

Social Networking - UK - April 2010

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What is this report about?

Despite widespread media speculation that social network penetration had reached saturation point in 2008, the phenomenon continues to grip the nation. None more so than Facebook, which is now the main player in the market, enjoying rising total unique visitors each month (according to comScore data) as well as continuing to extend its reach to older users. It's now as much a place for older users to socialise as it is for younger members of the internet community.

What have we found out?

- Social networks have managed to avoid the impact of saturation in their core, younger audience by successfully appealing to a wider audience base of older users. More than four million unique internet users aged over 55 visited Facebook in February 2010.
- Despite the increasing range of activities available to social networkers, more than two-thirds of users are still focussed on connecting with their friends.
- More than 20% of internet respondents access social networks on their mobile phone. This figure will increase in 2010 because of the greater sophistication of budget handsets. Wider availability of mobile applications will also make social networks quicker and easier to use on the smaller screen.
- The launch of Buzz in February 2010 marked Google's first foray into the social networking market. It's not yet a credible threat to Facebook, but the search engine has a track record for innovation - as well as financial muscle - that could grow market share in the future.
- More than half of gamers on social networks avoid games that require them to spend real-world money. This is partly due to the wide variety of free alternatives, but also because paid online gaming is a relatively niche market as a whole.
- Facebook is set to be the first social network to incorporate e-commerce onto its platform in 2010. Further details have yet to be released but it's likely to be based on Facebook's existing payment facility 'Credits'.

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