

## A brief guide to [Facebook](#) and blogging: How can they benefit your organisation?

The rise of the internet as an effective public relations (PR) tool has been unprecedented. Accounting for 46% of all PR activity it has quickly become the biggest single contributor to effective customer relations. Indeed, this has led to the development of new communication initiatives and in particular the concept of social networks. As a social structure made up of individuals who are tied by particular interests, social networks have led to the development of organisations such as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), along with the concept of 'blogging' too. So much so that the popularity of social networks overtook that of e-mail services in late 2007 (see figure one). A trend which has continued and looks set to persist for the foreseeable future.

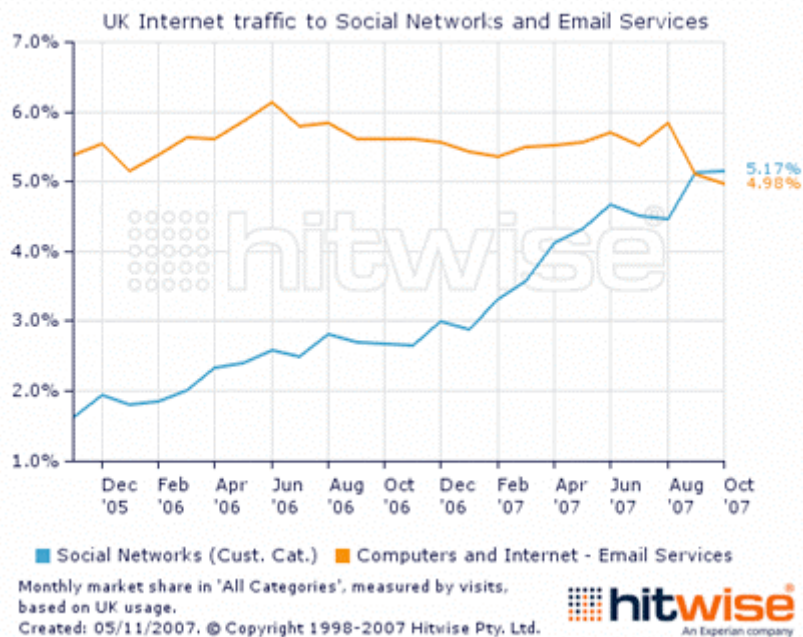


Figure One: UK internet traffic to Social Networks and E-mail Services.  
(Sourced from Hitwise Pty. Ltd., 2007)

For ease I will focus on [Facebook](#) as an example of a social network site, but will explain the overall concept of blogs. [Facebook](#) aims to foster networks and relationships between its members; in creating a profile you/your company are able to add organisations/people who you feel may be interested in the services you offer, and inform them of news, promotions or whatever you desire by sending messages and invitations. A blog similarly cultivates communication, but its content is universally available and largely driven by personal views. Whilst links to other websites may be posted communication is generally restricted to the blog itself, making the organisation of events somewhat difficult.

With 25% of the UK population holding membership to the [Facebook](#) community and half of this figure accessing the website on a daily basis, the potential scale of publicity is unparalleled. Your 'friends' (online contacts) will generally relate to the values of your company and fellow friends, or may simply be interested and eager to find out more. This 'common' interest may

lead to the development of an online pro-active community. With the opinions of your (potential) customers in one place you are able to fathom general consumer consensus and carry out necessary service/product adaptations when/where necessary. When coupled with the development of a loyal fan base, [Facebook](#) and blogs may well propel alterations necessary to drive your business in to the future. This was recently seen in a [Facebook](#) campaign to bring back the original recipe for [Pears Traditional Soap](#), and demonstrates the power of social media to prevent business disaster.

Indeed, there is no better advocate for your product than a satisfied customer. These ambassadors hold an unbiased trait which cannot be replicated by company representatives. So whilst it would be counterproductive to post opinions on your own product, there is no reason why you cannot help to stimulate customer praise via discussions or online events. The beauty of [Facebook](#) in this case is that not only can you detail forthcoming events, but you can also use these to stimulate/facilitate other forms of media. In recent times tailored online events have become particularly popular and not without good reason too. Take the case of [Casillero Wines](#), who via social networking sites organised a live web video food and wine matching cook-off. Online screenings of ethical films such as [‘The Age of Stupid’](#) and the organisation of climate change protests such as [‘The Wave’](#) have demonstrated that ethically based practices are particularly tailored to this media avenue. The ability to personally direct events which have developed from social networking is rare and such opportunities should be both promoted and utilised, when and where possible.

There is, however, a tendency to place too large a focus on social media functions when generating effective PR and a general marketing strategy. Even a quick glance at [Gartner’s Hype Cycle](#) demonstrates that social networking (termed ‘microblogging’ here) is but a single component in an ever-changing media environment (see figure two). The concept of microblogging is therefore susceptible to its own fall. Take the case study of [Myspace](#) which, despite being the world’s second biggest social networking site, has in recent times fallen from the radar and has experienced declining membership as a result.

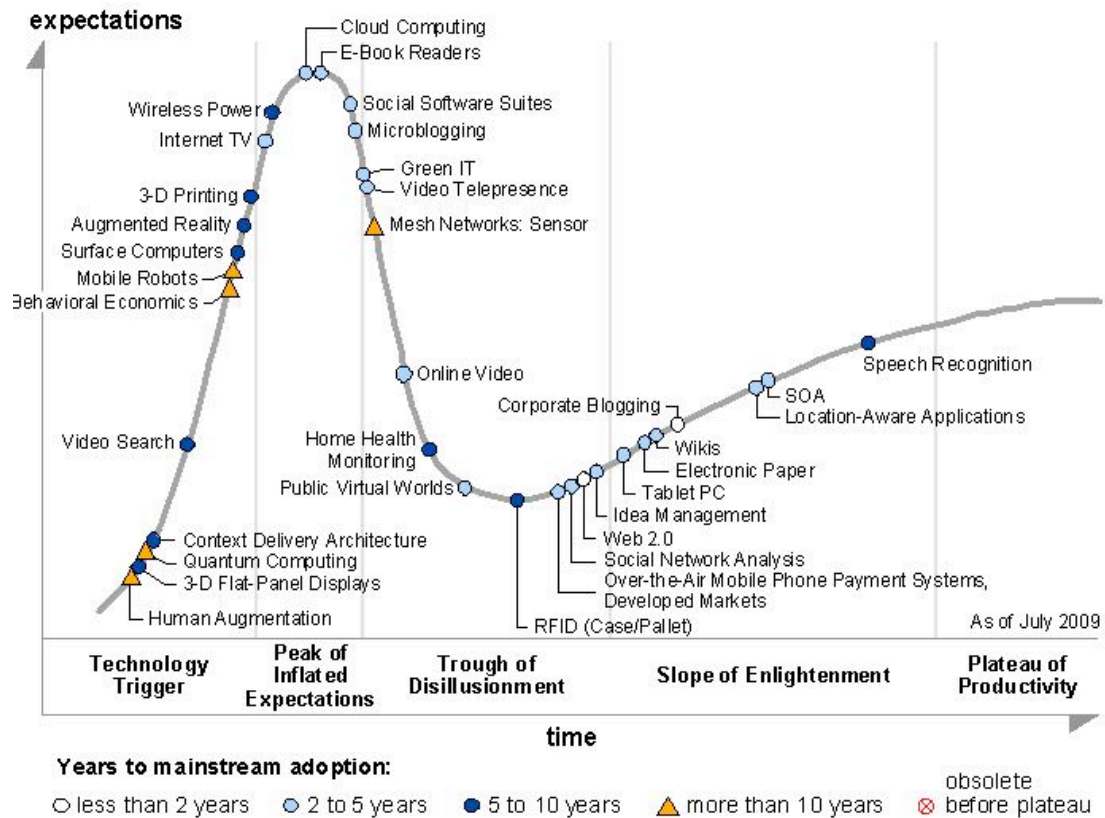


Figure Two: New technologies for the next 10 years+ (Sourced from Gartner, 2009)

With this in mind it should be remembered that [Facebook](#) and blogging can only attract a specific audience. Indeed, the demise of [Myspace](#) may be attributed to its focus on music and consequently a specifically younger market. The fact that 72% of [Facebook's](#) UK membership is similarly under the age of 34 demonstrates how social media, and other internet-based marketing solutions, are unable to reach all areas of the target population. With the requirement for a certain standard of IT skills and a 'common' interest too it may be that such initiatives are restricting rather than increasing customer bases.

It is all too easy to become swept up in the hype which surrounds social media; the scale, revenue and adaptability of this medium can sometimes obscure the negatives. As such it is important to always place social networking in the context of an 'integrated marketing communications approach' with the aim of increasing the brand's value (see figure three for guidance).



Figure Three: Factors contributing to brand value  
(Sourced from Knowledge Capital Partners, 2007)

With the core strength of PR being the ability to develop effective brand reputation there is the need for a broader outlet than social media alone. After all, traditional media relations – newspapers, magazines, radio and television – have already proved their worth when promoting a company/product. To disregard such assured publicity would be unwise and non-benefiting.

A need for reserved caution appears to surround [Facebook](#), blogging and the general social media network. The ability to unite people with a common interest cannot be ignored; bringing ethically minded people together will help to give this industry and the messages it promotes a larger voice. Being able to foster pro-active online communities and consequently deliver unbiased product commendation is similarly priceless – a platform from which other media forms can be utilised too.

[Facebook](#) and blogs should therefore be utilised, but it is advisable to incorporate such tools in an integrated marketing approach. As such there is the need to consider advertising, promotion, PR and other marketing avenues whenever assessing the potential for social media to promote business. Most importantly Ethical Junction members should remember that it is impossible to promote a good/service with a poor concept, and that the ability of social networking to amplify the flaws of a product poses a continual threat.

So, where to start? Here is a quick ten step guide to making [Facebook](#) and blogging work for your organisation:

1. Identify the key players in your organisation's area.
2. Tell the story of your product/organisation, utilizing members of your community and their opinions.

3. Enforce a level of control by introducing conversation but recognising that everyone has the right to communicate and offer their opinion.
4. Give your page a certain personality. Define the character of your business through social media.
5. Be mindful; consider your ethical and industry responsibilities.
6. Recognise the need to build up an awareness and rapport with members.
7. Do not be discouraged if sales do not immediately improve. The idea of social media is that it helps to foster communities and relationships and this may not immediately be communicated via sales.
8. Recognise that blogs and PR do not automatically connect and try to amend this through collaborative projects.
9. The need for a pleasant and polite manner applies to social media too.
10. Go for it! Embrace the benefits offered by social media with ingenuity, enthusiasm and creativity.