



Why your website should be using Facebook Connect to attract visitors

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Two thousand and nine was undoubtedly the year of the **Social Network**. In a world of loose economic foundations and falling advertising revenue, the social aspect of the Internet became even more important in the lives of many people.

The largest name in social networking has some mind-blowing statistics behind it: **Facebook** just [hit the 350 million user mark](#); the average member spends 25 minutes a day on the site; there are over 90,000 apps on the site and an astounding half of all users go to the site every day.

So how can newspapers take advantage of this social boom?

One of the easiest and more effective ways is to install **Facebook Connect** on their websites. Facebook Connect allows for user interaction from a larger source than a typical site or blog is capable of creating for itself. Facebook has the fifth highest level of traffic on the web; that's a lot of potential uniques waiting in the wings.

The only problem is how to direct all of those users to a site off of Facebook, and this is where Facebook Connect comes in to help. According to the [Washington Post](#), over 80,000 websites have now installed Facebook Connect and more than 60 million Facebook users use the service each month. The universally available tool has [heaps of potential to bring traffic to a site](#) as well as [spread the proverbial word](#) virally across Facebook. Yet many sites, particularly those of newspapers, are not taking advantage of the free publicity. Why?

WHAT FACEBOOK CONNECT CAN DO



Once a blog or site has installed Connect, readers can log in to the site through their Facebook accounts. Users can then leave comments, have discussions, and post the link to the page directly to their news feeds through the plug-in. The links will be seen on Facebook by the user's friends, who can then click through to the site because of the link. This is how the majority of traffic from social networking sites is generated. The cycle continues to become even more viral when the friend posts the same link to his wall, and a third friend clicks through.

The reason that Connect increases interaction on a third-party site is because it cuts down on formalities and allows virtually instant access to a comment field. Most blogs have an individual screen that users must fill out in order to comment on the site. Many are lengthy or invasive, and then there is always the annoyance of having to remember which e-mail you used to sign-up for which site. By the time someone's logged it, they may well have completely forgotten their comment and lost interest.

Using Facebook Connect, however, will allow the user to log-in to Facebook instantly and will also carry over a log-in from another window. If you've already checked your Facebook that day, you're instantly ready to comment on **Vimeo** or to **Digg** something. Most comment boards will even show the user's profile picture next to her log-in name. (Though all Facebook privacy settings continue over to third-party sites: if your profile picture is only viewable by friends on Facebook, it stays that way on all other sites as well.)

Most notably, Connect is free. No money is exchanged between the social networking site and the sites or blogs that install Connect. Yet, according to Facebook, Connect increases traffic to sites and makes users up to 15-20 percent more active once they are on the site. According to **Joost**, as quoted on the **Facebook Connect site**, "Connected users watch 30 percent more videos, enter 15 percent more comments, and invite 38 percent more friends." That's more page views, more uniques, and more content. And it's free.



One of the most important advantages of Facebook Connect is the information about the users that is provided by the service. Once someone has logged into a third-party site through Connect, that site can gain valuable information about the user. Their names, locations, genders, ages and even photos become fair game for the site. This can make an enormous difference in regards to advertising. If the third-party site is privy to detailed statistics about its commenters, then it can use this information to coax potential advertisers looking for a specific demographic. For example, **MTV** is not going to be looking to advertise on sites where the commenters are primarily in their 40s, but would be much more anxious to put an ad up on a site with a high level of teenage activity. The use of data from Facebook Connect is an invaluable survey of the most active users on any given site.

The use of Facebook Connect can also help to monitor comments as well. Because the users are logged in under their real names, it is easier to ban people for inappropriate comments or harassment. Additionally, most people are more cautious of what they write when they are required to take credit for it; thus, inappropriate comments would decrease thanks to the required log-in.

SOME EXAMPLES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Some newspaper sites have already begun to take advantage of the benefits that Facebook Connect has to offer. An early partner, **The San Francisco Chronicle**, has used Connect on its website, **SFGate.com**, since January 2009. In that time, the traffic to the site has grown exponentially. Between early 2008 when first creating a Facebook page and July of this year, SFGate experienced a 1,597 percent growth in page views, with 397 percent just between June and July.



The ability of Facebook to drive new users to sites is undeniable. One of the most **successful implementations** by a news site has been by **The Huffington Post**. The site officially partnered with Facebook in August with the launch of "**Social News**," in which the HuffPost aggregates stories that Facebook friends of a user have recommended or commented on. It can also post the same info about the user on his Facebook profile.

Of course, **as expected from the HuffPost**, the launch had a two-pronged intention. At the time of the launch, HuffPost CEO **Eric Hippeau** said, "our goal is to make HuffPost Social News the go-to place for Facebook users to share news -- both the stories they love and the stories they hate -- with friends. It should also appeal to marketers interested in reaching passionate, savvy readers who care about the news and who want to share their interests with friends."

The integration aimed to bring in page views as well as advertisers, something it has most definitely done. Since integrating Facebook Connect, the HuffPost has seen an increase of 500 percent in referrals from Facebook, and over 15 percent of all comments to the site come directly from Facebook. According to Facebook COO **Sheryl Sandberg**, "with the integration of Facebook Connect, HuffPost Social News is now leading the way to make news even more of a social experience, giving people new ways to share and filter news and current events through their networks of friends on Facebook." This is an example other news sites might do well to follow.

USING CONNECT WITH OTHER SOCIAL NETWORKS



The New York Times uses Facebook Connect, but in conjunction with its own social network, **TimesPeople**. The network, which went public in September 2008, allows users to log-in on the site and then share articles, collect friends, join networks, and even publish to **Twitter**. The network has an application on Facebook that allows for integration between the two social media, and once a user is logged into TimesPeople, he can use Facebook Connect through the Times' site. This uploads all of the user's contacts from Facebook who are also on TimesPeople instantly onto the user's page. Users can also import contacts from **Gmail**, Twitter, and other sites. Although usage numbers were unavailable (the most recent was the year-old report of 100,000 users), the recent integration of Facebook Connect and Twitter into the mix is likely to have greatly increased usage.

The Independent recently launched its own social network site as well. **Plotstar** provides readers with information about "where to go and what to do near specified locations, see what deals local companies offer and plan events with their friends." Plotstar is accessible through the Independent's website as well as the mobile site.



Once a user is logged-in, he can use Facebook Connect to send invitations to events to friends or post an exciting happening on his profile. Through it, users can buy tickets for events or make reservations at restaurants. These additional services involving purchases, along with the added advertising on the site, will help to raise extra revenue. This not only brings new users onto the site, it also helps to increase brand awareness and encourage the purchase of subscriptions.

WHY (NOT) CONNECT?



So why don't more sites use Facebook Connect? Some do, but not nearly as many as would be expected. Why is this? Why are many papers denying themselves free promotion and guaranteed page views? Especially in the current economic climate and state of publishing? It could be a lack of knowledge. The program is still only a year old -- many editors may still be in the dark about the possibilities that are out there and the things that Connect can do.

Many sites already have a 'Share on Facebook' button installed and may feel that that is adequate for promoting themselves on the social networking site; however, with Connect installed as well, the interaction on the site would rise along with the amount of shared links. Isn't this a 'can't lose' situation: more page views, more visitors, more publicity?

URL: http://www.editorsweblog.org/analysis/2009/12/facebook_connect.php