

Social Media

## 'Like' Is Beautiful?

Jonathan Kish , 05.20.10, 11:45 AM EDT

**Marketers should take pause before embracing Facebook's "Like" button.**

Jonathan Kish

With Facebook approaching 500 million users worldwide, a virtual battle of giants is brewing between Facebook and **Google**--a battle over users, and more important, over data. Facebook's revenue is still dwarfed by Google's, but it appears Facebook is slowly gaining the upper hand in terms of valuable user data.



Thanks to recent developments, the site might collect [user information](#) that no other company, even **Google** ( [GOOG - news - people](#) ), has been able to collect so far. As part of its quest for better targeting data, Facebook realized it had to spread out and escape the social channel--and it seems the Open Graph will put Facebook Connect to shame.

Here's a snapshot of the different approaches the two rivals are taking (granted, Google has been trying to crack the social graph, but with limited success thus far):

Facebook's expanding universe poses a true dilemma for marketers and publishers, and the cost/benefit equation should be carefully examined. On the one hand, since any "Like" on a site then appears on a user's feed, the universal "Like" button has the potential of sending more traffic back to the original site, giving

publishers an incentive to put (more) Facebook buttons on their pages.

Traffic might further increase thanks to the fact that Web users can now signify their preference for a brand by "Liking" the page that represents it on Yelp, for example, not just on the official brand page.

Furthermore, as users get a more personalized experience thanks to the social media giant's social plug-ins, satisfaction levels should rise, resulting in more time spent on sites and possibly more visits (again, more traffic). All of this points to more site engagement for marketers, and advertising revenue potential for publishers.

But implementing Facebook's plug-ins comes with a price. Technically the sites are giving Facebook data from their own real estate (to use Facebook's words), and cannot see the data in that piece of real estate.

[CNN](#), for example, does not actually see the Facebook plugin activity--this resides in an iframe box that's on the site for Facebook to populate. CNN doesn't know who the user is or who his or her friends are--Facebook does. The contextual marketing, the personalization, is done by Facebook, not the site. Users might credit CNN with the improved experience, and that's great, but that's just part of the equation.



The question here is one of control: Do you give up control of the social element of your site to Facebook? For sites with no built-in social features, this might be an easy choice--it's an instant way for them to move into social arenas. But for sites that already rely on their own social features, this is more complicated. The implication is losing actual control over the site's social elements: Facebook will own all the data.

Marketers and publishers need to look for ways to tap into the rich data that is being accumulated on their own real estate, or else become blind to it (interestingly, it seems that

so far publishers aren't too concerned: 50,000 of them implemented Facebook's new social plug-ins within a week of the launch).

Marketers should also be cognizant of the personalization/privacy trade-off Facebook's changes offer for users. For some, the plug-ins might prove extremely useful, for others, plain creepy.

Finally, the new link between likes/interests and pages will result in yet more data entering users' feed streams. That added data might easily be viewed as spam, rendering the freshly installed "Like" buttons useless.

### Recommendations For Marketers

Examine the role of each element in your digital ecosystem. What is now the role of your site? What is the role of distributed content? Now that the two can be so easily connected, should they be connected? What would the connection serve?

Take a hard look at your real estate. Do you have social elements? Are those features strong enough? Should you go your own way, and invest in strengthening them--or do you try to leverage Facebook's social plug-ins? Remember, this might not be a "make or buy" question, but a "make or sell/give away" one. In light of Facebook's changes it's more important than ever to have your own digital assets, in the form of customer relationships and data.

If you take the Facebook route, test and learn. Test the social plug-ins to see which ones work for you--that is, which generate more valuable traffic. Iterate and optimize page placements, sizes and copy. Make sure your users don't freak out in the process.

Also, if you take the Facebook route, make sure you are privy to the data collected on your real estate. Ownership of user data (and the ability to analyze and manipulate it) is the most important issue here. The data gathered matters both for virtual real estate (traffic and revenues) and for physical [brand equity](#) (since data learnings could have implications on physical-world marketing).

If you wish to explore even more, consider the possibility of implementing the deep instant personalization tool. Facebook has not revealed its intentions regarding partner base expansion, but that expansion seems likely.

If you don't take the Facebook route, you'd better have a social strategy. It should include much more than media strategy, and it should include a vision beyond Facebook (that's right, being on Facebook does not constitute a social media strategy). Take the time, invest the money and prepare yourself for organizational change.

On second thought, even if you do take the Facebook route, you need a social strategy. In contrast to the recent language change (from Fan to Like), this is much more than an ad copy or fan page vocabulary issue. This is about your social strategy.

Facebook's slew of changes will transform the web. Marketers should take the time to make sense of the barrage of announcements, and find their place in the new, uber-social Web.

***Jonathan Kish is executive vice president and director of strategy, MRM Worldwide.***