

# Latest Universal McCann social media study released

Universal McCann Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) recently released its latest comparative study on social media trends. The third in a series, Wave 3 brings together the latest results and evolving trends of social media, aiming to provide facts behind the hype.

Wave 3 surveyed 17 000 Internet users in 29 countries. Since Wave 1, the research has created insights on patterns of usage, such as China having more bloggers than the US, emerging markets leading take-up and Japan shunning photo sharing. This latest report demonstrates the continued growth of social media.

Universal McCann South Africa's MD Nazeer Suliman believes that social media has an important place in the communications mix, if led by an understanding of the consumer. "This is not about targeted advertising. Brands that approach social media in this way are on the wrong foot forward right from the outset. It's about identifying opportunities that create meaningful engagement and sustained relationships between the brand and communities, which goes beyond advertising as the communications imperative."

## Wave 3 highlights

*Bloggng - the impact:* As a collective, the blogosphere rivals any mass media in terms of reach, time spent and wider cultural, social and political impact. There are also major shifts into participation, pioneered by the Asian markets and now happening everywhere. Blogging today should be embraced whether you are a marketer, advertising professional or content producer.

*Social networking:* Growth appeared to be slowing. Not so; Wave 3 indicates usage is up to 58%, an increase of 21%. Estimated users worldwide have reached a staggering 272 million people.

*Brand penetration:* This research provides clear proof that MySpace is still number one among a broad collection of International networks with a 32% weekly reach. Its position has been maintained by its focus on music and commercial content, rather than connecting friends. Facebook is not far behind on 22.5% weekly reach and the number one in many markets which will surely grow as it becomes internationalised. However the pattern is very mixed globally and it's far from a two horse race. In Asia a variety of local sites such as QQ, Cyworld and Mixi dominate in home markets, while Orkut is number one in Brazil.

## Things to watch in the world of social networking

*Niche Social Networks:* In the face of the all encompassing mega social networks a raft of more niche and sometimes exclusive networks are emerging.

*DIY Social Networks:* White label social network systems that you can customise are driving the emergence of a wealth of ultra niche networks.

*Reputation Management:* Slowly users are realising the implications of having every drunken photo on online for the world to see. Personal brand management is going to be a big deal in the next few years. Tools to report and manage your reputation are coming online; Wink.com or peekyou.com for personal search and reputa.com and reputationdefender.com for more sophisticated management systems.

## **Consuming content: the impact**

According to the study, social media has impacted every aspect of the Internet and transformed the role it plays in our lives. The social-orientated Internet is a massive opportunity for brands, advertisers and marketers if embraced properly. It enables a much more positive relationship with consumers where true benefits are created. Integrate it with offline communications and use social media as link or as a story to communicate.

The next major in-depth Wave, due to be released in mid-2008, will investigate word of mouth in the online age. It will focus on how the wealth of consumer and peer-to-peer opinion we are now exposed to impacts on how we form opinions on brands, products and services. Wave 4 of the social media tracker is scheduled for late 2008 and should include a number of new social media innovations and a larger geographical coverage.

"The World Wide Web has brought the world closer together, aggregating people into communities around special interests," says Nazeer. "The challenge is for brands to identify relevant and meaningful ways to engage with these communities."

The full Wave 3 report can be downloaded at [www.universalmccann.com](http://www.universalmccann.com).

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