

Social networks – where content and brands collide

By [Stanley Edwards](#)

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MIPTV, CANNES, FRANCE: Day four at MIPTV was dedicated to the world of social networks and included presentations from MySpace, Bebo and YouTube. As MIPTV is primarily a content market, many delegates were looking at these platforms as a place where their content could be viewed legally and monetised, which has unfortunately not been the case.



With MySpace having over 2 million users, for brands and advertisers, these social networks offer huge audiences for their marketing messages, but as with mobile, it needs a different approach.



Facebook learnt this the hard way where the community rejected and was even outraged by its first attempts to include marketing within the Facebook, thanks to a pretty objectionable notification system: When Facebook members purchased items on certain external sites, their friends were notified of the transactions, often without their permission.

With regards products and services, research indicates that consumers would rather believe a total stranger in an Internet chat room than a 30 second TV spot. Social communities are about interaction and sharing. We're dealing with the first generation that has grown up with the Internet and they are used to controlling and shaping their media experience and will reject traditional advertising – especially if it isn't relevant to them. The Internet has evolved into a cultural platform and brands need to insert content into the dialogue and become part of the online conversation. It's about engagement

marketing and most of the social networks have taken a branded entertainment or advertiser-funded content approach, which has worked extremely well.

Integrate in credible way

These social networks are approaching very eager brands to fund and be integrated into content in a credible way. These are taking a 'soap opera' approach, with series such as Roommates, Kate Modern and Sophia's Diary. Roommates is funded by Ford and includes product placement and brand integration and, because the experience, is online allows for direct links to Ford's website and product offering.



Social networks can also be used very effectively for product development. By asking the community what they think of your product or service and how it can be improved, they'll not only take ownership of a brand but would recommend it to their friends and family. Social networks are about brands communicating and not advertising. The communities are very brand-conscious and brand-loyal and brands reflect who they are.

YouTube has an ad revenue share model with its users and a good example is a regular mom in the UK who offers make-up advice and tips. Using a basic video camera and edit suite in her home she advises the community on how to create the

Amy Winehouse look, party styles and how to look after your skin. Brand integration is obvious and demonstrates how these social networks do want brand advice and not brand advertising.

Needs to be done properly

There is a great opportunity for brands within social networks. The networks themselves understand this and can deliver huge audiences, peer referral and viral sharing, but it needs to be done properly, with an understanding as to how these networks operate and communicate as opposed to traditional advertising.

ABOUT STANLEY EDWARDS

Stanley Edwards is director of Platypus Productions (www.platypus.co.za). Hot on the heels of his visit to MPTV, Stanley will be speaking at Ogilvy South Africa's Verge conference on 15 April in Johannesburg. Verge will be attended by 350 Ogilvy staff and clients and his presentation will be serving as a feedback session on information gathered at MPTV. Following the Verge Conference, Stanley will also be making an appearance as a speaker at The Marketing Show (www.marketing-show.com) being held in Johannesburg, 15 – 16 April 2008, covering branded entertainment specifically.

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