New Breed of Social Sites: Visual Social Content

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In this essay I outline the distinctive features of a new breed of interest-based social sites, and then recommend the adoption of these features for domain name monetization.

Facebook's IPO valuation of about $100 billion is the most obvious testament to the growing importance of social Web sites. But the explosion in this space over the past two years has been led by the phenomenal growth of Pinterest. (For the evolution of social Web sites, see the Eland Blog.) Pinterest is typical of the "pin-boards," or social curation sites, with such features as:

1. Visual content driven by photo pin-ups.

2. A focus on users' particular interests. This makes for a markedly different focus and approach than Facebook, which focuses on deepening users' personal relationships. A site like Pinterest creates what technologists call an "interest graph," in contrast to Facebook's "social graph." For example, Pinterest uses the topics "Products I Love" and "For the Home," but you can create your own topics too. Content is not chronological (as on Facebook) and therefore not time dependent. But a number of pin-board sites, wanting to raise awareness of their services and attract users, have adopted Facebook's Timeline API. The interest-based sites and Facebook are complementary, not substitutes for one another, and as these new services grow they pump more content back to Facebook.

3. Ease of creating and finding content that interests a given user. The first is especially important because most people don't like to spend time creating content. They prefer to just consume it, as evidenced by the typical 80/20 distribution (80% of content is produced by 20% of users).

4. Careful avoidance of the copyright issues of shared photos.

It still isn't too late to get on the band wagon, as evidenced by the number of new start-ups such as Snip.it, canv.us, Fab.com (which is commerce driven), and flipboard. ∎