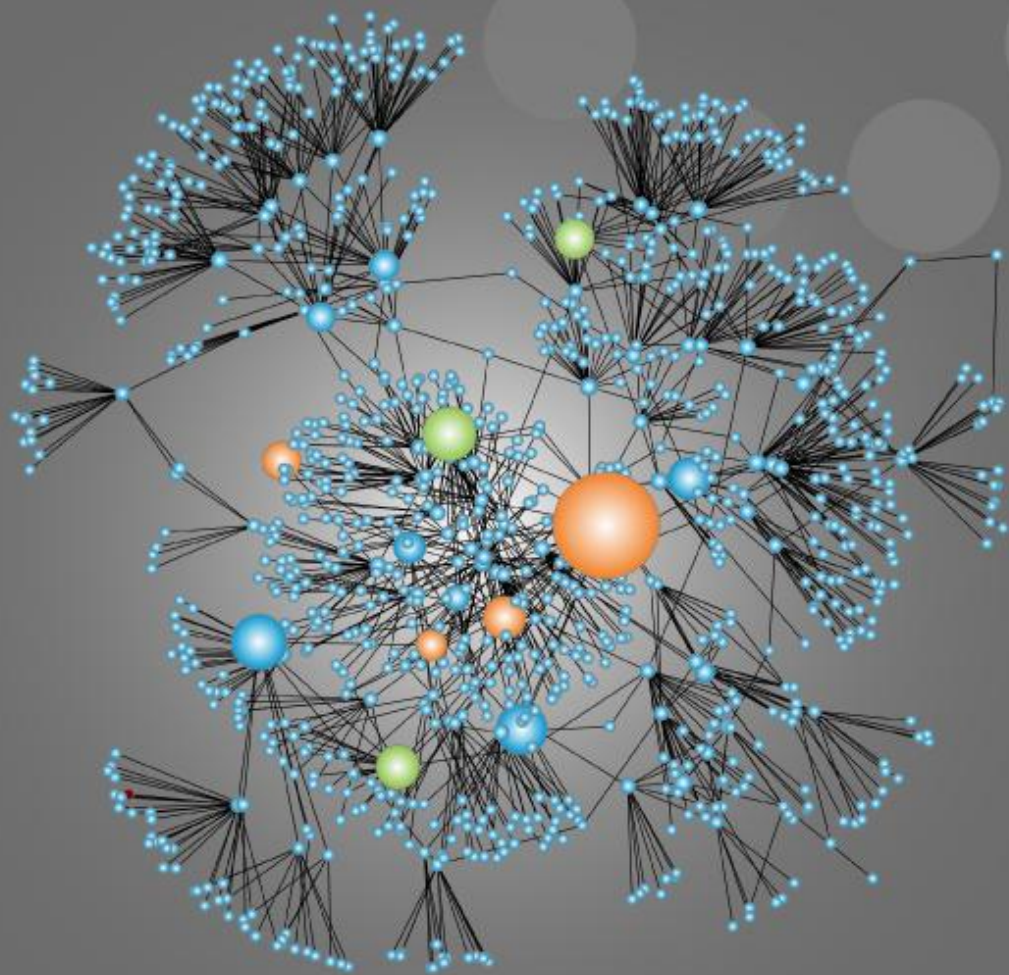


What is social media?
An e-book from iCrossing



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‘Social computing is not a fad. Nor is it something that will pass you or your company by. Gradually, social computing will impact almost every role, at every kind of company, in all parts of the world.’

Forrester Research, [Social Computing](#) - How Networks Erode Institutional Power, And What To Do About It

Introduction

Thanks for downloading this e-book. It's written as a short, sweet summary of the phenomenon called social media. It's an unashamedly straightforward work, intended to give you a brief overview of the story so far, maybe fill in a few gaps and act as a reference guide.

It's intended for anyone, but will be most useful to people working in media, marketing and communications.

Things move fast in this world, so this e-book will be updated every now and again. Check www.icrossing.co.uk/ebooks for the latest edition.

So how big a deal is social media?

Very big indeed. To give you an idea of the numbers, when this e-book was last updated there were:

More than 110 million blogs being tracked by Technorati, a specialist blog search engine¹, up from 63 million at the beginning of the year

An estimated 100 million videos a day being watched on video sharing website, YouTube²

More than 200 million profiles created by users on social network MySpace³

¹ Technorati <http://www.technorati.com/about/>

² Engadget <http://www.engadget.com/2007/07/18/ins-and-outs-does-youtube-fit-on-the-boob-tube/>

³ Mashable <http://mashable.com/2007/09/09/200-million-myspace-accounts/>

What is social media?

Social media is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics:

Participation: social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.

Openness: most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on.

Conversation: whereas traditional media is about 'broadcast' (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.

Community: social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue or a favourite TV show.

Connectedness: Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people.

Basic forms of social media

At this time, there are basically six kinds of social media. Note, though, that innovation and change are rife.

Social networks: these sites allow people to build personal web pages and then connect with friends to share content and communication. The biggest social networks are [MySpace](#), [Facebook](#) and [Bebo](#).

Blogs: perhaps the best known form of social media, blogs are online journals, with entries appearing with the most recent first.

Wikis: these websites allow people to add content to or edit the information on them, acting as a communal document or database. The best-known wiki is [Wikipedia](#), the online encyclopaedia which has over 2 million English language articles⁴.

Podcasts: audio and video files that are available by subscription, through services like [Apple iTunes](#).

Forums: areas for online discussion, often around specific topics and interests. Forums came about before the term 'social media' and are a powerful and popular element of online communities.

Content communities: communities which organise and share particular kinds of content. The most popular content communities tend to form around photos ([Flickr](#)), bookmarked links ([del.icio.us](#)) and videos ([YouTube](#)).

Microblogging: social networking combined with bite-sized blogging, where small amounts of content ('updates') are distributed online and through the mobile phone network. [Twitter](#) is the clear leader in this field.

⁴ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Back to the future

If you think that there's something oddly familiar about descriptions of social media, it may be that you recall some of the discussions in the 1990s about what the web would become. And many of its emerging manifestations are close to the idealistic imaginings from that time.

A good way to think about social media is that all of this is actually just about being human beings. Sharing ideas, cooperating and collaborating to create art, thinking and commerce, vigorous debate and discourse, finding people who might be good friends, allies and lovers – it's what our species has built several civilisations on. That's why it is spreading so quickly, not because it's great shiny, whizzy new technology, but because it lets us be ourselves – only more so.

And it is in the "more so" that the power of this revolution lies. People can find information, inspiration, like-minded people, communities and collaborators faster than ever before. New ideas, services, business models and technologies emerge and evolve at dizzying speed in social media.

The new means of production and distribution...

Media production

Rather than asking, "Are blogs a fad?" or "How much of this is hype?" it's more useful to look at the fundamentals behind the phenomenal growth of social media.

It used to be that the ability to create content and distribute it to an audience was limited to individuals and organisations that owned the production facilities and infrastructure to do so. In other words: 'the media'.

If you were in the video creation and distribution business you were called a TV station and employed thousands of highly skilled individuals to write, film, edit and broadcast your content through a relatively small number of channels to the public. Similarly, if you were a newspaper, you hired a team of reporters and editors, designers, typesetters, printers and delivery men, and had deals with a network of newsagents for them to sell your product to your audience.

With the advent of digital technology and the internet it became a lot easier for people to create their own content, be it images, words, video or audio. But even five years ago, it was still beyond most people's technical skills to create and maintain their own website.

Today, the ever-lower costs of computers, digital cameras and high-speed internet access, combined with free or low-cost, easy-to-use editing software means that anyone can have a live blog website up and running within minutes of deciding to do so. With a little reading and fiddling they can upload video or sound too.

Distribution

Production, obviously, is only half of the story. What good is great content unless you can get it to people? Take blogs for instance. People have a limited amount of time to check websites regularly – few people are going to be bothered to check more than a couple of blogs every day.

Now they don't need to. The innovation that has increased the reach of blogs and podcasts and has given terrific impetus to social media's evolution is a technology called RSS (Really Simple Syndication) which allows people to subscribe to a blog or website.

RSS notifies a "newsreader" or your personal homepage (on, say, [Google](#) or [Windows Live](#)) that there is new content available and sends it the text and images. You can then read these in your newsreader without having to visit the website itself.

The importance of RSS, therefore, is that it makes it much easier for blogs and other social media to build or become part of communities. They may often be small communities, but to their users they may be highly relevant and valuable.

The other method of distribution that is sometimes neglected in any discussion of social media is search engines. Because blogs are highly connected, in the eyes of Google the more established ones can become an authority on a niche topic.

If, say, you have been blogging about cats for a good few months, and your posts have attracted links from other blogs, then a story about new government legislation on pet ownership on your blog may earn similar ranking for searches on that subject as the local newspaper or even national media.

‘It is difficult, indeed dangerous, to underestimate the huge changes this revolution will bring or the power of developing technologies to build and destroy - not just companies but whole countries.’

Rupert Murdoch

How social media works...

Now let's take a look at each of the main types of social media, and how they work. These explanations are intentionally very general, because with social media every rule seems to have an exception.

In fact, among the defining characteristics of social media are the blurring of definitions, rapid innovation, reinvention and mash-ups.

Each explanation also has a section on how to try out that form of social media yourself, with pointers on both how to find social media that's relevant to you and how you might go about creating it. If you want to really understand how social media works, there's no better way than to take part in it.

Mash-ups: the combination of two or more pieces of content (or software, or websites) is one of the phenomena in social media that make it at once so exciting, fast-moving and sometimes bewildering. Mash-ups are possible because of the openness of social media – many websites and software developers encourage people to play with their services and reinvent them.

There are literally hundreds of mash-ups of the [Google Earth](#) service, where people have attached information to parts of the maps. For instance there is a [UK rail service mash-up](#) where you can track in real time where trains are on the map. Fans of the TV series 24 have mapped locations from the shows' plotlines on to a [Google Earth map](#).



A popular type of mash-up cannibalises different pieces of content, typically videos and music. Popular videos on [YouTube](#) can spawn hundreds of imitations, homages and (frequently) comic reinterpretations. In communities like this, the number of mash-ups a piece of content spawns is often an indicator of its popularity.

Some marketers have cottoned on to the power of this and encourage people to reinterpret their content.

Three brilliant mash-ups on YouTube

8 ½ Mile

Eminem's movie + Fellini

Love Will Freak Us

Missy Elliott + Joy Division

A Hard Day's Night of the Living
Dead

The Beatles + zombie movies

How social networks work...

Social networks on the web are like contained versions of the sprawling blog network. People joining a social network usually create a profile and then build a network by connecting to friends and contacts in the network, or by inviting real-world contacts and friends to join the social network.

These communities retain the interest of their members by being useful to them and providing services that are entertaining or help them to expand their networks.

[MySpace](#), for instance, allows members to create vivid, chaotic home pages (they've been likened to the walls of a teenager's bedroom) to which they can upload images, videos and music.



[MySpace](#) has built a lot of its popularity around its music services. There are said to be over three million bands and musicians registered on it, trying to attract a fan

base from the 200 million registered accounts. According to Hitwise, in September 2006 MySpace was the 8th largest referrer of traffic to HMV.co.uk, more even than the MSN search engine.

In 2007, [Facebook](#) a social network that originated in US colleges, became available for public use in the UK. Its popularity quickly rocketed.

Part of Facebook's success is its creators' decision to 'open up' and allow anyone to develop applications and run them on Facebook - without charging them. This has seen Facebook users able to play each other at Scrabble and Chess, compare each others' tastes and send 'virtual gifts', among any number of new ideas vying for attention.



[Bebo](#), which is popular among school-age children, actually has the most members, perhaps helped by the fact that it is grouped around schools and colleges.

Crucially, the growth in the use of social networks by young people in recent years has come at the expense of their consumption of traditional media such as TV and magazines. This switch in behaviour was one of the drivers behind the biggest deal in social media to date, when Rupert Murdoch bought MySpace for US \$580 million.⁵

Marketers have also increasingly begun to experiment with trying to reach the members of MySpace and other social networks. Bebo hosts pages for many children's authors for instance, while MySpace has seen a rush of marketing efforts from Toyota to the US Army.

Perhaps the most 'grown-up' of the popular networks is [LinkedIn](#), which allows users build their business and

⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4695495.stm>

professional contacts into an online network. It has been criticised for not being open enough and for charging for too many of its services – but next to Facebook it is still the most popular online social network among people aged 25 and over. The huge success of the 'opening up' of Facebook, as mentioned above, could be a challenge to LinkedIn's 'closed' approach in the future.

How blogs work...

At its simplest, a blog is an online journal where the entries are published with the most recent first.

There are a number of features that make blogs noteworthy and different to other websites:

Tone: blogs tend to be written in a personal, conversational style. They are usually the work of an identified author or group of authors.

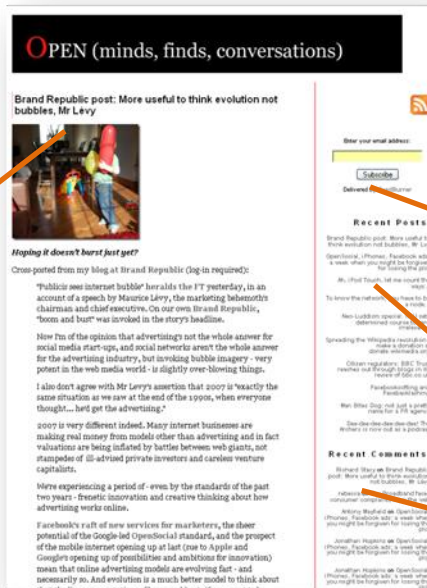
Topic: blogs tend to define what it is they are writing about. They can be as specific as a blog about a book in progress or as wide in scope as 'my musings on life and stuff'.

Links and trackbacks: the services people use to write blogs make it very easy for them to insert links to other websites, usually in reference to an article or blog post or to provide further information about the subject they are writing about.

Comments: each blog post has a comments section, effectively a message board for that article. On blogs with large audiences the debates in these sections can run to hundreds of comments at a time.

Subscription: blogs can be subscribed to, usually via RSS technology, making it easy to keep up with new content.

Blogs are easy to set up using any of a number of services. One of the simplest is the free [Blogger](#) service from Google.



Author & Topic

Subscriptions

Links & Trackbacks

Comments

Others such as [Wordpress](#) and [TypePad](#) offer more features, the latter for a fee.

Different types of blogs

With millions of people around the world of different ages and backgrounds blogging about whatever they feel like, it is about as easy to generalise about 'bloggers' as it is to make sweeping statements about 'human beings'.

Here are some of the main kinds of blogs you will come across:

Personal blogs

Many millions of people keep blogs about their everyday lives, much like public diaries. These sometimes become very popular indeed, especially those anonymous, slightly

risqué ones. You know the sort: they get written about in the Sunday Times and become best-selling novels. One of the best-known personal blogs is [Dooce](#).

Political blogs

Especially in the US, but increasingly in the UK, blogs are being written about politics. Often perceived as a response to media bias (across the political spectrum) they tend to comment on the news, giving closer analysis of issues they feel have been misrepresented or glossed over by mainstream media.

In America most if not all of the contenders for the presidency in 2008 already have bloggers on staff to advise on reaching political bloggers and their readers. We are not quite at that stage in the UK, but blogging has been playing a part in the resurgence of grassroots Conservative politics, and right-of-centre bloggers such as [Iain Dale](#) and [Guido Fawkes](#) have been making their presence in the UK mainstream media. Influential examples from the political left include [MediaLens](#) and [Harry's Place](#).

Business blogs

Many professionals and businesses now have blogs. They can allow companies to communicate in a less formal style than has been traditional in newsletters, brochures and press releases, which can help to give a human face and voice to the organisation. For individuals in business a blog can become a very effective way of building a network of like-minded individuals and raising their own profiles. [Blog Maverick](#) is a good example.

'Almost media' blogs

Some blogs are unashamedly media businesses in their own right, taking advertising and employing a blogger or a group of bloggers full-time. Effectively, they are start-ups that are taking advantage of the new blogging technologies and opportunities to build communities of readers in new or niche subject areas. These are generally to be found covering news and opinion in the technology and media industries. Try [Businesspundit.com](#) or [Hecklerspray](#).

Mainstream media blogs

Most national newspapers in the UK – not to mention the BBC – now have blogs for some of their reporters and editors. These can provide useful insights into the news gathering and reporting process, but will also give vent to personal views that the journalist may otherwise have kept to themselves. For example, see BBC business editor [Robert Peston's blog](#). It's worth noting that while many journalist blogs are hosted on newspaper sites themselves, a large number are independent, personal blogs with a major focus on their professional interests.

Reading blogs

The easiest way to read blogs is to subscribe to ones you find interesting using the [Bloglines](#), [Rojo](#) or [Newsqator](#) newsreader services.

A newsreader is a website or piece of software where you can go to read a newsfeed that you are subscribed to via RSS. All blogs and most news websites have RSS feeds attached to them.

You can find blogs on topics that you're interested in by using search engines like [Technorati](#) or [Google Blog Search](#). If you find a blog which is particularly interesting or relevant to you, have a look for its 'blogroll' (list of recommended blogs) – it's a great way of exploring the networks of blogs.

How wikis work...

Wikis are websites that allow people to contribute or edit content on them. They are great for collaborative working, for instance creating a large document or project plan with a team in several offices. A wiki can be as private or as open as the people who create it want it to be.

Wikipedia

The most famous wiki is of course [Wikipedia](#), an online encyclopaedia that was started in 2001. It now has over two million articles in English alone⁶ and over a million members.

In 2005 the respected scientific journal Nature conducted a study⁷ into the reliability of the scientific entries in Wikipedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica. No one was surprised that Encyclopaedia Britannica was the more reliable of the two – what was remarkable was that it was only marginally more accurate.

The Encyclopedia Britannica team issued a 20-page rebuttal of the study a few months later. Others observed that while Encyclopaedia Britannica had no entries for wiki, Wikipedia has a 2,500 word article on Encyclopaedia Britannica, its history and methodology.

But Wikipedia is more than a reference source. During a major breaking news story, especially one which affects large numbers of people directly, such a natural disaster or political crisis, Wikipedia acts as a collective reporting function.

⁶ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

⁷ Nature <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v438/n7070/full/438900a.html>

Trying out wikis...

Everyone knows Wikipedia: here are some other examples of large wiki projects that you can take a look at and even participate in:

Wikia

A community of wikis on different subjects

wikiHow

A practical 'how to' manual for everything from making coffee to writing business plans

Wikinews

Wikipedia's news project

You can start your own public wiki in the Wikia community, or look at the technology's possibilities for team working by trying out the services from companies like JotSpot and Socialtext.

How podcasts work...

Podcasts are audio or video files that are published on the internet and that users can subscribe to. Sometimes 'vodcast' is used to specifically describe video services.

It is the subscription feature that makes a podcast so powerful as a form of social media. People have long been able to upload audio content to the web, but the subscription feature means that people can build regular audiences and communities around their shows. It effectively puts private individuals or brands on a level playing field with traditional media organisations when it comes to competing for people's attention with AV content online.

Podcasts, like personal video recorders (PVRs), are part of a shift in media consumption patterns, which increasingly sees people watching or listening to content when and where it suits them. This is sometimes known as time-shifting.

When a new podcast is posted to the web, all the subscribers' podcast services (such as iTunes) are automatically notified and download the programme to their computer's hard drive. The podcast can then be either listened to on the computer or downloaded onto an MP3 player, such as an iPod.

Naturally the advent of the podcast has also meant that media brands have been able to invade one another's traditional territory. Many national newspapers in the UK have started effectively producing their own radio-style programmes and distributing them via their previously text-and-picture based websites. Channel 4 has also launched its own audio/podcasting brand, [4Radio](#).



iTunes podcast section

YAHOO! My Yahoo! Mail Music

YAHOO! PODCASTS beta

Search Help:

Enter keywords to search help.

Yahoo! Podcasts > [Yahoo! Podcasts Help](#)

Podcasts 101

- Getting Started
- Do I need an iPod or an MP3 player to listen to podcasts?
- Do I need special software to listen to podcasts on my computer?

Subscribing

- How do I subscribe?
- Podcasts in the Yahoo! Music Engine
- Podcasts in Apple iTunes
- Podcasts in Windows Media Player, Winamp, and Other Programs

Tags

- What are tags?
- What should tags be about?
- How do I add tags to a podcast?
- Why should I add a tag if it's already listed?

Troubleshooting

- When I click "Listen," nothing happens.
- The file I'm trying to listen to doesn't seem to work.

Publishing 101

- I don't know what to talk about in my podcast.
- How can I make my MP3 file smaller?
- What is web hosting?
- What are some of my web hosting options?
- What is FTP, and how do I use it?
- What is RSS?
- Guide to Publishing RSS
- What are some podcast directories where I can list my podcast?
- What kind of copyright protection do I have over my content?
- What legal considerations should I consider when creating my own podcast?
- What is podsafe music, and where can I find some?
- Where can I learn more about podcast publishing?

Advanced Publishing

- How frequently does Y! update the index?

Top Questions

- When I click "Listen," nothing happens.
- The file I'm trying to listen to doesn't seem to work.
- How do I make sure I'm showing up in Search Results?
- How frequently does Y! update the index?
- What fields should I include in my Podcast #RSS feed?

Related Links

- Visit Yahoo! Podcasts Help for more questions and answers about Yahoo! Podcasts.
- Visit Yahoo! Help Central for more information on Yahoo! products.

Yahoo Podcasts

Getting started with podcasts

If you already have an iPod and use iTunes you can click on the Podcast icon in the left-hand toolbar to access podcasts and subscribe to them.

Other good places to find and start listening to podcasts are [Podcast Alley](#) and [Yahoo! Podcasts](#)

If you fancy trying your hand at creating your own podcast, download the free audio editing tool [Audacious](#) or have a look at the 'how to' guide at [wikiHow](#).

How forums work...

Internet forums are the longest established form of online social media. They most commonly exist around specific topics and interests, for example cars or music.

Each discussion in a forum is known as a thread, and many different threads can be active simultaneously. This makes forums good places to find and engage in a variety of detailed discussions. They are often built into websites as an added feature, but some exist as stand-alone entities.

Forums can be places for lively, vociferous debate, for seeking advice on a subject, for sharing news, for flirting, or simply for whiling away time with idle chat. In other words, their huge variety reflects that of face-to-face conversations.

The sites are moderated by an administrator, whose role it is to remove unsuitable posts or spam. However, a moderator will not lead or guide the discussion. This is a major difference between forums and blogs. Blogs have a clear owner, whereas a forum's threads are started by its members.

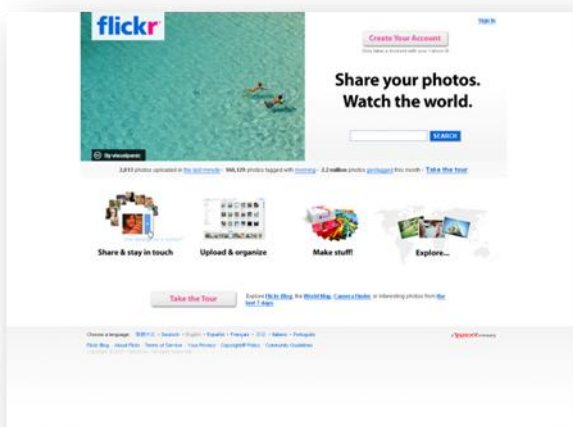
Forums have a strong sense of community. Some are very enclosed, existing as 'islands' of online social activity with little or no connection to other forms of social media. This may be because forums were around long before the term 'social media' was coined, and in advance of any of the other types of community we associate with the term.

In any event, they remain hugely popular, often with membership in the hundreds of thousands. Forum search engine [BoardTracker](#) monitors over 55 million conversation threads across almost 40,000 forums⁸, and it is by no means a comprehensive index.

⁸ BoardTracker <http://www.boardtracker.com/>

How content communities work...

Content communities look a bit like social networks – you have to register, you get a home page and you can make connections with friends. However, they are focussed on sharing a particular type of content.



For example, [Flickr](#) is based around sharing photography and is the most popular service of its kind in the UK. Members upload their photos to the site and choose whether to make them public or just share with family and friends in their network.

Thousands of groups have formed on Flickr around areas of common interest. There are groups dedicated to particular graffiti artists, towns, sports and animals. If you work for a reasonably well-known brand it is worth taking a look to see

if there is a Flickr group about you – there are groups for motorbike brands, consumer electronics brands and even the cult notebook brand Moleskine. As testament to its enormous success, Flickr was bought by Yahoo! in 2005 for an estimated US \$30 million⁹.

[YouTube](http://www.youtube.com) is the world's largest video sharing service, with over 100 million videos viewed every day. Members of YouTube can upload videos or create their own "channels" of favourite videos. The viral nature of YouTube videos is enhanced by a feature that makes it easy for people to cut and paste videos hosted by YouTube directly into their blogs.

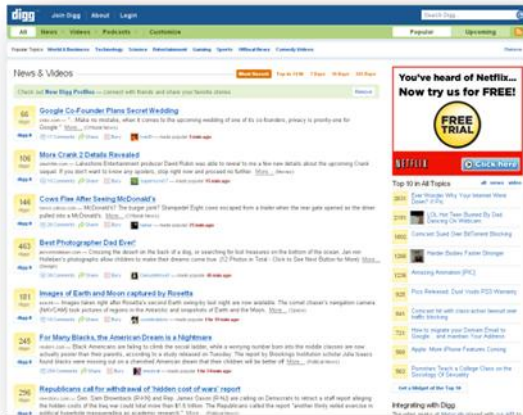


As well as thousands of short films from people's own video cameras, webcams and camera phones, there are many clips from TV shows and movies hosted on the service. Some people also use the service to record video blogs.

⁹ CNN
http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2005/12/01/8364623/

YouTube started as a small private company, but was bought by Google for \$1.65 billion in October 2006.¹⁰

[Digg](#) is a news and content community. Members submit links to news stories that they think will be of interest and these are voted on by other members. Once a story has garnered about a critical number of votes (the number varies according to how busy the site is) it will be moved to the front page where it will receive wider attention from members as well as more casual visitors to the site.



Digg claims to receive 20 million unique visitors every month, and certainly the volume of traffic via popular links from the service is so great that it can cause smaller companies' servers to crash.

As with other social media platforms, rumours of acquisition deals and massive valuations for the service are flying around, but it remains independent and relatively small in terms of the number of employees (around 40).

¹⁰ BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6034577.stm>

Folksonomies

Content communities often display characteristics of what are known as **folksonomies**. The term folksonomy refers to the way that information is organised - it is a play on the word taxonomy, a classification system.

In a folksonomy the information or content is “tagged” with one-word descriptors. Anyone can add a tag to a piece of content and see what other people have tagged, too.

For instance, del.icio.us, a bookmark-sharing service that replaces the favourites folder on your web browser, is a prime example of a folksonomy. Content communities such as Flickr, YouTube and blogs generally make use of the folksonomy approach of tagging content to make it more easily found.

Music folksonomies have proved particularly popular. Services such as last.fm let you tag tracks as you listen to them, and search and link to music based on other people’s tags.

How micro-blogging works...

Micro-blogging is tool that combines elements of blogging with instant messaging and social networking.

The clear leader in the micro-blogging field is [Twitter](#) with over 340,000 users¹¹. Other notable micro-blogging players include [Pownce](#) and [Jaiku](#), which offer various different features, but for the purposes of this e-book it makes sense to focus on the Twitter format.

Twitter users can send messages of up to 140 characters instantly to multiple platforms. 90% of Twitter interactions¹² are not made via the Twitter website, but via mobile text message, Instant Messaging, or a desktop application such as [Twitterific](#). Its flexibility is further enhanced by the ability to subscribe to updates via RSS.

Uses of Twitter vary. It's popular among homeworkers and freelancers, who use it in part as a 'virtual watercooler'. Other people use it simply to stay in touch with a close network and share thoughts or start conversations.

Its suitability as a vehicle for breaking news has encouraged the BBC and CNN to introduce Twitter feeds. Even candidates for the US Presidency have taken to Twitter (for example, [Barack Obama](#)).

An important feature to note is that Twitter can be indexed via Google. As with so much on the web, it's a public platform, so it's worth remembering that as such your use of it may become part of your 'permanent record'.

¹¹ Twitter facts <http://twitterfacts.blogspot.com/2007/07/number-of-twitter-users.html>

¹² D.construct 07
<http://dconstruct07.backnetwork.com/feeds/default.aspx?listtype=full&contributor=philwhitehouse>

How Second Life works...

One of the biggest online marvels to capture the imagination of the traditional media is [Second Life](#). It's an online computer game, but is perhaps better understood as an online virtual world. By registering and downloading the software, you can enter the game world and create an 'avatar' – an in-game representation of yourself.

Since Second Life encourages community and social interaction, some consider it to be a form of social media,



although like so much in the new forms of online media it could very well be considered as a category of its own.

More than 10 million Second Life user accounts have been created, and around 1.5 million residents log in to the virtual

world every month. Over 1 million US dollars are spent in Second Life each day.¹³

That last figure, perhaps the most surprising to those unfamiliar with Second Life, is down to the functioning economy that exists in the virtual world. This is made possible by the ability to own private property within the game and by setting an exchange rate between the game's currency and the US dollar (approximately 270 "Linden dollars" to the US dollar).

In fact, Second Life created its first millionaire in November 2006, when Anshe Chung amassed virtual assets worth one million US dollars.

Marketers are beginning to experiment with the game world too. Toyota has launched in-game models to promote its 'Scion' range, while Peugeot has invited gamers to try a recent model on a virtual racetrack, built to coincide with the Frankfurt Motor Show.

During its 2006 Big Weekend festival, BBC Radio 1 had a stage in Second Life with avatars of presenters and bands performing – anyone visiting the concert received a virtual digital radio that they could listen to Radio 1 on in the virtual world.

Doubtless a large part of the marketing benefit from these in-game presences really comes from the publicity in the non-virtual world that these generate, but these are intriguing precedents for marketers.

¹³ Reuters <http://secondlife.reuters.com/>

What next?

Whether we are still using MySpace or Second Life in two, five or ten year's time is anyone's guess.

The unique way that the internet continually improves in response to user experience is driving innovation on an unprecedented scale.

There will doubtless be exciting new variants on current formats, and perhaps innovations that come to be thought of as new forms of social media. They will develop in response to our appetite for new ways to communicate and to the increasingly flexible ways that we can go online.

That's the detail – impossible to predict. What is beyond doubt is that social media – however it may be referred to in the future – is a genie that will not be disappearing back into its bottle.

About iCrossing

iCrossing, formerly known as Spannerworks in the UK, is a global digital marketing company that combines talent and technology to help world-class brands attract, engage with and acquire customers.

The company connects digital marketing services – including paid and natural search marketing, social media and content, display and creative, user experience and web development – to create digital marketing strategies that deliver compelling brand experiences and unrivalled ROI.

iCrossing works with world-class brands including Coca Cola, HBOS, TUI and Virgin. Founded in 1997, the agency employs over 550 people worldwide with over 100 people in the UK.

Find out more at www.icrossing.co.uk or contact us on +44 (0)1273 828100 or results@icrossing.co.uk.

About the author

Antony Mayfield is head of content & media at iCrossing. He leads a team which has developed pioneering approaches to marketing and communications online.

Among the innovations to have come out of the team is the [Network Sense Mapping](#) tool, which allows analysts to build visual representations of how brands are connected to social networks and other websites online. The team has also developed the [Social Spaces Framework](#), an industry-leading approach for large organisations engaging with online networks.

Prior to joining iCrossing to establish its content & media division in 2006, Antony worked in corporate and brand communications for over a decade, most recently as a director in the Bell Pottinger Group, in its technology specialist brand, Harvard. There he worked with leading technology firms such as Vodafone, Sony Playstation and Fujitsu Services, while also working across Bell Pottinger raising awareness of social media's impact on marketing communications.

He is a regular public speaker on issues around social media and marketing, and writes on his personal blog [Open \(Minds, Finds, Conversations\)](#), [Brand Republic](#) and iCrossing's [Search Sense](#) and is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA).

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Glossary

| Term | Definition |
|------------------------|--|
| Blog | Originally 'web log', a website where the most recent entries appear first, typically allowing users to subscribe to updates and to leave comments. |
| Bookmarks, bookmarking | Saving an item, page or website for future reference, increasingly via an online account such as del.icio.us . Works in a similar way to the 'favourites' feature of a web browser. |
| Communities | Online networks that exist around shared interests or shared content. |
| Content communities | Communities which organise around and share particular kinds of content. Popular content communities exist around photos (Flickr), bookmarked links (del.icio.us), news (Digg) and videos (YouTube). |
| Instant Messaging (IM) | A form of real-time communication via the internet between two or more people based on typed text, for example Google Talk . |
| Mash-up | A hybrid web application combining content from two or more different data sources, for example data added to Google Maps . |
| Micro-blogging | Instant publishing of bite-size amounts of content via a service such as Twitter . |
| Podcast | Audio files that are published on the internet and can be subscribed to. Podcasts sometimes refer to video files, although these are now also known specifically as vodcasts. |
| RSS (Really Simple) | A method of subscribing to a site's content and being alerted to new updates without visiting the |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Syndication) | site, either through the user's web browser or an RSS aggregator (for example Bloglines). |
| Second Life | The best-known 'virtual world', in which users can move around and interact with one another and the environment as 3D characters (avatars). |
| Social media | Media that users can easily participate in, share and create content for, including blogs, social networks, wikis, forums and virtual worlds. |
| Social networks | Channels through which individuals can interact socially. Successful online examples include Facebook , MySpace and Bebo . |
| Tags, tagging | Keywords that label pieces of content (for instance blog posts, bookmarks) and make them easy to organise and search. |
| Technorati ranking | A blog's authority, as measured by blog tracking website Technorati . |
| Twitter | A micro-blogging service that distributes bite-sized chunks of text across multiple platforms, including mobile, instant messaging and email. Messages are often status updates about what a user is doing. |
| Virtual Worlds | An online environment in which people can interact with each other and the environment as 3D characters (avatars). |
| Vodcast | Video files that are published on the internet and can be subscribed to, a derivative of podcasts (audio files). |
| Wiki | A collaborative website that anyone with access can directly edit. The best-known example is Wikipedia . |

Source: iCrossing Social Media Terminology

Useful Websites

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Apple iTunes | http://www.apple.com/itunes/ |
| Audacious | http://audacious-media-player.org/ |
| Bebo | http://www.bebo.com/ |
| Blogger | https://www.blogger.com/start |
| Bloglines | http://www.bloglines.com/ |
| Boardtracker | http://www.boardtracker.com/ |
| del.icio.us | http://del.icio.us/ |
| Digg | http://digg.com/ |
| Facebook | http://www.facebook.com |
| Flickr | http://www.flickr.com/ |
| 4Radio | https://www.channel4radio.com/ |
| Google Blog Search | http://blogsearch.google.com/ |
| Google Earth | http://earth.google.com/ |
| Google Talk | http://www.google.com/talk/ |
| iCrossing | http://www.icrossing.com/ |
| Jaiku | http://www.jaiku.com/ |
| JotSpot | http://www.jot.com/ |
| Last.fm | http://www.last.fm/ |
| LinkedIn | http://www.linkedin.com/ |
| MySpace | http://www.myspace.com/ |
| Newsqator | http://www.newsqator.com/home.aspx |
| Open | http://open.typepad.com/open/ |
| Podcast Alley | http://www.podcastalley.com/ |
| Pownce | http://www.pownce.com/ |
| Rojo | http://www.rojo.com/today/ |

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| SearchSense | http://www.icrossing.co.uk/search-sense/ |
| Second Life | http://secondlife.com/ |
| Socialtext | http://www.socialtext.com/ |
| iCrossing | http://www.icrossing.co.uk/ |
| Technorati | http://technorati.com/ |
| Twitter | http://twitter.com/ |
| Twitterific | http://iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific |
| TypePad | http://www.typepad.com/ |
| Wikia | http://www.wikia.com/wiki/Wikia |
| wikiHow | http://www.wikihow.com |
| Wikinews | http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Main_Page |
| Wikipedia | http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page |
| Windows Live | http://home.live.com/?mkt=en-gb |
| Wordpress | http://wordpress.org/ |
| Yahoo! Podcasts | http://podcasts.yahoo.com/ |
| YouTube | http://www.youtube.com/ |