surfers have used the web to keep in touch with existing friends and meet new individuals. In the last few years the interaction between web surfers has grown amazingly, spawning a new generation of networking sites.

A social networking website is an online place where people can create a personal profile and build a network that connects him or her to other users, on the basis of personal tastes, activities, location or total randomness!

In the past five years, such websites have rocketed from a niche activity into a phenomenon that engages hundreds of millions of internet users.

Social networks provide public and private communication tools

This breed of Networking websites offer a variety of ways to communicate with people inside and outside of the own network. There are private messages that can be sent from user to user, but there are also more public means of communicating within the social networking space. A user can post messages to a friend's page or wall, send a bulletin or group message to a user's network, post comments to a friend's blog, or give e-props, "pokes" or kudos by posting small icons to a friend's page.

The most popular way of communicating via social networking sites is to post a message to a friend's profile, page or "wall." More than 4 in 5 social network users (84%) have posted messages to a friend's profile or page.

Another very popular activity is sending private messages to a friend within a social networking system – a sort of internal email. 82% of social networking site users have sent a private message within the system. Three out of four online social network users have posted a comment to a friend's blog, and more than six in ten (61%) social network users have sent a bulletin or group message to all of their friends in their online social network.

Traffic Statistics

According to Hitwise, the leading online competitive intelligence service, MySpace and Bebo continued to dominate the UK social networking category in April 2007, with 67% of category visits.

YouTube, the video sharing site, has taken a 3.9% share of global internet visits a day compared with 3.35% for MySpace, according to internet analysis company Alexa.

Although YouTube has considerably more visitors, it has fewer regular active members, as the community aspect of the portal is somewhat 'secondary' to its broadcasting fame.

Whilst MySpace maintained a slight lead over Bebo in April (less than 1%), Bebo looks sure to overtake MySpace in share of UK internet visits in May, ranking #1 each of the past three weeks.

The two social networking leaders continue to grow at a rapid pace, with UK Internet visits to MySpace increasing nearly two and a half times from April 2006 to April 2007 and visits to Bebo increasing 3 times.

Facebook, which opened up to accept all Internet users in September 2006, has seen its share of visits soar, up 9 times since September. Previously it had been limited to those with a college or high school email address and more recently to business addresses.

rank	NAME	share
1	YouTube	
2	MySpace	33.77%
3	Bebo	33.53%
4	Facebook	12.82%
5	Faceparty	4.00%
6	Piczo	3.36%
7	Friends Reunited	2.12%
8	Tagged	1.60%
9	hi5	1.47%

Facebook

Facebook is the second largest social network on the web, behind only Myspace in terms of traffic. Initially focused on high school to college students, it has been gaining a greater market share, and a broader audience as Alumni and graduates join the network. The main difference between these two “giants” is that Facebook, unlike Myspace, is not about creating new virtual groups, but more about serving existing ones.

A typical Facebook profile consists of a number of different sections, including Information, Status, Friends, Friends in Other Networks, Photos, Notes, Groups, and The Wall.

About the network

Searchability	Users can be searched by registered members only. The majority of personal profiles can only be seen once “friendship” has been requested and granted, or a member “pokes” you back.
Type of users	Mainly university/college students aged 18–24 (34% users) and alumni.
What it's used for?	Facebook is not about FORMING new groups in cyberspace; it's for serving EXISTING groups. Communities mainly revolve around college/university, enterprise or geographic region.
Quality of users	On average, Facebook users spend 1h9m a month on the websites. About half of its members visit their profile on a daily basis. 95% visit their page at least once a month.
Level of privacy for users	Users can set who can see what on their public/private profile. Friendship linkage has to be requested and approved. Only registered people can search the network
How do groups work?	Facebook is “institution” specific as members are part of an actual physical network (Uni, Organization). Members can list friends from other networks and groups to which they belong...groups that can go from the “Pamela Anderson appreciation society” to “London’s biggest water fight”.
Number of users (UK)	By March 2007 1.3million, 12% of 8.43 million UK Internet users...but growing rapidly.

Potential for spreading content / messages in the Facebook network

General overview	Very good service, Clean and sleek look, on the spot information and usage. Useful for keeping in touch with peers.
Openness to external messages	Very low. Networks are formed among people that already know each other, thus creating a huge 'word of mouth' potential but also creating a barrier to external advertising. Influencers and their relationships are crucial to spread a message.
Quality of messaging	Wall-posts can only be written by accepted friends, although messages can be sent to anyone in the form of internal emails.
Type of media	Notes, Posts, images and most importantly embedded YouTube videos.
Methods of communication	Wall-posting, private messages, virtual gifts, videos, notes, groups, images.
Use of Groups	Groups can be setup by anyone for any subject. and growth is likely to be exponential as users can see what groups friends have joined.E.g.: 'Viral Video group'.

MySpace

MySpace is huge! Initially, it was the home to 20-somethings interested in indie music in the San Francisco area. Today, you will have to look under stones to find a young person who does not know about it, regardless of whether or not they participate. Over 50 million accounts have been created and the majority of participants are what would be labeled youth, ages 14–24. MySpace has more pageviews per day than any site on the web except Yahoo! (yes, more than Google or MSN).

The “friend” network allows people to link to their friends and people can traverse the network through these profiles. An individual's "Top 8" friends are displayed on the front page of their profile; all of the rest appear on a separate page. Bands, movie stars, and other media creators have profiles within the system and fans can friend them as well. People can comment on each others' profiles or photos and these are typically displayed publicly.

About the network

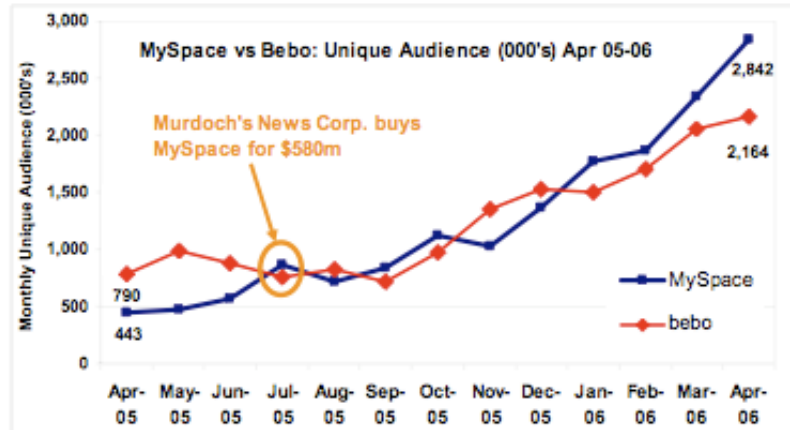
Searchability	Anyone can search and browse the networks, although users can set level of privacy hiding personal page/profile, and by not appearing in public searches.
Type of users	Even though Myspace was incredibly popular among teens 12–17 (24.7% in 2005), it is now even more used among adults aged 35–54 (40.6%) followed by 18–24 (18.1%).
What it's used for?	Myspace enables anyone to build their own homepage for free, listing their likes, dislikes, favourite bands, top books, best movies, general interests, relationship status etc, and then hook-up with other like-minded folk. It's particularly popular amongst 'music types' of users.
Quality of users	According to hitwise, Myspace is the most visited website in the UK, with 5.86% internet share, even google follows!
Level of privacy for users	Similarly to facebook users can set their privacy level, however even unregistered users can browse pages and content.
How do groups work?	Groups rotate around any topic/subject and are organised by categories. The homepage of a group displays random members, a forum section and 'news' bulletins.
Number of users (UK)	It has 33.77% of 8.43 million UK Internet users, although many people just set up profiles and never return.

Potential for spreading content / messages in the MySpace network

General overview	Myspace proves to be very popular, as it allows its users to have a personal page that is easily customizable. This is also why is so often used by bands, companies etc as a blog/hub to communicate with followers.
Openness to external messages	Myspace is inundated with spam, a simple registration is required to post comments on any public profile, the ability to insert custom html scripts has enabled many users to add banners too.
Quality of messaging	Friends do use walls and blogs, as well as private and Instant Messaging. However many blogs are literally filled by advertising messages
Type of media	Every user can add his own soundtrack to his/hers personal page. Videos can be uploaded into myspace and embedded/shared.
Methods of communication	IM, private messages, blog, news bulletins, forums and comments.
Use of Groups	Groups can be setup by anyone for any subject. and growth is likely to be exponential as users can see what groups friends have joined.E.g.: 'Viral Video group'.

Bebo vs MySpace

MySpace vs. Bebo: Who is the most popular in the UK?



Source: Nielsen//NetRatings NetView, UK Home & Work data including applications, April 2005-2006

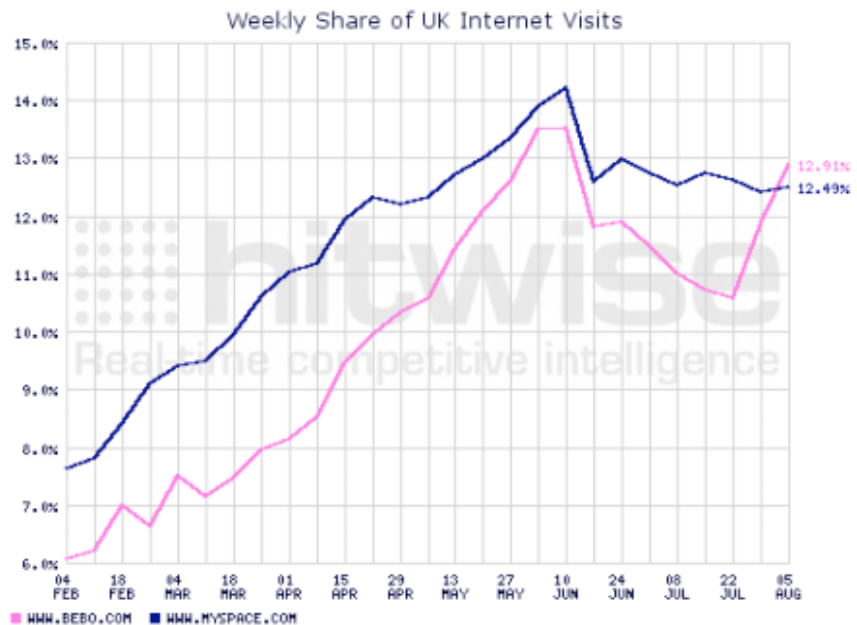


CHART OF THE WEEKLY ALL SITES MARKET SHARE IN 'COMPUTERS AND INTERNET - NET COMMUNITIES AND CHAT', BASED ON VISITS.
 TIME PERIODS REPRESENTED WITH BROKEN LINES INDICATE INSUFFICIENT DATA.
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Bebo

Essentially, Bebo is MySpace meets Facebook. It also provides video sharing (via VideoEgg widgets) and built-in Skype presence. While the designs may be more controlled than MySpace pages, most of Bebo's success seems to arise from the network effects, especially among teens: users join Bebo because everyone else is using the site.

According to research in August 2006 Bebo was the most visited social network in the UK. However in almost a year both Bebo and MySpace have lost a share of market to new networks such as Facebook. We can see from the total figures that Bebo lost less visits than MySpace, and is expected to pass the latter's total traffic within June 2007. 1 in every 135 UK visits goes to Bebo, which is now the 11th most visited site on the Internet.

About the network

Searchability	Search can only be performed by registered members, although the home page visualizes a 'pick-of-the-day' of members and bands profiles.
Type of users	54% of Beboers are aged under 18
What it's used for?	Very similarly to myspace, people list their preferences, friends and are also able to create polls, music playlists and post videos. All of this in a more clean and sleek look compared to myspace.
Quality of users	Despite having a smaller audience than MySpace, Bebo's audience is more engaged – spending on average 27% longer and viewing 10% more pages on the site per month than MySpace visitors
Level of privacy for users	Any registered member can post comments on users' walls.
How do groups work?	Bebo's groups mainly rotate around 'bands' profiles, but also 'authors', categorised according to their genre.
Number of users (UK)	1.36% of UK internet users,

Potential for spreading content / messages in the Bebo network

General overview	<p>Being more targeted towards schools, Bebo is more popular with teenagers: 54% of its audience is under 18 compared to 31% for MySpace.</p> <p>This means that despite its smaller overall audience there were more under 18's on Bebo (1.17 million) than on MySpace (0.89 million) in April 2006.</p>
Openness to external messages	<p>Communication revolves around friend networking and music bands.</p>
Quality of messaging	<p>Friend's chats, wall-posts. However since any registered user can post comments, popular profiles are becoming increasingly cluttered with pointless posts.</p>
Type of media	<p>YouTube embedded videos, pictures slideshows-widgets, polls, quizzes, music and playlists</p>
Methods of communication	<p>Draw/write on whiteboard, group-friend, post comments, private messages, skype-ability to send IM and voice chat.</p>
Use of Groups	<p>Groups can be formed as a 'music band', however the potential for viral content in this form seems low as not being music-centric it would appear unappealing.</p>

Hi5

Hi5 launched in late 2003, and is a MySpace-style social network. It targets the teens and twenties demographic and claims to have over 40 million members. According to Hitwise stats (June '06), hi5 is the 8th most visited US social network. However, the site is losing market share, which now accounts for 0.78% of the social networking market, down from 1.06% in May.

Like most social networks, hi5 gives users a profile page which includes their name, gender, location and a profile picture.

About the network

Searchability	Profiles are searchable by un-registered users, but users can set privacy level(e..g. hide pictures)
Type of users	Teens and twenty.
What it's used for?	On a similar wave length as myspace, users can create profiles, post pictures, videos, have a blog and comment on items posted by friends. Users can also rate each other with 'Hi5'.
Quality of users	Hi5 is ranked inside the top 5 in no less than 27 different countries, and while only having a 3% share in the US and 1.35 in UK,it is very popular with Portuguese and Spanish countries. 14% of users from Portugal.
Level of privacy for users	Users exercise the option to make their profile viewable only to those people who are in their network. The network of friends consists of a user's direct friends (1st degree), the friends of those direct friends (2nd degree) and the friends of the friends of direct friends (3rd degree)
How do groups work?	Users can join forums only after joining groups.
Number of users (UK)	1.47% of 8.43 million UK Internet users

Potential for spreading content / messages in the hi5 network

General overview	Some users opt to make their profiles available for everyone on hi5 to view. Other users make it viewable only to those who are in their network. network of friends consists of user's direct friends (1st degree), the friends of those direct friends (2nd degree) and the friends of the friends of direct friends (3rd degree).
Openness to external messages	Users can set level of privacy, thus deciding whether or not messages are receivable from individuals out of the 3 degrees of separation area.
Quality of messaging	Blog, pics and journal comments. Private messages and Instant messages. These can only be posted by friends in the '1st and 2nd circle'.
Type of media	Users can edit the html code, this would allow to insert videos from youtube, slideshows etc
Methods of communication	Add comments to profile pages, post items on the bulletin boards, add members to favorites, join groups and send messages to other users. hi5 also has a very basic blogging tool under the "Journal" section, but it seems that this is rarely used
Use of Groups	Once again, groups about any topic can be created by users, who can then invite friends there to share ideas and meet new people.

YouTube

The video sharing site has taken a 3.9% share of global internet visits a day compared with 3.35% for MySpace, according to internet analysis company Alexa.

Showing videos on the internet is nothing new. Their clever idea was to create a model that makes it easy not just to watch the films, but also to share them.

About the network

Searchability	Registered users have a searchable profile, where they can list personal info and links to their favorite videos.
Type of users	Most YouTube visitors are 18- to 24-year-olds (30.55 percent)
What it's used for?	Share videos of any kind!
Quality of users	Youtube is wide spread among 18–24 and 35–44, but extremely popular among upcoming film directors and animators, using it to publicize their creations
Level of privacy for users	Users can add 'contacts' and 'friends' to their list, and choosing whether to only allow the latter to post on their profile.
How do groups work?	Groups and channels rotate around communal areas of interest. Streams are similar to chat rooms where users can share and view their videos while chatting.
Number of users (UK)	Dominance, receiving 60% of UK visits in the online Video segment.

Potential for spreading content / messages in the YouTube network

General overview	YouTube, is content-driven. Users tailor the site to their needs, searching and finding the content they want regardless of interest or age.
Openness to external messages	Although most videos are visible to anyone, comments and private messages can only be posted by registered members.
Quality of messaging	Any registered member can comment on any video, but only friends on a users' contact list can write on their personal blog.
Type of media	Videos, channels and comments, videocasts, vlogs.

<u>Methods of communication</u>	Usual private messages, profile posts, comments on videos
<u>Use of Groups</u>	A bulletin on users' profile updates about videos uploaded or 'favourite' by friends.

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