

## Understanding social networks and global web apps

Over the last few years a global phenomenon on the net has been the huge growth in social networks. These are online communities of people who share a common interest. Initially social networks were largely youth orientated but now have become much more mainstream and have millions of members globally. We are now seeing the growth of social networks in the business arena and these can be invaluable community networks to promote your business on a global basis using sites like UK based [www.ecademy.com](http://www.ecademy.com) or the very well known [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

There are also a variety of communication media you can include on your website to encourage customer interaction and to add value to your site. Many of these initiatives are part of the web 2.0 revolution which has fundamentally changed how the web is used

At Ecomgroup we are happy to talk to you about how you can use these new media opportunities

The following brief summary (primarily sourced from Wikipedia) gives you some background on these major social networks and other communication systems and key global websites

### BLOG

A **blog** (a contraction of the term **weblog**) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning *to maintain or add content to a blog*.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (artlog), photographs (photoblog), sketches (sketchblog), videos (vlog) music (MP3Blog) audio (podcasting), which are part of a wider network of social media. Micro-blogging is another type of blogging, one which consists of blogs with very short posts. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 112 million blogs. With the advent of video blogging, the word *blog* has taken on an even looser meaning — that of any bit of media wherein the subject expresses his opinion or simply talks about something.

### FORUM

An **Internet forum**, or **message board**, is an online discussion site. It is the modern equivalent of a traditional bulletin board, and a technological evolution of the dialup bulletin board system. From a technological standpoint, *forums* or *boards* are web applications managing user-generated content. People participating in an Internet forum can build bonds with each other and interest groups will easily form around a topic's discussion, subjects dealt with in or around sections in the forum.

*creative online solutions that work*

## SOCIAL NETWORK

A **social network service** focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services.

Social networking has encouraged new ways to communicate and share information. Social networking websites are being used regularly by millions of people.

While it could be said that email and websites have most of the essential elements of social network services, the idea of proprietary encapsulated services has gained popular uptake recently.

The main types of social networking services are those which contain category divisions (such as former school-year or classmates), means to connect with friends (usually with self-description pages) and a recommendation system linked to trust. Popular methods now combine many of these, with Facebook widely used worldwide; MySpace, Twitter and LinkedIn being the most widely used in North America; Nexopia (mostly in Canada); Bebo, Hi5, MySpace, dol2day (mostly in Germany), Tagged, XING and Skyrock in parts of Europe;<sup>1</sup> Orkut and Hi5 in South America and Central America; and Friendster, Multiply, Orkut, Xiaonei and Cyworld in Asia and the Pacific Islands.

There have been some attempts to standardize these services to avoid the need to duplicate entries of friends and interests (see the FOAF standard and the Open Source Initiative), but this has led to some concerns about privacy.

### **LINKED IN** [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

**LinkedIn** is a business-oriented social networking site founded in December 2002 and launched in May 2003 mainly used for professional networking. As of May 2009, it had more than 39 million registered users, spanning 170 industries.

### **Ecademy** [www.ecademy.com](http://www.ecademy.com)

A fast growing UK based subscription based business social network founded in 1998 and now boosting millions of global members. As a member you can make business contacts and find work take advantage of business support and advice and even participate in local physical network meetings

## **MYSPACE**

**MySpace** is a social networking website founded in 2003 with an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music, and videos for teenagers and adults internationally. Now having 1600 employees the company is owned by News Corporation. In June 2006, MySpace was the most popular social networking site in the USA. According to comScore, MySpace was overtaken internationally by main competitor Facebook in April 2008, based on monthly unique visitors. The 100 millionth account was created on August 6, 2006 in the Netherlands and is now available in 15 different languages.

## **BEBO [www.bebo.com](http://www.bebo.com)**

**Bebo**, an acronym for "**Blog early, blog often**", is a social networking website, founded in January 2005. It can be used in many countries including Ireland, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. A Polish version was launched recently, which uses a different user database. There are plans for French German and other versions. Founded by husband and wife Michael and Xochi Birch, Bebo had a major relaunch in July 2005.

It was bought by AOL on March 13, 2008 for \$850 m (£417 m).

## **FACEBOOK [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)**

**Facebook** is a free-access social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. The website's name refers to the paper face books depicting members of a campus community that some US colleges and preparatory schools give to incoming students, faculty, and staff as a way to get to know other people on campus.

Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook with fellow computer science major students and his roommates Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes while he was a student at Harvard University. Website membership was initially limited to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. It later expanded further to include any university student, then high school students, and, finally, to anyone aged 13 and over. The website currently has more than 200 million active users worldwide.

Facebook has met with some controversy over the past few years. It has been blocked intermittently in several countries including Syria and Iran. It has also been banned at many places of work to discourage employees from wasting time using the service. Privacy has also been an issue, and it has been compromised several times.

## **TWITTER** [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

**Twitter** is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates known as *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length which are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as *followers*). Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow anybody to access them. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) or external applications. The service is free to use over the Internet, but using SMS may incur phone service provider fees.

Since its creation in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter has gained extensive notability and popularity worldwide. It is often described as the "SMS of Internet," in that the site provides the functionality (via its application programming interfaces) for other desktop and web-based applications to send and receive short text messages, often obscuring the Twitter service itself.

Estimates of the number of daily users vary as the company does not release the number of active accounts. In November 2008, Jeremiah Owyang of Forrester Research estimated that Twitter had 4-5 million users. A February 2009 Compete.com blog entry ranks Twitter as the third most used social network (Facebook being the largest, followed by MySpace) which puts the number of unique monthly visitors at roughly 6 million and the number of monthly visits at 55 million, however only 40% of users are retained. In March 2009, a Nielsen.com blog ranked Twitter as the fastest-growing site in the Member Communities category for February 2009. Twitter had a growth of 1382%, Zimbo had a growth of 240%, followed by Facebook with a growth of 228%. A Nielsen Online study claims Twitter has a retention rate of 40% which is about half the retention rate more established social networks have

## **OTHER KEY GLOBAL WEBSITES**

### **YOUTUBE** [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

**YouTube** is a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips. Three former PayPal employees created YouTube in February 2005. In November 2006, **YouTube, LLC** was bought by Google Inc. for US\$1.65 billion, and is now operated as a subsidiary of Google.

The company is based in San Bruno, California, and uses Adobe Flash Video technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. Most of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, although media corporations including CBS and the BBC and other organizations offer some of their material via the site.

Unregistered users can watch the videos, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. Accounts of registered users are called "channels". Videos that are considered to contain potentially offensive content are available only to registered users over the age of 18. The uploading of videos containing defamation, pornography, copyright violations, and material encouraging criminal conduct is prohibited by YouTube's terms of service

*creative online solutions that work*

**PAYPAL** [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com)

**PayPal** is an e-commerce business allowing payments and money transfers to be made through the Internet. PayPal serves as an electronic alternative to traditional paper methods such as checks and money orders.

A PayPal account can be funded with an electronic debit from a bank account or by a credit card. The recipient of a PayPal transfer can request a check from PayPal, establish their own PayPal deposit account or request a transfer to their bank account. PayPal is an example of a payment intermediary service that facilitates worldwide e-commerce.

PayPal performs payment processing for online vendors, auction sites, and other commercial users, for which it charges a fee. It sometimes also charges a transaction fee for receiving money (a percentage of the amount sent plus an additional fixed amount). The fees charged depend on the currency used, the payment option used, the country of the sender, the country of the recipient, the amount sent and the recipient's account type. In addition, eBay purchases made by credit card through PayPal may incur a "foreign transaction fee" if the seller is located in another country, as credit card issuers are automatically informed of the seller's country of origin.

On October 3, 2002, PayPal became a wholly owned subsidiary of eBay.

**GOOGLE** [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

**Google Inc.** is an American public corporation, earning revenue from advertising related to its Internet search, e-mail, online mapping, office productivity, social networking, and video sharing services as well as selling advertising-free versions of the same technologies. The Google headquarters, the Googleplex is located in Mountain View, California. As of March 31, 2009, the company has 20,164 full-time employees.

Google was co-founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin while they were students at Stanford University and the company was first incorporated as a privately held company on September 4, 1998. The initial public offering took place on August 19, 2004, raising US\$1.67 billion, implying a value for the entire corporation of US\$23 billion. Google has continued its growth through a series of new product developments, acquisitions, and partnerships. Environmentalism, philanthropy and positive employee relations have been important tenets during the growth of Google, the latter resulting in being identified multiple times as Fortune Magazine's #1 Best Place to Work. The unofficial company slogan is "Don't be evil", although criticism of Google includes concerns regarding the privacy of personal information, copyright, censorship and discontinuation of services. According to Millward Brown, it is the most powerful brand in the world.

**DIGG** [www.digg.com](http://www.digg.com)

**Digg** is a social news website made for people to discover and share content from anywhere on the Internet, by submitting links and stories, and voting and commenting on submitted links and stories. Voting stories up and down is the site's cornerstone function, respectively called *digging* and *burying*. Many stories get submitted every day, but only the most *Dugg* stories appear on the front page. Digg's popularity has prompted the creation of other social networking sites with story submission and voting systems.

**WIKIPEDIA** [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

**Wikipedia** is a free multilingual encyclopedia project supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Its name is a portmanteau of the words *wiki* (a technology for creating collaborative websites, from the Hawaiian word *wiki*, meaning 'quick') and *encyclopedia*. Wikipedia's 12 million articles (2.8 million in the English Wikipedia) have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone who can access the Wikipedia website. Launched in January 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger it is currently the most popular general reference work on the Internet.

Critics of Wikipedia accuse it of systemic bias and inconsistencies, and target its policy of favoring consensus over credentials in its editorial process. Wikipedia's reliability and accuracy are also an issue. Other criticisms are centered on its susceptibility to vandalism and the addition of spurious or unverified information though scholarly work suggests that vandalism is generally short-lived

Jonathan Dee, of *The New York Times*, and Andrew Lih, in the *5th International Symposium on Online Journalism*, have cited the importance of Wikipedia not only as an encyclopedic reference but also as a frequently-updated news resource.

When *Time* magazine recognized you as its Person of the Year for 2006, acknowledging the accelerating success of online collaboration and interaction by millions of users around the world, it cited Wikipedia as one of three examples of Web 2.0 services, along with YouTube and MySpace

*creative online solutions that work*