

# How does social networking impact on advertisers?

## Many brands are afraid of associating themselves with social networking sites. Martin Coomber explains the potential pitfalls and how to avoid them.

The meteoric rise of social networking sites such as *MySpace* and *Facebook* has had advertisers and marketers salivating, and clambering amongst one another to jump on board the social networking bandwagon. However, as both technology advances and these sites continue to evolve, keeping abreast of developments and opportunities has become a 24/7 task.



Although the success of it is somewhat exaggerated, Arctic Monkeys did use MySpace to great effect.

So answering the boss when he asks, “have we used *Facebook* yet?” may be easy, but it’s much more tricky to answer his next question; “how do we use it?”

The central attraction of sites such as *Facebook* lies in the fact that whilst digital technology as a whole has fragmented media and split up consumer bases, it has at the same time led to groupings of people with similar interests, background, or from a similar demographic coming together. Meaning that advertising can be more targeted. Moreover, as behavioural targeting software becomes more sophisticated, the draw becomes even stronger.

As digital advertising continues to become more and more of a two way engagement between advertiser and consumer, the opportunity to interact and relate to your potential customer is greater than ever before. Within



Facebook helped some brands become big news. Much to their disgust.

this dialogue, though, the advertiser must be invited to participate, and herein lies the key to advertising online and offline as a whole; a great idea delivered to the right people with first class creative. What differs is that with digital advertising and social networking in particular, the spread of your creative is organic, driven by influencers who then pass them on to their friends.

One only has to look at The Arctic Monkeys and Lilly Allen, whose success was initially sparked by their use of *MySpace*, to see how quickly a buzz can be generated purely on the back of word of mouth. But how can your brand use the peripatetic beast that is *Facebook* to follow in their footsteps.

Firstly there are numerous opportunities which work with the basic format of *Facebook* itself. Examples such as targeted polls, and creating networks where groups can gather and participate in hosted discussions allow people to engage with your brand in an explicit way.

However, more subtly, and to properly make the most of *Facebook's* potential, more complicated vehicles such as knudges, real time and turn based games, as well as applications, permit your brand to develop a relationship with your consumers on a deeper level. When integrated effectively with other media they can create a powerful sense of affinity between consumer and brand. Such a holistic approach allows consumers to feel valued, and thus leads to an increase in repeat visits/uses, whilst also increasing the draw and stickiness of your homepage.

Sceptics will counter argue that there is too much at risk with using social networks. That it takes years to develop a sense of brand and putting it on the *Facebook* will make the public judge, jury and executioner. They'll highlight high profile mishaps such as when brands were featured on such dubious networks as the BNP. So is it worth the risk of using social networks?

I truly believe it is. Although one mustn't feature for the sake of it, as relevancy is the key. Likewise a degree of stoicism is required from both agency and client. The internet being the democratic monolith that it is, one must be prepared to face criticism from certain areas in the online public domain. However, if you remain transparent and honest, and you interact with material that engages your consumer base in cool and exciting way, your brand recognition can only rise to the status of happy. 😊

