

Online Social Networks: Setting Expectations for Your Alumni and Staff

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"Given all the technology changes occurring in the market, what will 'engaging with alumni' look like in the near and then distant future?"

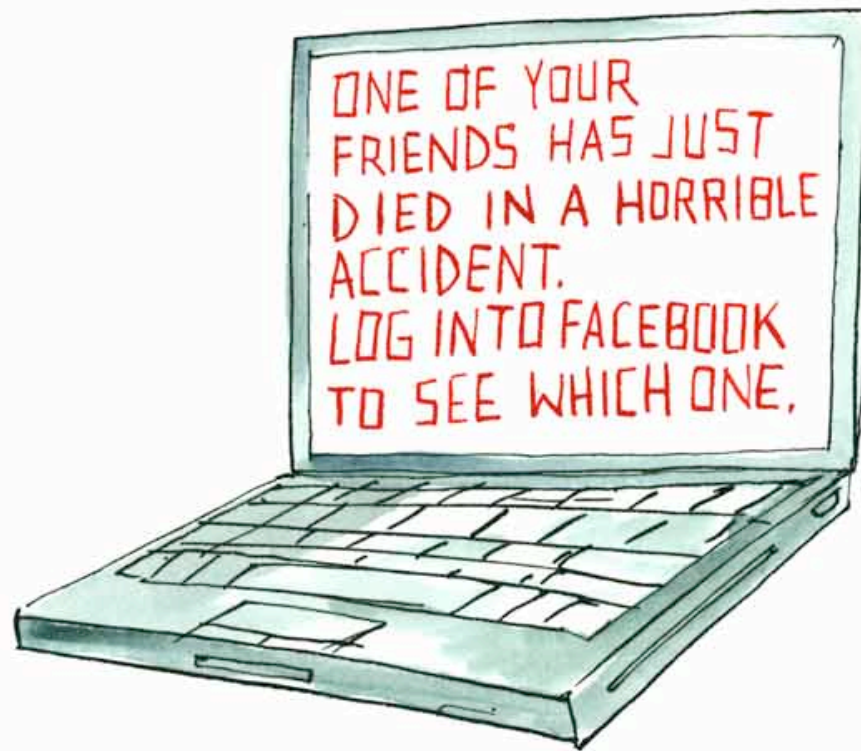


Illustration: Graham Roumieu

Road Map

- Background on Facebook in Canada
- Common questions about networks
- Two frameworks for thinking about online networks:
 - *Three Themes* for social networks
 - *Content vs Container* model

Two Types of Online Communities

- General Interest Communities
- Special Interest Communities

General Interest Communities

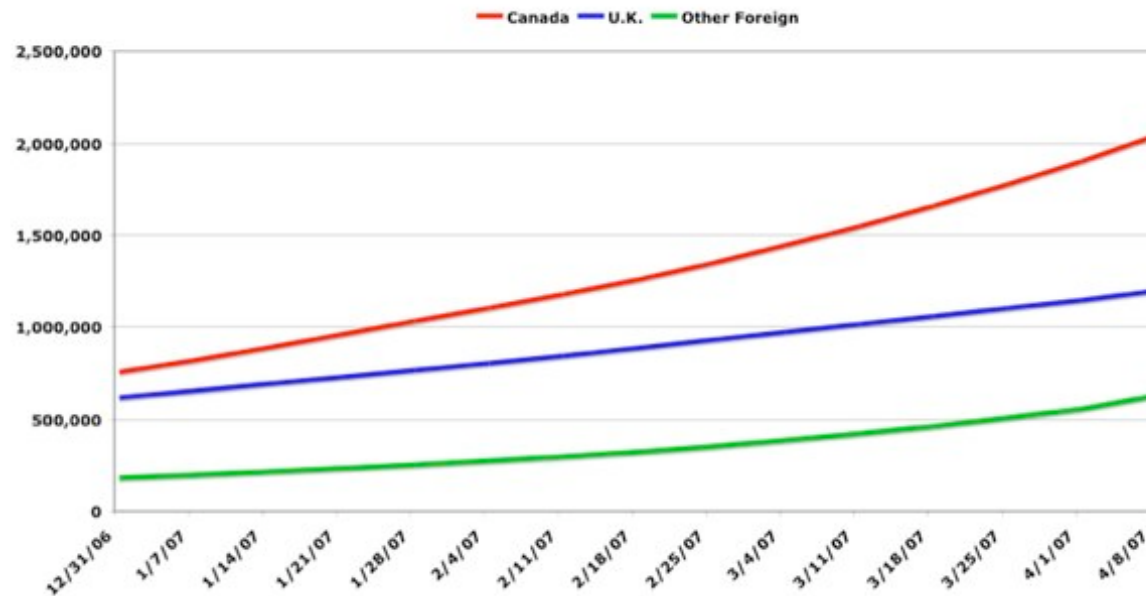
- Caters to the *public at large*
- Anyone can join
- Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, Blogger, LinkedIn
- User-generated content, profile-based
- Sub-groups for organizations/affiliations

Special Interest Communities

- Alumni association sites
- Closed: only alumni & students can join
- University of ____ Online Community
- Mostly "official" organization or institutional content

Facebook in Canada

- Largest SN in Canada: >7 million users
- Canada has the third-largest Facebook population & fastest growth rate



Facebook Blog '07

Facebook: Sued in Canada

- *Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic* — filed suit May 30, 2008
- Key complaint:
 - Facebook requires users to opt out of providing some personal information
 - Default setting is an alleged violation of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (*PIPEDA*)

“Do alumni view general interest communities a **replacement** for alumni (special interest) communities?”

- No.
 - Alumni don't think there's anything to replace
- To the extent alumni networks serve a specific need, and serve it well, replacement is not necessarily a sign of failure

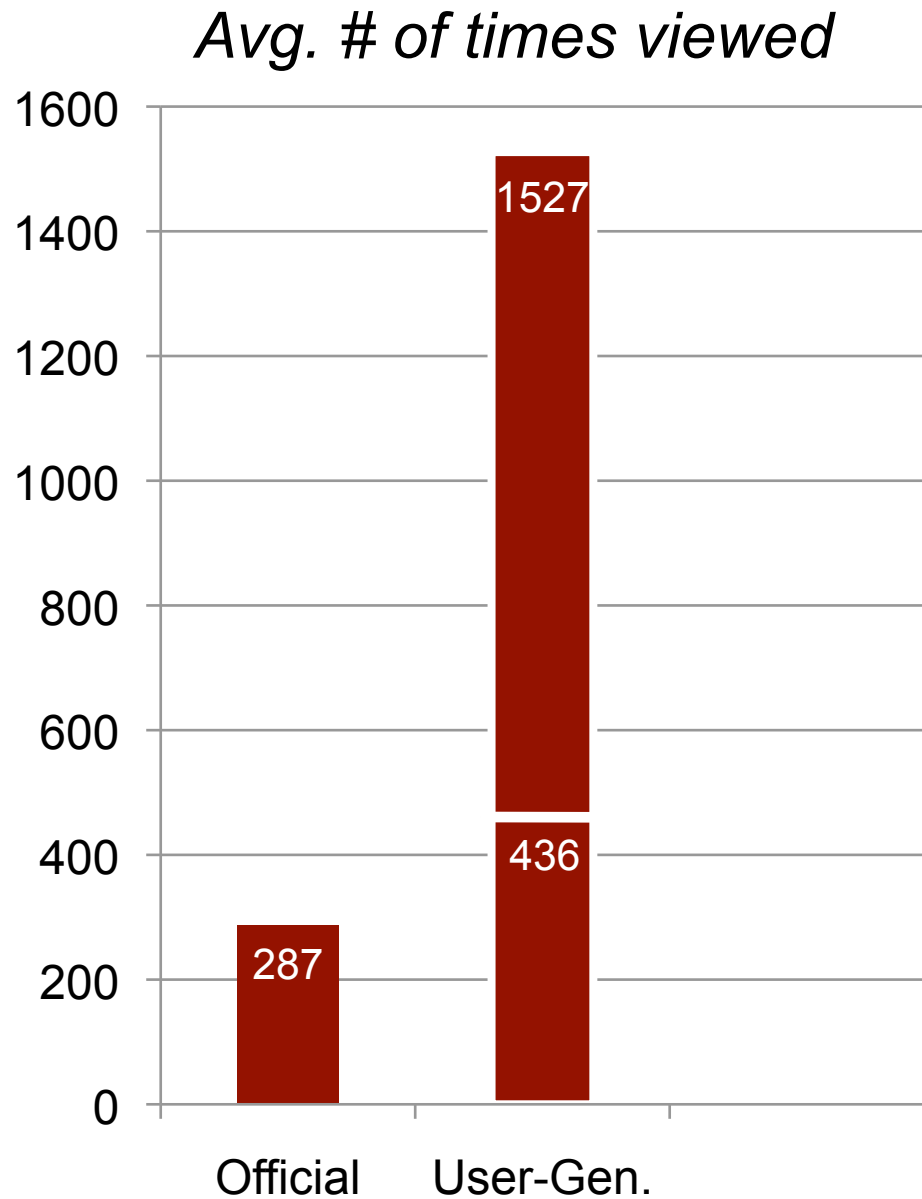
"How might institutions gain a foothold on this new playing field?"

- "Go native"
- Live *with* and *in* General Interest Communities, participate fully, and be part of the landscape
- Even respected institutional voices are ignored (at best) or distrusted (at worst)

Expectation: Loss of Interest in Your 'Official Content'

- *I Am Fresno State* on YouTube: "official content" is of little interest
- The five least-viewed user videos average 436 views, which is 50% more than the official ones
- The most viewed user video is seen 17 times more frequently than the most viewed official one

<http://www.youtube.com/user/iamfresnostate>



"Should we treat Facebook as a surrogate alumni directory?"

- No
 - pre-graduation info is reliable, nothing else is
 - post-graduation info: self-reported, self-policed
- **Expectation:** Software vendors will not encourage you to create closed groups on General Interest sites
 - e.g., validate through alumni email verification

“Can we improve our databases with information from social networks?”

- Yes, however...
- It depends on
 - what information we are trying to collect
 - the privacy policies of the specific sites

"What tools do these sites provide to help us connect alumni with alma mater and each other?"

- Short answer about Facebook: *Pages* are superior to *Groups* for alumni organizations
 - But both are pretty feeble
- Don't just wait to be told "what to do"
- Talk with students, staff and alumni who are digital natives
- Use the sites yourself to determine what will help you achieve your goals online

“High-level insight into trends in this fast-changing field”

- Expectation: data will be more portable
 - Open Social
 - Facebook Connect
 - Google Friend Connect
- Driven by social network sites
 - Users may not want data portability (e.g., seen as threat to privacy)

Two frameworks for thinking about the usefulness of social networks:

1. Fred Stutzman's *Three Themes*

- Closeness
- Curation
- Imagined Identity

2. *Container versus Content*

Three Themes (1)

- Closeness:
 - “smaller friend networks and more personalized content”
 - “diminished self-censorship”
 - examples: Twitter, LiveJournal, Tumblr.

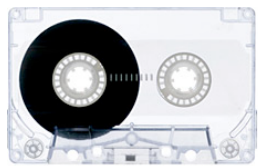
The Twitter logo, featuring the word "twitter" in a light blue, rounded, lowercase font with a white outline.

LIVEJOURNAL

The Tumblr logo, featuring the word "tumblr." in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font with a white outline and a slight shadow effect.

Three Themes (2)

- Curation:
 - “limited, curated content”
 - one’s online persona is “carefully chosen and managed”
 - examples: Muxtape, Flickr, Vimeo



Muxtape

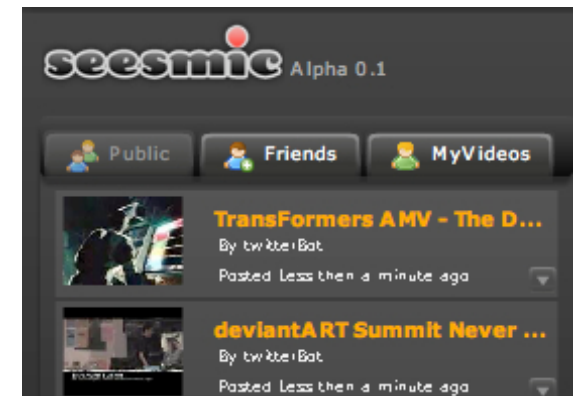
- [upload a song](#)
- [settings](#)
- logout →

a simple way to create and share mixtapes



Three Themes (3)

- Imagined Identity
 - “identity induced in more nuanced fashions”
 - your "identity" is a function of your output over time
 - examples: Twitter, Seesmic.



Three Themes: Ask Yourself

- How do your online services stack up against these themes?
 - Do you have closeness? Is there any small-group privacy?
 - Do you have “limited, curated content” or is everything in one big pot?
 - Do people develop their identity, or do they just fill out a form and leave?

Three Themes: Caveats

- “Inherently emergent”
- They don’t reward networks for size
 - in opposition to the goals of large players like Google, Myspace or Facebook (which rely on size)
- Key idea: Networks must be *connected to each other*, with portable data

Container vs. Content (1)

- CONTAINER =
Institutional or Association web site
- CONTENT =
Users' activity on that site
 - With other users
 - With the organization
 - With the information

Container vs. Content (2)

- Steve Rubel:
 - “The era of web sites is coming to an end, ushering in an era of web services.
 - To succeed, brands and content producers will need to make sure their content is portable and can **go where the people are.**”

Container vs. Content (3)

- **Sites** giving way to **Services**
- We will still build web sites - for now
- Don't be a destination;
 - create "plug and play" tools (widgets) that allow you to place your organization's content, identity and brand almost anywhere online



Containerless Content: OpenSocial

Data can “go with you” from one network to another

NBA GLOBAL D-LEAGUE WNBA

[Team Site](#) | [Buy Tickets](#)

Los Angeles Lakers (57-25)

Team Leaders (2007-08 Season):

Points:		Kobe Bryant	28.3
Rebounds:		Lamar Odom	10.6
Assists:		Kobe Bryant	5.4

Previous Game:  vs  101-124 (W)

Get updates via e-mail

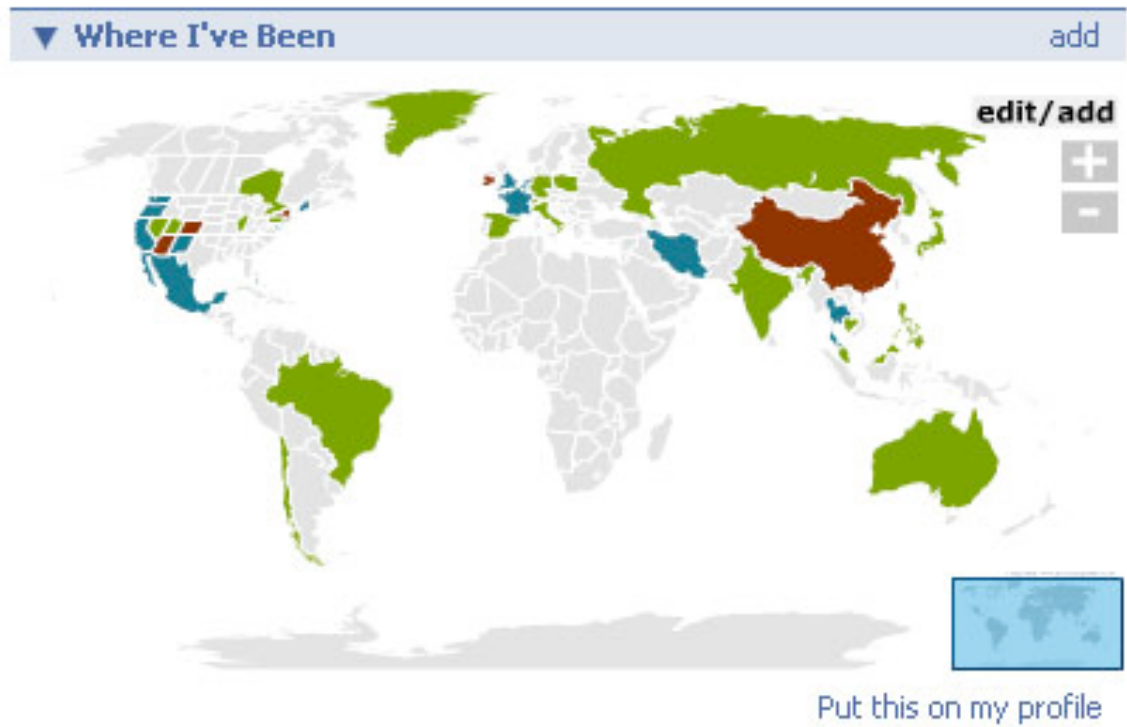


 **WATCH VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS**

Grab It

Containerless Content: NBA Widgets

“Just click the button on the widget and copy the widget directly to your social network site (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, etc.) or blog.”



Containerless Content: Facebook Applications

Can now live outside of Facebook



Containerless Content: Amazon's S3

“...store and retrieve any amount of data, at any time, from anywhere on the web... same highly scalable, reliable, fast, inexpensive data storage infrastructure that Amazon uses...benefits of scale...pass those benefits on...”

Don't come to Amazon.com; do things on your site or elsewhere, and use Amazon's backbone to support it

Bottom Line

- Your brand is no longer embodied (or embedded) in your site
- Packaged, "portable services" can — and must — go wherever your audiences are

Issue: Focus on Format (1)

- Focusing on the delivery mechanism [site, blog, PDA] puts you a step behind
- Key: Get your content into a portable format that can slide into any container
- “The website is an important repository for content, but it can't be the only one”

— *Charlie Melichar*

Focus on Format (2)

- "Do you have a prospective student, parent, or alumnus who likes a particular story or picture? They should be able to share it, drag it to their Facebook page, and extend its social life [i.e., longevity]."

– *Charlie Melichar*

Back to Data Portability

- Do alumni create profiles on your community site?
 - They will stop creating & updating them unless they can easily take data in & out
 - **You** must be able to bring in data too
 - Worry less about the container and focus on the content instead

Tell Your Grandkids:

“I was a blogger and I once had an entire web site all to myself.”

They'll never believe you.

References

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<http://www.alumnifutures.com>
- Fresno State
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- Canadian Internet Policy & Public Interest Clinic
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- Unit Structures – Fred Stutzman
<http://chimprawk.blogspot.com>
- Micro Persuasion – Steve Rubell
<http://www.micropersuasion.com>
- Intermedia – Charlie Melichar
<http://intermedia.typepad.com>

Thank You