

How Facebook invaded Myspace's space

"Strategic blunders" led to dominance in social networking war

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In the world of social networking Facebook has the most "friends."

Yet the now ubiquitous platform was launched more than a year after Myspace, which was at that time the Big Man on Campus.



There's a scene in the Oscar-nominated movie "The Social Network" in which Mark Zuckerberg, who created Facebook (played by Jesse Eisenberg), explains how The Facebook (its original name) would be different from Friendster and Myspace. He said those sites were hard to use and were more about interacting with strangers. The Facebook, on the other hand, was about connecting with real friends online -- like a sorority or a club.

Facebook started as a Harvard-student-only project. It soon opened to other colleges and, eventually, the world. Today Facebook boasts around 550 million members and has surpassed Google in traffic. Myspace hovers around 100 million.

Why?

"There are a number of strategic blunders on Myspace," says Paul Conti, assistant professor of communications at The College of St. Rose in Albany. "(Myspace) thought an attraction would be to let people design (their pages) any way they wanted. Instead of being appealing, it became a distraction for people who couldn't figure it out."

The simple design and user-friendly nature of Facebook is what made people like Regina Vertone of Latham cancel her Myspace account.

"When some of my friends and I made the switch from Myspace to Facebook, it felt like a more 'grown up' version of Myspace," says Vertone, 32. "The clean, easy-to-navigate interface also made it less intimidating for trying something new. As much as Facebook changes with the times, they stay consistent with being a website that people use to stay in touch with one another."

But while having fewer than one fifth as many users may make it seem like Myspace has lost the social networking war, some experts say that's not the case.

Myspace now brands itself as a social entertainment site, encouraging self-expression and allowing independent artists such as comedians, musicians and authors to connect with fans, says Sam Ford, the director of digital strategy for Peppercom, a strategic communications firm in New York.

"It's a little package to promote your enterprise," Ford says.

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