

LinkedIn: A Better Way to Build a Social Network

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Social networks are slippery.

By their nature, they invite competition because the user base is only as interested as the number of friends they have (which eventually slows in growth) and the number of things they can do (which can feature creep people to death).

Corporations believe they need to be involved with them because there are millions of waiting eyeballs. Myspace and Facebook have 58 million and 22 million people respectively. However, nobody is quite sure how to use them to promote -- and more importantly sell -- wares other than music, movies and comedy.

There's even been talk that the network growth is slowing, although I don't buy into that theory. Eventually, triple digit growth is impossible.

These networks aren't just about selling.

The social network that shows the most promise -- and the one that has grown 361 percent in the past year -- is LinkedIn, the business networking site where people can upload their resume, give and receive testimonials from friends and meet other business contacts.

On the surface, it sounds boring. It's Web 2.0 for the serious professional. It's Monster.com without the spam. It's networking with the bells and whistles.

In a modern world, people are the driving force in any good company. As businesses decentralize operations and put more decision making in the hands of employees, it's important to find the right people.

LinkedIn allows people to effectively use social media to target candidates, get references from people you know and hire candidates (or find a company) most suited to your needs.

Beyond the obvious business attraction, the company has also taken a slow growth approach to social networking. Instead of capturing every eyeball, they opted to target specific eyeballs and grow around that.

They didn't rush out to be first. They didn't try to beat the crowd. They watched. Observed. And built a network with a solid foundation and a great user base.

First doesn't always win. Sometimes best makes a comeback.

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