

Whilst many leading, tech savvy brands have wholeheartedly embraced the concept of social networking; understanding the value of an effective social media strategy and executing efficient strategies, there are many, who whilst recognising the necessity of developing their social networking presence are not fully aware of the best way of going about it.

While just about the whole world is tweeting or poking, brands looking to develop an effective social media offering need to recognise it's simply not enough to have a presence. Twittering here and fan pages there can only go so far. The key is an integrated offering with which your audience can fully engage.

The value of creating a brand focussed experience is at the heart of brand extension and interaction. It allows the brand itself, as well as the consumer, a different kind of engagement. There is a richness that is often limited on the larger sites. While free sites may allow companies and brands a wider reach, they offer very little in the form of actual control or feedback. As a consequence, many companies are opting for a combination of approaches - and in the case of Reality Digital, this included partnering with Facebook Connect (a Facebook platform which allows companies and brands to join Facebook with a branded site).

The benefits of this approach are clear. The Facebook Connect integration allows users of Reality Digital's Opus and Harmony social media platforms to connect a customer's niche community directly to Facebook's social network, offering users the ability to interact with their Facebook accounts, friends and content. It is indeed this level of integration that is key to effective brand extension in the social media world. Integrated free and branded social networks can be a far more effective approach for companies than opting for one or the other. The results and benefits are clear; the Facebook Connect integration means from a customer's standpoint they can be in any of their digital environments, or in Facebook and have access to the same things, the same network of people, and the same content"

However a note of caution needs to be sounded here, whilst Facebook Connect and other social colonisation tools clearly reduce barriers to entry for the user and this should in turn, aid interaction and data portability as a whole, the rub for the publisher is that:

They are not collecting user registrations and unique user data for themselves, thus these tools could ultimately reduce the overall market value of their proposition.

From an audience perspective, this level of integration is expected and in many cases demanded. It is about speaking the same language as your audience and given that the markets with the most buying power right now and the most coveted, are the teen and young

and recognising how to speak to your audience. However I still believe that regardless of how well you organise your social media outreach activity, every brand and publisher needs to create a 'home' to bring your social media converts back too.

Expect significant developments in this area. Integration tools and new methods will continue to grow but as a brand, now is the time to get involved. And get integrated. ☺

by
**Robert
Proctor**

“The value of creating a brand focussed experience is at the heart of brand extension and interaction.”

adult groups of 16-25 year olds, it is imperative that you are able to provide what are regarded by this audience as the bare necessities.

Brand loyalty happens over time. However, the real value of offering this integrated approach, combining the two types of network, is in more easily reaching your target audience. If they already have a Facebook page and they're able to carry that with them without worrying about signing into a network again, it's only going to increase their willingness to participate.

Many brands are doing just that, but there is still a long way to go. Having an effective social media strategy is not just developing a profile here or sending a tweet there. It's about integration, ease of offering

About Reality Digital

Reality Digital, Inc. helps businesses drive brand recognition, engagement and revenue through white-label social media solutions that deliver custom online communities rich in digital media, user generated content and social networking capabilities. Reality Digital products include Reality Digital Opus™, a full-service social media platform for enterprises, and Reality Digital Harmony, a self-service, entry-level social media platform for small businesses and projects. Reality Digital customers include leading global brands in media, entertainment, sports, travel and retail. Founded in 2003, Reality Digital has offices in San Francisco and London.

Integration is
Key to Brand
Extension

» **Robert Proctor** | Head of EMEA, Reality Digital | www.realitydigital.com