

# Facebook Value



**Toni Sant** goes from one to ten on the Facebook phenomenon

Facebook is a social networking website. It is one of many such sites but arguably it is the best and most popular of them all.

You may have never heard about it. In which case, you probably either do not use the Internet or use it only for very limited purposes. You may have heard about it but never bothered or had the time to look into it. If this describes you, then you are probably too busy doing other things to benefit from it anyway. You may already be an avid Facebook user. There are thousands of Maltese people on Facebook and it seems that it has quickly become the 'it' thing for the Internet as far as 2007 is concerned.

Whether you are already a Facebook user, a soon-to-be member, or even if you would rather just spend your time reading articles like this one in old print media, these are the 10 things about Facebook that you should know.

**1** Contrary to what some people may have you believe, I was not the first Maltese person on Facebook. The site has been around since 2004 when it was created by a student at Harvard University called Mark Zuckerberg. Initially it was restricted to students with education-related email addresses. I don't know the name of the first Maltese person on Facebook, but I have a feeling that person is the son or daughter of a second, third or fourth generation Maltese immigrant in North America. Naturally enough, there are thousands of people with Maltese surnames on Facebook who are Canadian or American.

**2** Facebook is not the largest social network on the web. MySpace still claims that spot and it appears that the two sites may soon establish themselves as the main ones to be reckoned with, leaving other contenders far behind. Interestingly though, you can be active on both MySpace and Facebook without missing out from one or the other. To my mind, Facebook seems a little more sophisticated than MySpace. This may have something to do with how each of these social networks started out. While Facebook came from within an education environment, MySpace has been a commercial concern since day one.

**3** Aside from registering for a free account and creating a basic profile with your name and basic personal details, Facebook is built around the idea that you can network with friends and friends of friends through personal messages, image tagging, information sharing, and all sorts of other fun and games.

**4** One of the more enticing aspects of Facebook is the ability to a current status announcement. This involves writing something after a preset phrase like "Toni is..." So, it's "Toni is at home or even "Toni is thinking about what to write in his status message."

**5** After accepting or requesting someone to be added to your list of Facebook friends, you can also join networks and groups.

Networks are usually either geographically based or associated with a place of work, university or similar organisation. These usually relate to groupings you are in already. By contrast, groups can be created by anyone and extend to the most deranged ideas. One created by Philip Serracino Inglott is called Tribali Hate Club, intended for people who like him cannot stand the music of this popular band.

**6** Facebook and other social networking sites are really useful for hooking up with old friends and staying in touch with others you could otherwise lose contact with. While I have reconnected with old schoolmates and teenage friends I hadn't heard from in eons through email and other online sources, with Facebook such reunions take place fairly regularly. I can also maintain contact with other friends who I would normally only see whenever we happen to be at the same public events. Through Facebook I get a fairly regular update about them through their profile feed. While this is hardly a chronicle to rival those written by 19th century men of letters, it is still an excellent way for us to stay present in each other's (online) lives without more intrusion than you'd expect from a casual friend.

**7** New friends are also available via Facebook too, of course. While they are not really resigned as dating sites, many social networking services are used to hook up with other people in search of either intimate companionship or casual sexual encounters. Facebook seems less of a free-for-all zone than sites like MySpace or hi5. These sites are not intended solely for such exchanges, like sexi or OkCupid, but they are used for whatever their members see fit. Facebook seems tame compared to other social networking sites.

**8** There are several entertaining application (known as apps) on Facebook. Playing pirates, vampires or werewolves is a bit too much a waste of time for my taste but hundreds of Maltese Facebook users indulge in this sort of activity along with thousands of other non-Maltese users. There are far too many entertaining apps to mention them all here. One of my personal favourites is Scarbulous, which enables you to play a version of the popular board game Scrabble with other Facebook users. You can play against your friends or even with other Facebook users you have never met before.

*continued on page 16*



**9** Concerns about identity theft and unwarranted personal harassment on Facebook are justified but easy to control. Compared to other online social networking sites, Facebook has excellent controls on limiting who sees what on your profile. Unless you are naïve or don't care who knows what about you, you can completely limit who sees more than just your name and where you generally come from.

**10** Like most other things on the Internet, it is best to try them out for yourself rather than read about them. Anyone who is already on Facebook would probably agree with this and say 'go on do it' to any Internet user who is still not into Facebook. ■

*Dr Toni Sant is lecturer in Performance & Creative Technologies at the University of Hull's School of Arts and New Media in Scarborough, North Yorkshire. His blog and weekly podcast can be found at [www.tonisant.com](http://www.tonisant.com)*

## Facebook Friends

**CORYSE BORG** Best thing since sliced bread to keep in touch with friends from all over the world and send them virtual presents and drinks.

**BEN FARRUGIA** I'm always on Facebook. Has anyone figured out how to drink all those cocktails? What a waste.

**NORBERT BUGEJA** A virtual waste of time, with a human face.

**GIANNI ZAMMIT** It makes me look good when I 'remember' birthdays.

**JO ANN VASSALLO** Facebook is everything, anything and everywhere.

**NIKI YOUNG** Facebook is the root of all evil I would say - if by evil one implies a necessary waste of time of course.

**LISA FALZON** It's a slow, badly designed website that's full of bugs. I can't think why it's so popular, save that it's a bit like social networking from the safety of your office chair.

**ALEX FRENDO** Keeping in touch, anywhere. Facebook is a godsend!

**IRA LOSCO** It's great for looking for people I'd forgotten to ask for a contact address.

**PIERRE MIZZI** Through Facebook I got in contact with friends I haven't seen in years and family members I never even knew I had. Imagine one day everyone will be on here. Wouldn't that be handy?

**PETER CARBONARO** I've been on Facebook before everyone else knew about it. It's a great way to keep in touch and to know the latest gossip.

**WOODY AKI** I got suckered into Facebook it by a friend. You got to be careful or it will take over your life...just like every social networking website does when you get too addicted to it.

**LILY AGIUS** It's good for keeping contact with friends from yesteryear and feel connected every day with everyone and their creative lives which I thrive on. I prefer its visual aspect too rather than normal emails.

**MARIO BRUNO** I already was on another 8 social networking sites, so why not add a ninth. I'm on it at home and work. Oops, that's most of my day.

**CHARLIE MANGION CHAMBERLAIN** World communication - beats all the other addictions.