

You can't swing a dead cat these days without hitting social media. Actually, you can't hit social media without seeing cats. They're in funny videos, on robot vacuums and befriending dogs. But how did we get here? How did social media become such a big part of our lives? And, funny cats aside, how can it help us here in the lab? Let's get social.

SOCIAL MEDIA: WHAT'S ALL THE HULLABALOO?

Some contend that the first form of social media happened amongst cavemen and cavewomen around the campfire. Technically, however, that was really just an early form of networking that evolved into press-the-flesh happy hours and trade show hospitality suites.

Social media, on the other hand, officially became a thing in 1997 with a website called SixDegrees.com. (It has nothing to do with Kevin Bacon.) Today, nearly three-quarters of online adults use social media; that number jumps to 90% when you narrow the field to 18-29-year-olds. How did this happen? Well, let's take a step back.

Humans have spent centuries advancing communication. Consider Samuel Morse who sent the first telegraph in 1844 from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore. And the Internet, which forever changed our connectivity. Early on, CompuServe developed a network to support an insurance company and took nearly a decade to expand from a business-focused dial-up to a consumer product called Micro NET in 1979. The military, of course, was using ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) as early as 1969 when the first message sent across the platform was "LO," transmitted from UCLA



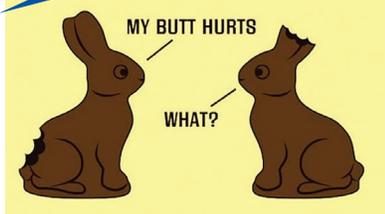
to the Stanford Research Center. Turns out, the intended message was actually "LOGIN," but the system crashed halfway through. No word on whether there was cussing at the time or just a massive reboot, but it's good to know there's a long history of malfunctions.

While those early systems are now obsolete, a network that started in 1979 still lingers. Usenet was organized into various newsgroups where users could follow along with long conversation threads, a precursor to modern-day Reddit. The service also

takes credit for coining now-familiar terms like FAQ and spam. Much of Usenet's legacy still lives on in Google's archives, since Google acquired that database in 2001. Feel free to fact-check that. And then, of course, there are the LISTSERVs that were popularized in the 80s and AOL Instant Messenger, aka AIM, which debuted in 1997 and had 18 million users in its heyday.

But back to SixDegrees.com, the first social network site, which lasted from 1997 to 2001. It was based on the "Web of contacts" model of social networking and named for the concept of 'six degrees of separation.' Users were allowed to list friends, family members and acquaintances; they could then post

"Being famous on Instagram is basically the same thing as being rich in Monopoly."



Phun with physics

Due to the effect of Thermal Expansion, the Eiffel Tower is up to 15 cm taller in summer.

The world's densest wood, the Black Ironwood (*Olea laurifolia*), does not float on water and therefore sinks.

The amount of water below ground is 50 times as much as all the water in the rivers and lakes combined.

An atom is more than 99.9% empty space.

On average, our bodies constantly resist an atmospheric pressure of about 1 kg per square cm.

The only rock that floats in water is pumice.

If you yelled for 8 years, 7 months and 6 days, you would have produced just enough sound energy to heat up one cup of coffee.

When glass breaks, the cracks move at speeds of more than 3,000 mph.

A rubber band shrinks when heated and expands when cooled because of the change in its entropy state.

bulletin board items or send messages to people in their first, second or third degree of connection. At its peak, SixDegrees had about 100 employees and around 3.5 million registered members. Many hallmarks of this service still exist today.

More successful social networking sites, based on the “Social-circles network model” soon followed, including Friendster, Myspace, LinkedIn, XING and the ubiquitous Facebook. Which would, in turn, lead to hosts of other social media sites including Second Life, Digg, Reddit, Tumbler, Instagram, Google Plus, Snap, Vine, Four Square, Yik Yak, Meerkat, Periscope, Pinterest, YouNow and the also ubiquitous Twitter. And that’s just as of this week.

But why?

What is it about social media that makes it so appealing? In 2012, a Harvard University study examined the psyche of social media usage. Through a series of experiments, researchers discovered that the act of self-disclosure activates the same part of the brain that is associated with the sensation of pleasure. Specifically, the same pleasure that we get from eating food, getting money or even having sex. Which really makes you stop and think about your most recent status update, doesn’t it?

Clearly, social media isn’t going anywhere. So how can you use it to your advantage? Let’s start with a brief review of the ‘big four,’ or the most common channels.

Facebook is the biggest, most powerful social network in the world with 1.55 billion active monthly users. Companies employ Facebook to have conversations with customers, prospects and other stakeholders. If you’re so

inclined, connect with Geotechnics on Facebook and see what you’ve been missing.

LinkedIn is regarded as the professional social networking site. Here at Geotechnics, this is where we have our largest social community. Thank you to all 3,675 of you, including the 225 new friends we’ve made since the beginning of the year. Often a good source of professional information and job opportunities, LinkedIn is a great way to keep on top of trends in our industry.

Twitter is known as the “in the moment” platform and boasts a healthy 255 million active monthly users.

Instagram, where a picture is worth a thousand words, is a visual platform designed for customers to post, share, comment and engage through digital media.

Social strategies

For anyone wanting to make the most of social media, there are a few good rules of thumb to consider, just as with any strategic marketing:

Set goals

- Know your audience
- Choose the channel or channels that work best for your audience
- Measure and test

As people who spend a lot of time in the lab measuring and testing, not enough can be said about learning what works (and just as importantly, what doesn’t). And when in doubt, ask your audience. So, it seems like a perfect time to ask you, oh faithful reader, what matters most to you? Connect with us on Facebook and LinkedIn to let us know.



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