

SOCIAL NETWORKING

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Social Networking Leaves Email in the Dust - Sort Of




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The online experience is increasingly oriented toward community interactions -- and social networks and blogs are far more efficient means of group communication than email. Thus, it's not surprising that a Nielsen survey identified a growing preference for networking over one-to-one correspondence.

However, the survey did not include business email use, which is still very strong.

Social networking and blogging are now more popular online activities than using email, according to a new report  by the Nielsen Co.

The member community category -- which includes both social networks and blogs -- is growing as fast as the four other online sectors in the top five: search, portals, PC software and email.

Visitors to these communities comprise two-thirds of the global online population, Nielsen said.

Killer App of the 2000s

The statistics are hardly surprising, Jonathan Stark of [Jonathan Stark Consulting](#) told the E-Commerce Times. "[Email](#) was the killer app for the '90s -- it brought the Internet out of the geek realm to the grandma realm."

In the 2000s, social networking is picking up where email left off, he said. Surprisingly, though, there are still large pockets of Internet users who have not embraced the social

networking trend.

"I know people in tech even that still resist taking the plunge -- they think it is a time waster when, in fact, it is the opposite," Stark observed.

Indeed, one of the reasons for the medium's popularity is its efficiency in communication.

"It is more efficient than sending out [emails](#), which basically a one-to-one form of communication," noted Stark.

That efficiency is what's driving social networking's popularity as an internal corporate communication tool, Jennifer Lindsay, director of digital services and social media evangelist with [Eastwick Communications](#), told the E-Commerce Times.

"For a business with a heavy new business pipeline, social networks can retain information; they can be a starting point to assign team members that may not have been part of the pitch, for example. Social networks are the perfect way to capture the mind share of the individual and share it across the [organization](#)," she explained.



Email, by contrast, doesn't capture knowledge transfer, noted Lindsay.

The implication that email is less important than social networking is a little deceiving, David Erickson, director of e-strategy at [Tunheim Partners](#), told the E-Commerce Times.

Indeed, the study did not encompass work email -- it was restricted to Web-based email applications. If work email had been incorporated into the study, email would have topped social networking, according to Erickson.

That said, the survey does capture the growing importance of social networking, as well as the evolving nature of online communications, he said. "Email is a one-to-one medium, and online communications is now about communities and connecting with people you know."

Every 11 Minutes

There are certainly abundant data points in the Nielsen survey to support  that characterization. For instance, [Facebook](#)  -- deemed the most popular social network by Nielsen -- is visited monthly by three in every 10 people online across the nine markets in which Nielsen tracks social networking use.

Another interesting metric from the report: Globally, social networks and blogs account for one of every 11 minutes spent online.

Nielsen also found that the social network and blogging audience is becoming more diverse, with the biggest increase in visitors during 2008 occurring among 35- to 49-year-olds. Furthermore, mobile technology is playing an increasingly important role in social networking, especially overseas.

UK-based mobile Web users are most likely to visit a social network using a handset, with 23 percent, or 2 million people, doing so. That figure compares with 19 percent, or 10.6 million people, using a mobile device to access a social network in the United States. These numbers

represent huge increases from the previous year -- up 249 percent and 156 percent, respectively.

Global Reach

The social networking phenomenon is genuinely a global one. [Orkut](#) in Brazil had the largest domestic online reach -- 70 percent -- of any social network among the markets Nielsen measured. Penetration of visits to social networks and blogs was highest in Brazil, where 80 percent of Internet users visited such sites.

The share of overall Internet time taken up by social networks and blogs was also highest in Brazil, where nearly one in four, or 23 percent, of minutes spent online were spent on these sites.

Germany saw the greatest increase in penetration of social networks and blogs across 2008, from 39 percent of the online audience in December 2007 to 51 percent in December 2008 -- a relative growth rate of 39 percent. [ECT](#)

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