

Social commerce - Facebook apps that offer more than marketing

Facebook applications are a keen focus area for companies that want to extend their reach. But what many don't realise, this early on in the development of the social phenomenon, is that it is not just about marketing or publicity. Companies that use [Facebook](#) merely to advertise their brand, or build up a contact database, are missing a big commercial opportunity.

By [Wesley Lynch](#), issued by [Realm Digital](#) 13 Jul 2011

Facebook advantage

And the functional possibilities of social commerce are in no way secondary to what you'd expect in an [Digital.co.za/solutions/e-commerce/ e-commerce](#) online store.

In fact, Facebook has a distinct advantage over ordinary Web commerce. While e-commerce projects foundered in recent years due to tight post-recession budgets, commercial Facebook pages, which require a much lower capital outlay, flourished.

And yet, surprisingly few companies - even in advanced markets like the US - know and use this. According to a study from ForeSee Results, 25% of the top 100 US retailers have no formal Facebook presence.

Meanwhile, lower down the food chain one finds many companies that get a lot of value out of Facebook. For much less than the cost of a basic website, brands can now have a fully functional [Digital.co.za/solutions/e-commerce/ e-commerce](#) Facebook Fan Page. It's time their example is followed.

Where the fish is

There are other very good reasons to combine social media with commerce, whether you sell airline tickets or books, luxury products or skincare:

- It is where everyone hangs out. Fish where the fish is.
- Buying is becoming recognised as a natural outflow of social Web interaction.
- Recommendations from friends are highly influential, and given eagerly.
- Bespoke Facebook development is a fast-growing industry.
- There are plenty of off-the-shelf apps, providing anything from whole store fronts to promotions, e-newsletters, online slide demos or offline event promos.
- With the current lack of awareness of the opportunities in social media, the noise is still relatively subdued, and first comers will get more bang for their buck.

Removing obstacles

For now, some obstacles remain. More social applications with a commercial bent should become available, and to a large degree, enterprises should shed some legacy as many e-commerce sites are not Facebook-ready.

The main hindrance is attitudinal: If you treat Facebook as an after-thought and don't accommodate it in your integrated marketing and digital campaigns and strategies, you will miss a golden opportunity to strike while the iron is hot.

Move quickly but be careful

The best possible move under the circumstances is to move quickly. Approach a [Digital.co.za/product/facebook-platform/development](#) agency with notable Facebook experience, or shop around for existing functionality.

But consider your objectives and mull your project choices very carefully. For example, it may not make sense for you to take on outright e-commerce functionality. But if you offer a valuable service that sparks a purchase decision, the customer should be offered the option of purchasing without having the user experience interrupted.

You can make [Facebook](#) work for you in more tangible ways than you may have thought. What are you waiting for?

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