

TOP INTERNET SITE FACEBOOK LAUNCHES MARKETING PATHWAY:

BUT WILL IT SERVE THE MARKETERS OR THE MARKET?

On November 6th, the young technocrats behind the website Facebook.com launched a new advertising program which, among other purposes, promotes, well... advertising itself. Nuances in communication and social networking on the World Wide Web are still being found and here, we find another trusted website seemingly selling-out.

Just a day before this, Myspace made a similar move with their launch of "HyperTargeting." Yowza! This fine new schematic helps "marketers to connect with specific user groups on a massive scale based on self expressed interests available on MySpace profiles," a recent press release explained.

Is it not because the targeted demographic at large has become savvy, sounding-off and calling b.s. at every possible chance, but that marketers need such help in what they used to be so good at: targeting consumers like deer, transforming even adults into consumptive children. Humungoid giant brands such as Procter & Gamble, Microsoft XBOX, Ford, Sony, Taco Bell, Universal Pictures, Toyota, Fox, etc. can "hit you up" by "what you dig." But that was to be expected from Myspace, no?

Facebook is implementing demographic-based ad targeting with even more capabilities unto itself. Users, particularly the students that grew the network from its inception in 2005, are raising their concerns about their old study procrastination tool. "Facebook is selling out. What used to be a social networking site just for college students is now just another outlet for advertisers to target college students, in the most invasive and privacy-violating way possible," says Margaret Gordon, a second year Women's Studies student at the University of California Irvine.

In the May of this year, Facebook kicked-off an additional feature to the site called "Facebook Marketplace." The addition of free, classified advertisements to the site, issimilar in premise to the relatively non-commercial and San Francisco-based Craigslist. Tame, but serves as the test stepping stone for the website's ultimate mission of creating the Incredible Hulk of Social Media.

Now, the Harvard-bred and Palo Alto-based company has made it possible for business advertisers (corporate and the little guys, in fairness to them) to not only directly target Facebook users through their personal profiles but to also subsequently track user purchases via Facebook "Beacons." Facebook Beacons enable a business to get social distribution without a Facebook Page. Users can decide if they want to share specific information from other sites back to their friends on Facebook, where they will be distributed through Mini-Feed and News Feed. Companies participating in this already include retail sites like Zappos.com, Blockbuster and Allposters.com but also information based sites like CBS Interactive and NYTimes.com. For example, credit happy youth can send a feed to their virtual friends that they've just purchased a pair of expensive shoes online while simultaneously linking back to the Trend Report from the Sunday Style section proving just how fashionable they, in fact, are.

Facebook's FAQ page says it best: "Your fans love you, and their friends will know it."

Companies investing in Beacons and Social Ads are given the choice of CPC or CPM pricing and Beacons are said to be free for "organic distribution." However, these campaigns are certainly not serving

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook profile for a user named Eliza Bennett. The profile is set to public and shows a cover photo of two people hiking in a forest. The News Feed section displays several posts, including a video of a sunset, a photo of a person, and a post about a new video. The Friends section shows a list of friends with profile pictures. The Information section includes personal details like name, birthday, and location. The page also features a search bar, applications, and a sidebar with various links and ads.

the interests of smaller companies/ brands/bands, etc simply based on the large-scale advertising-dollar factor in itself. On the other side of the coin though, who sits around in REAL life and debates at length Coke vs. Pepsi, let alone in the virtual world?

Thanks to Facebook, and other burgeoning, relatively new media outlets like Myspace, we now have new rubrics under which to look at media advertising, with its ever-changing changing, yet often corporate-favoring landscape. The new campaign, "Facebook Ads" is, just as their website tells us, an "ad system for businesses to ... spread information virally and to target advertising to the exact audiences they want." The benefits for profile users seem to be marginal in light of certain values of privacy being overlooked.

From a business perspective, it is simply creative marketing. Tools in the digital realm are the next step for future media. Remember personalizing M+Ms via the parent site of the Mars Corporation? Hell, even Columbia Records attempted to recruit mobile info from Bob Dylan fans by allowing to personalize the famous "Subterranean Homesick Blues" video in a promotional campaign for his last Greatest Hits Collection. But these all offered the

tool with the option NOT to register one's information. James Sanford, a former USC graduate of Political Science and International Relations, thinks that, "All the corporations

are trying too hard. It kind of goes against what people had as global perception of Facebook, which is that it's a less invasive networking site. But I will give them kudos for being original and being honest. It will probably work for a lot of people."

Facebook pages are utilizing the identity of already established personal profiles, intended initially for consumption by friends and classmates, and throwing them to the wolves of corporate America.

FACEBOOK PAGES ARE UTILIZING THE IDENTITY OF ALREADY ESTABLISHED PERSONAL PROFILES, INTENDED INITIALLY FOR CONSUMPTION BY FRIENDS AND CLASSMATES, AND THROWING THEM TO THE WOLVES OF CORPORATE AMERICA.

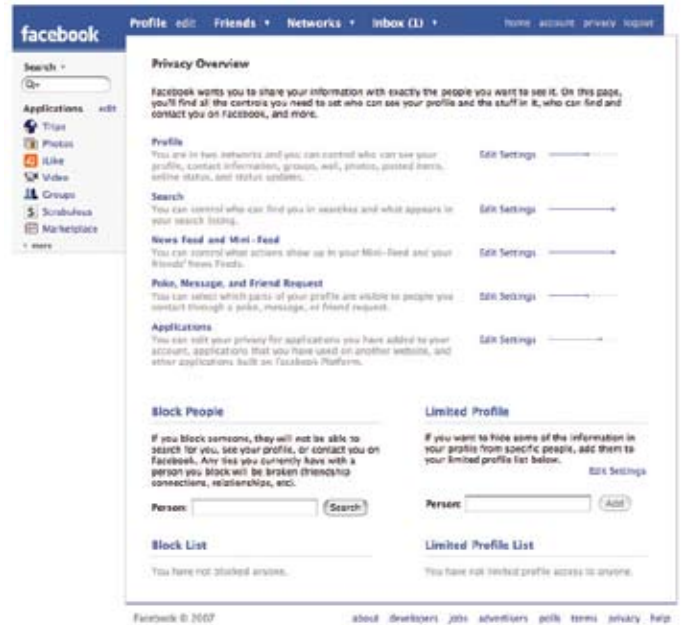
Yes, the user has to "befriend" the page of the company in order for them to use their likeness in their auto-generated wall-postings. But, with a registration age of just 13 years old, the question must be asked: How can a brand justify usurping the identity of someone that has not yet developed one? Facebook launches new ad program, and voila! Children become subjugated to causes and campaigns they don't understand, but were passively coerced into believing they did.

We careen down the road of faster communication and consumption via new media modes, and down the slippery slope we slide. The flip of the coin is, of course, the hope that charities and non-profits (Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Research, etc.) are able to utilize the technology for good.

Terms of Use for individual's profiles also ask that one "agrees not to use the Service or the Site to: impersonate any person or entity, or falsely state or otherwise misrepresent yourself, your age or your affiliation with any person or entity". Are marketers not attempting to impersonate an entity by masking themselves as the demographic of which they are not? The company's use of their essentially anonymous (in terms of a human identity) page allows them to falsely relate as a 15-year-old female in high school just the same as a 37-year-old male grad student, all under the comforting guise of brand and image.

In a recent Adweek article, Target representatives spoke of the Facebook ads, which sought to "communicate in the students' vernacular, "not in Targetspeak." Let's see some examples of this, discovered online this afternoon:

"Wow you're not gonna believe it...i clicked this offer to receive a REAL bag with a wallet from Coach totally FREE & it truly came in the mail!!! since i KNOW its no joke now, i'm going to go back real quick and snag a few more to give out as gifts..you oughta go snag a few as well LMAO!



isnt the one i received tight?"

Or, how about:

"Hey, how are ya? Just stopping by to say what's up and let you know about this thing I got today. Have you seen those ads for a FREE \$500 Macy's gift card? Man, I was skeptical as hell but I tried one last week and got mine today in the mail! No lie, this shit really worked."

Once the colloquialisms of youth reach their way to national advertising, they've lost all validity. Besides, won't the spammers and bots currently plaguing Myspace inevitably crack Facebook as well?

Chrystal King, Journalism Studies Graduate at CSUN, thinks that, "it's fine as long as you're given a disclaimer before you press the accept button to be the corporations' friend. I should be told that I'm giving them permission to use my name and likeness in ads and to send advertising to my friends. As long as people are warned and fully aware that that's what's going to happen, then it's fine for them to be allowed to have Facebook profiles because then it's my decision after the point of notification."

Only time will tell if users that signed up for a mostly-for-fun interface want to continue using a system that is "designed for businesses and brands to efficiently interact and communicate with users," as the Facebook FAQ page indicates.

Facebook acknowledged, in a statement released, that it would hear from its users if they have objections. "We'll see if they come up and we'll react quickly to that," the statement claimed.

With advertisements making us slaves to our own impulses, and advertisers on the endless plow to sever the ties between choice and coercion, one now wonders in all this...

What is in the public interest?

Might I suggest that our interest should be to challenge conventions we're constantly being fed, by a (non)culture insisting on building glass houses for us, sending all progressive ideas for change and communication into a toxic ether of modernity?

Feurbach said of modern living that it "prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality [and] the appearance to the essence... illusion only is sacred, truth profane." The V.P. of the Coca Cola Company was recently quoted in Adweek as claiming to provide "a network of experiences" through the company's Facebook initiatives. A world where consumers are appeased by virtual interaction, and made to accept such automated experience as actual living, would be quite a bleak reality.

By Paul G. Maziar