

What the Web Will Be Like with Facebook's "Like"

You're going to like it.

A whole lot of people spent last week freaking out about Facebook's new "instant personalization" features. Most of these freakouts came from users panicking about the privacy implications of Facebook sharing their (public) information with third party sites. A smaller percentage of these freakouts came from analysts realizing that as soon as users understand the benefits of instant personalization, we're all about to start using the internet in a completely novel way.

Marketers, start listening to this second group, because Facebook is on the verge of something *big*. Let's look a little deeper, shall we?

By now, most of us are familiar with the concept of "liking" (formerly "fanning") something on Facebook. You can "like" public figures like Louis CK or hobbies such as bowling. You can "like" brands like Corona or marketing powerhouses like **Upshot**. And you can "like" important causes like saving the environment or completely banal things such as **not being on fire** (quite a bold statement!). When you choose to "like" any of these things, you also notify your Facebook network, so "liking" Nickelback will broadcast your (inexplicably awful) taste to your peers (and probably explain why they've stopped talking to you).

But, there's more to that news stream than just the things you've "liked" within Facebook. With the arrival of Facebook Connect (which we covered in **a prior Potty Posting**), other sites can broadcast your tastes *back* to Facebook, so your peers can learn that you gave Paris Hilton's *The Hottie and the Nottie* a 10/10 on Netflix. (Have I introduced you to the aforementioned Nickelback guy? You two would really hit it off.)

These features have enabled Facebook to become the king of social media (with 400 million members, and growing), but most of this information heads in one direction. Users declare that they "like" something, and it ends up in their news stream on Facebook.com, along with photos, and videos, Farmville triumphs, and... you get the idea. It gets lost in the clutter, rather than forming a piece of a larger profile about our tastes and preferences.



But what if things were different? What if that one-way exchange turned into a loop? What if "liking" The Hopleaf meant that when I visit Yelp, the site would prioritize a recommendation for another craft brew mecca like The Map Room? What if "liking" both of those bars meant that when I visit a travel website, I would be directed to a page that tells me the best bars for craft beer across the United States? And, if I "liked" those bars... well, hopefully Facebook would steer me to a health spa, since I'd be in need of some serious detoxification by then.

But setting aside my personal problems, don't you think that this scenario would be a better internet experience for everyone?

It would. And that's what "instant personalization" is all about: *personalizing sites around the web according to your interests* and the recommendations of your Facebook network. That little "like" button is the key. *The like button can now be added to any page on the web*, allowing Facebook to harness what you "like" on *any* site (for example, you can now "like" any of the articles on **theawesomeblog.net**). Then, Facebook shares this data with trusted partners to personalize your experience on *their* sites. For instance, the streaming music site Pandora can now analyze all the bands you've "liked" in order to create a playlist customized to your tastes. Pandora, in turn, can share this information with concert listing sites like SonicLiving and let you know if any bands you "like" are coming to town. In other words, *all the websites you are visiting have become instantly personalized*.



For marketers, this is big news. Our customers want *personalized, customized, relevant* interactions with our brands, which have been relatively tough to deliver. But, our consumers are about to start telling us a *lot* about their interests, and we will have the opportunity to deliver targeted, valuable messaging in an absolutely unprecedented manner. For our clients, the future could look something like these (purely speculative) examples:

- If someone generally "likes" online recipes that are healthy and can be prepared in under 30 minutes, Kraft can prioritize these recipes when this person visits kraftrecipes.com or uses the iFood Assistant.
- If a business traveler "likes" college sports stories, Gogo Inflight Internet can deliver messaging on their portal page that reminds this person to keep up on his or her favorite teams while in the air.
- If a Disney Vacation Club member "likes" the outdoors, DVC can emphasize their resorts that feature more natural surroundings.

We could continue with similar hypotheticals for each of our brands, but so could you. And that's the point. If there was one overarching takeaway from this year's SXSW Interactive conference, it was *the willingness for these tech companies to let marketers get under their hoods*. The Facebooks of the world are creating technology solutions without really knowing which problems they can solve, while we have expert insights into our consumers' needs and wants. Someone turn on the Barry White, 'cause this is a marketing marriage that needs to be consummated! **We've seen it happening with Foursquare, we've heard Twitter calling for it**, and now, Facebook will be on the prowl for partners who can imagine the potential of "the social graph." It's not about determining which service is "the hot one" and jumping on the bandwagon; it's figuring out *which service has the data that can be harnessed for deep, meaningful customer interactions*. We "like" what we're seeing.

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