

# Social Networking Sites:How to Attract New Users

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## Abstract

*If the World Wide Web was once an enormous library, it is now a vast conversation. Transmitting information from one person to another has never been easier and since the birth of social networking websites the methods of communication have become more diverse than ever before. Though these days many social networking sites are there having millions of existing users, there are still many different ways which could be employed in order to attract new users to the site. This paper attempts to describe some of the ways to attract new users, to join a social networking site. These methods to attract new users include marketing strategies and enhancing existing features and adding some extra features. Enhancing existing functions and adding new functionality are vitally important in sustaining and even improving on the massive numbers of social network users.*

**KEYWORDS:**SocialNetworking,Users,Marketing,Features.

## 1 Introduction

Social networking sites(SNS's) serve as a medium for people from different communities to share interests and activities. They are the social utilities that connect people with friends and others who work, study and live around them. Through SNS's users get to know the people whom they would have never met otherwise. To emphasize these sites have become the integral part of day to day life. There are hundreds of social networking sites running over the internet these days and almost all them allow free membership.

The value of any network is correlated to the number of direct users it has. A network of only two is nearly useless, whereas a network of many thousands or millions can be very powerful. So, all of the SNS's are doing their best to retain the interest of their existing members and attract new users by applying both technical and non-technical strategies. Today SNS's rely upon enormous quantity of traffic to return a relatively small amount of revenue via advertising, thus, meaning the value of the companies is based largely around the number of users they could attract.

In the past lot of study and research is done in improving the social networking sites for the obvious reasons of increasing the number of users of the site.[10, 6, 9, 12, 13].

According to recent survey Myspace currently rules the popular crowd on the Internet social scene.[3] The reason behind this is that, it has variety of features which other sites



Figure 1: social networking[2]

lack, for instance horoscopes, TV on demand, games and books to download. But there is one question: why is Myspace only very popular in North America and why has it not gained the same popularity in rest of the world?[3] The one answer could be lack of marketing. If any site needs to become popular all over the world, no doubt it needs good features, but in addition it also needs a good marketing strategy to attract new users from all domains.

The paper attempts to discuss the effectiveness of some new features and marketing strategies for social networking sites, to increase their user base. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2, discusses the current methods to attract new users. Section 3, describes some extra future methods to attract new users which could prove to be effective. Section 4, sheds some light on common areas of SNS's, for instance registration process, which should also be taken care of and finally Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2 Current methods of Persuasion

In order to facilitate a potential user's decision to enter a community, i.e. to register, the community web-site clearly shows its benefits to a visitor by displaying different features of the site. The following subsections discuss some of some of such features.

### 2.1 Displaying Pictures

Almost all the social networking sites display pictures to show the benefits of the site on their start pages. Here are few examples of some popular social networking sites which attract users by displaying different kinds of pictures.

#### **LinkedIn**

It is the business oriented site which allows registered users to maintain a list of contact details of people they know and



Figure 2: LinkedIn showing different benefits for the user

source LinkedIn



Figure 3: MeetUp showing different activities which users can do

source MeetUp

trust in business. Being a business oriented site it allures new users by displaying advertisements regarding jobs and businesses as shown in the Figure1. In such types of sites the language used is very positive keeping in mind the human psychology. For example the advertisement does not say that there is possibility of getting a job after connecting to the people in the community rather the language implies that if a person joins the site he will surely get the job.[6]

#### Facebook

It is a social networking site in which users can select to join one or more participating networks, such as a school, place of employment, geographic region, or social group. Prior to joining the network a potential user is shown some of the prominent features of the network. Such features include uploading photos, publishing notes, posting videos, using privacy settings and getting latest news from friends. If the user gets interested in any of these features he will waste no time in joining facebook.

#### Meetup

This site was developed with the goal of organizing off-line meetings of people based on their interest. It shows what users can do using real examples. Meetup focussed on those people who to some extent feel lonely and want to share feelings, thoughts and work.

It is really a nice concept as meeting face to face a person having the same interest and whom you never met before apart from online, is really exciting. Some of the photos which MeetUp displays can be seen in Figure3.

## 2.2 Financial Costs of Social Networking

It is not an easy job for SNS's to increase the user base by charging the users, in order to earn more, who want to join the site. However, it is very hard to say



Figure 4: showing LinkedIn is free

source LinkedIn

whether users will join such paid sites or not. It completely depends on one's needs. If the user really needs to avail the facilities provided by the features of the site then he may join the site even if it is a paid site.

Today, the cost of joining most of these social networking sites is totally free. It is clearly stated by these sites. Usually, it is displayed near the join button as it is shown in the Figure4.

## 2.3 Look Inside

Less formal networks allow users the opportunity to look inside the site and to see the existing interest groups, forum discussions and even view existing members, but the personal information stays private for unregistered users. For example, MeetUp allows users to find groups by interest and location. It is one of the good features because in this way, users get an idea whether the social networking site which they are going to join is of their interest or not.

## 3 Possible Methods to Attract New Users

First it should be observed that what people want the most or in what they are interested in their life. Generally speaking people desire for four things in their life- money, fame, intimate relationship with someone and entertainment [15]. People today need those features in the site by which their life gets easy, either it happens by messaging or by some other means in SNS, they want to be entertained and moreover they are crazy about movies, celebrities and sports. So, if social networking site takes care of all these things effectively and efficiently keeping users in mind then it will be very easy to attract new users.

Following subsections discuss some new features and marketing strategies for the growth of SNS's.

### 3.1 Features

One survey found that Myspace has the weakest attracting features than LinkedIn but still it is reported that number of users in Myspace continue to grow.[3, 13] This is because it has much more features than LinkedIn towards which the users are attracted and one other reason could be the activity of its current members in inviting others. It is observed that people are attracted by the perceived quality of the features of SNS's [3]. Following subsections suggest some possible new features to attract new users.



Figure 5: Figure showing Mashups can work

source [www.soulincode.com/images/googlemaps.jpg](http://www.soulincode.com/images/googlemaps.jpg)

### 3.1.1 See Location

The value of knowing the location is very important, whether it is about knowing the enemy location in the military or any tourist wanting to get the location of a new city. Social networking sites could also prove to be very efficient way in getting the location of any user.

In most of the social networking sites, the location field is marked as a mandatory field. This can be used to add one new feature. One, in which the user will be able to see his location as well as the location of his member friends in the community. There should also be an option to disable this function as some of the users may not want their addresses to be public. But human nature tends to make people more interested in knowing a current location whether it is their own location or it is others.

This can be easily done through mashups, for example with Google Maps. With the help of this feature users can easily know the distance and location of another user without switching over to another site of maps. [14, 12]. Figure 5 gives a glimpse, how the location can be seen through maps.

### 3.1.2 Enemy List

This feature will provide user the facility to make a so called *enemy* list which will show all those members who did something wrong to him either in real life or in virtual life (internet). This list can be made without the consent of the enemy. However it should not harm anyone in anyway. The user should just be able to tag people as *enemies*. There should be a picture of the enemy in the list along with the reasons why the particular person is despised. Examples are he/she is more popular among girls or boys, has insulted my honor, or has defeated me in a swimming competition and so on.

It is seen that most of the people get mental satisfaction when they do such kind of things for those whom they hate.

### 3.1.3 Matrimonial

This is very interesting feature for the social networking sites. Today, along with social networking sites, matrimonial sites are also flourishing. They were flourishing and will also keep on growing especially in Asian countries because in countries like India, Pakistan and



Figure 6: Figure showing matrimonial in SNS for free

source [www.asianmatrimonial.org/images/centrepic2.jpg](http://www.asianmatrimonial.org/images/centrepic2.jpg)

China, boy and a girl can't live together, without marrying each other, unless they belong to the same family. So, it seems people will never stop marrying in such countries.

So, the social networking sites can also be used as a matrimonial site very effectively. This feature would provide a field in the profile which would display an option showing that the user is interested or not in getting married. The users who are interested should be listed in a separate column in groups according to their religion and region. This will surely attract those users who just browse matrimonial sites looking for a partner. Not only those users who want to get married but also their family members will get interested too in such social networking sites.

This would get popular very soon. The reason behind this is simple: in matrimonial sites people only mention their educational qualifications, jobs, hobbies along with their photo but SNS's would provide some extra information because by looking at the profile, which would be very detailed and at the groups which the user the user would have joined, for example, religious or crime group, also by looking at friends profile i.e. types of friends he or she has and by reading messages sent or received by him or her, one would easily get an idea the type of guy or girl the user is looking for.

The user would surely get a more clearer picture of a future spouse on a social networking site. So this feature will attract users from totally a different domain.

## 3.2 Marketing

Most of the business in spite of having good services do not grow just because they do not advertise themselves or they do not allure users. This type of marketing can also be termed as social marketing. Following are some of the methods of marketing to attract new users to social networking sites.

### 3.2.1 Encouraging existing users

This strategy is based on very simple phenomena of working and earning. Working here means putting effort to increase the friend circle by adding new friends in the friend list and earning may be monetary or non-monetary benefits.

Here this marketing strategy is concerned with the existing users. Existing users should be encouraged to

attract new users. These existing users in turn should be given some benefits for their work. For instance, consider the case of Orkut, a social networking service provided by Google. According to the strategy, Orkut people should search those users who have more than 500 connections. And these potential users should be given extra space to attach the documents as a benefit, in Google mail. So, to set an example these potential users should be given 15MB extra space as benefit for having 500 or more connections.

Now, these users should propagate this scheme to all the members in their friend lists, outside the friend lists and even propagate this message outside the community.

This benefit suits well just for Orkut users since both Orkut and Gmail are services provided by the Google. Moreover there is also a major problem in Google mail that one can not send attachments of more than 10 MB. Sometimes it becomes irritating when there is some large file is to be send. So, in this way, Orkut can very rapidly grow its user base. All the figures mentioned are just examples. These can be set according to the company's strategy.

This marketing strategy should be multilevel. To understand multilevel marketing, consider a user A, who invites user B to join the site, with 100 friends in the friend list. User B is one of the friend of A among 100 friends. There are also some mutual friends of A and B. So, in order to become eligible for the reward, user B has to make 100 new friends apart from those mutual friends who were already there when B joined the network.

But the Other social networking sites, apart from Google's Orkut, which do not have their own mailing service, can adopt some strategy which involves monetary or some other benefits. For example, if an active user has certain number of connections he should be given a gift voucher or something like that. Different slots of connections should be defined for different benefits. Again it should be remembered that this strategy should also be multilevel. [5, 1]

There should be a possibility to send link regarding some interesting content inside of the community to someone outside, so it can potentially awake interests of the email receivers in the community.

### 3.2.2 Competition inside the community

These days money is playing the most important role in every case and people also understand the value of money. According to this strategy users will get chance to earn money by taking part in competitions.

There should be regular healthy competition in the community which will retain the interest of its existing users as well attract others. Healthy competition means, that it should not have any kind of negative effect on its members. There can be C/Java language programming competitions or some quiz competitions. The members who wins should be awarded a prize. In order to publicize

this, like mentioned before, there should be possibility to send link to email addresses outside the community. People who will get interested or who are interested in such kind of competitions would join the community in order gain some knowledge and earn some money.

Moreover these types of competitions are good for the users of the community as well as for the society. [16, 7, 10, 11]

## 4 Common things for all SNS's

There are some methods which are currently used but could also be enhanced to attract new users to the community. The subsections which follows discusses the importance of entry barrier to register in the SNS and guidance which they need after registering themselves.

### 4.1 Entry Barrier

In most cases, it should not be easy to register in SNS. It's important to remember that just as a community includes some people, by definition it excludes others. The fine line between inclusion and exclusion can be referred to as the barrier to entry, and every community has one. The amount of energy one expends to join a community, the more the community means to him. [9]

This is especially true for the *serious* business networks like LinkedIn. The members of LinkedIn fill out a pretty big profile before they become visible to others. This increases quality of the community, since just-for-fun members will not waste their time filling out the profile. Most online communities do not need any invitation to join but some of them do need invitation. Orkut is one of the online communities that still invite-only. This is actually one of the known marketing methods, which is usually used at or before the products launch in order to give customers a feeling of exclusiveness and to pretend the product has more value than it actually offers.

A second barrier of entry is that, it often takes at least one person with a large existing network before many of the features of the service start being useful. With LinkedIn, this is particularly important, as you can't even search for people who you don't have 3rd degree connection with an existing friend. Thus it is important to provide the new user with guidance on how to find the people he knows and establish connections with them.

The more informal the community is, the smaller the entry barrier should be. [13]

### 4.2 Guidance for new members

The community should clearly state its benefits for a new member and inform him about key features. Otherwise, the newly registered user may not become a real member of the community and may remain just a lurker. In general, the existence of participants called lurkers, who post very few or

no messages in an online community, is widely known. It is stated that lurkers might have a negative influence on an online community because many people regard them as free riders.[17]

Another method to speed up the involvement of the new member in the community is to provide an opportunity for existing members to get to know him. This is actually made, for example, by showing the newly registered members (with pictures) on the main page, with the goal that someone can discover his real-world contact. However this method becomes less effective as the size of community increases, and the number of new members per day becomes too big to be shown on one page. In this case, some subset of the new members should be selected, based on higher possibility of contact (same place, same interests). In the entertainment communities, showing the pictures of new members can lead to the contact, if one person may look appealing to another. [13, 4]

LinkedIn displays the number of new members in the users network (people you are connected with) since his last log in. The user can even click on this link and browse those members, refining the search. It is especially helpful for the beginner in the community since he would be very curious about his network.

One of the communication patterns in physical communities is a history of community. If you look at communities in the physical world that have sustained themselves for a long time, they always have an interesting back-story or history which is communicated to new members. The act of communicating it to new members becomes part of the ritual of membership, a community building act in and of itself.[4, 8]

In brief, the things which should be done

1. Provide guidance for a new member, showing him what he can do here
2. Provide an opportunity for existing members to see the new ones
3. Increase the probability of the social contact between old and new members by selecting which new members to show, taking into account possible commonalities.
4. If it is viable, assign a greeter role to the old members

## 5 Conclusion

There is an enormous demand for online social networks which is backed up by the large numbers of visitors to such sites as; YouTube, Bebo and MySpace. But this number can also be increased by implementing some extra features and marketing strategies as described in the paper. The discussion in the paper focusses on how and which extra features can prove to be useful and what type of marketing strategy could increase the user base of any social networking site. Moreover, common things which most of the times are overlooked or are given less importance, has also been highlighted as how to use them effectively to attract new users.

The social networking sites should be implemented keeping in mind that the company has to sell this product(SNS)

which also needs marketing, along with features, as other tangible products.

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