

## What Value in Social Network Sites?

Social networking sites can be useful, but for most I think they offer a very poor return on the time you invest in them! In recent years we've seen the arrival of all sorts of "social networking" sites on the Internet. They seem to attract huge numbers, especially amongst the young and those who sell their products and services over the net. Many of these sites are free to join and use, and as a result have thousands of people signed up. I have no idea what percentage of people continue to make good use of these sites after joining, or what value they get from them if they do. Certainly though, it seems that many people who join the sites do not stay with them for long, and those that do find them to be more time consuming than time saving!

I therefore believe that networking sites that are just that, and not much more, are only of value for the select few. These are those that use them more or less full time. They are professional connectors, often very altruistic, who have reached that stage of their business career where they can spend hours networking, or else those who use the "network" purely as a means to sell. In both cases there is some reward, but for most business people it's not an effective use of their time.

Of course there are those that want to use the networking sites for their genuine purpose – to meet peers, overcome isolation, develop themselves, champion best practice, to meet their need to contribute, save time and so on. I'm not convinced though that the leading sites offer this. They are too dependent upon the membership fees of the "sales networkers" and so gear their functions accordingly. Alternatively, they drop their fees but have to rely on advertising revenue – so it's just "sales" in disguise.

I believe that the proportion of business people who genuinely expect functionality and added value from their networking sites is bound to increase, as today's graduates have grown up in an entirely different technological environment to the 40 somethings – who predominantly use the existing sites as a sales tool. This factor, along with increasing competition, will mean that the sites of the future will need to offer more. They need resource centres, time saving functions and personal development pages, as well as the traditional networking pages and marketing opportunities.

I also believe that maybe not now, but in years to come, the most successful sites will mainly be used by paying members. That's because sites that genuinely offer more than just networking opportunities will attract members who are serious about their business, and are keen to make a genuine contribution to their online community. The strength of the members will be the site, and the strength of the site will be the members.

To attract this type of member at BosstoBoss, we will soon be announcing schemes for encouraging members to introduce contacts to the community, join business discussion forums and submit articles to our library.



Whilst basic membership is likely to be free for some time yet, it is our eventual goal that all members enjoy the same functions, but the price they pay for their membership will depend on how much they contribute to the community. It may seem like a strange concept now, but I really believe that one day all business support sites will work this way!

By your Editor, Neil Greateorex  
[www.bosstoboss.com](http://www.bosstoboss.com)

