



Webbmedia Group, LLC

Facebook Connect

From Webbmedia Group's Knowledge Base

Summary: Facebook Connect is a centralized identity service that launched in May 2008. The basic premise is to make it easy for users of other websites to integrate their comments on other sites and social networks into Facebook.

Corporate Explanation: Facebook Connect is the next iteration of Facebook Platform that allows users to "connect" their Facebook identity, friends and privacy to any site. This will now enable third party websites to implement and offer even more features of Facebook Platform off of Facebook – similar to features available to third party applications today on Facebook.

- Users will be able to connect their Facebook account with any partner website using a trusted authentication method. Whether at login, or anywhere else a developer would like to add social context, the user will be able to authenticate and connect their account in a trusted environment. The user will have total control of the permissions granted.
- Facebook users represent themselves with their real names and real identities. With Facebook Connect, users can bring their real identity information with them wherever they go on the Web.
- As a user moves around the open Web, their privacy settings will follow, ensuring that users' information and privacy rules are always up-to-date. For example, if a user changes their profile picture, or removes a friend connection, this will be automatically updated in the external website.





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Analysis: Facebook Connect does make it very simple to bring new users into a network. When a user is registered on another website, such as CNET, and posts a comment, the comment and user information also automatically posts to Facebook.

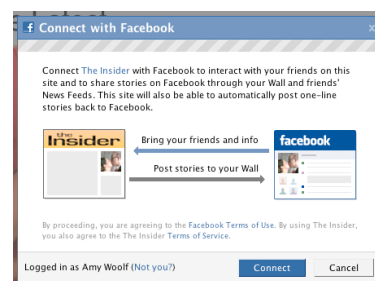
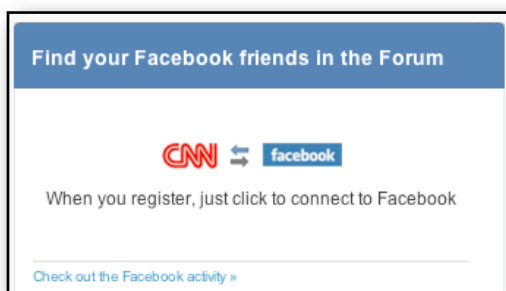
That said, Facebook stands to gain tremendous traffic and user information from its affiliate networks. When the service was announced, there were 24 partners. They included: Amiando, CBS.com, CNET, CollegeHumor, Disney-ABC Television Group, Evite, Flock, Hulu, Kongregate, Loopt, Plaxo, Radar, Red Bull, Seismic, Socialthing! (part of AOL), StumbleUpon, The Insider, Twitter, Uber, Vimeo and Xobni.

Today, many more are using the service: CNN's The Forum site, MyBarackObama, Indiegogo, GlobalGrind, ConnectedWeddings and Govit Citysearch, theInsider.com, SixApart (Movable Type) and Digg.

Because Facebook Connect works with sites that either offer registration as a service or require it by all users, it is able to glean valuable information about a particular website's ecosystem as well as its individual users. Any website using Facebook essentially loses control over its user base and opens up behavior data, use patterns and potential monetization to Connect.

Users who may understand Facebook - how to post a photo or write on someone's wall - may not necessarily understand the functionality or widespread reach of Connect. For example, partner sites, such as Digg and StumbleUpon, allow users to rate stories without making comments. With Facebook Connect, when a user "digs" or gives a thumbs up to a story or web page, that information is being sent back to Facebook. All of that activity will then be shared inside that user's Facebook news feed.

Facebook originally promised strict privacy controls, enabling the user to dictate what information was re-broadcasted to his/her Facebook account. To be sure, many of the services using Connect offer a widget created by Facebook to enable the service:



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We discovered that not every website makes Connect as clear. Our early testing showed that comments on partner sites such as StumbleUpon and Citysearch automatically reposted to the news feed, without asking the registered Facebook user first for approval. We retested Citysearch on February 10 and found that it did not automatically post without approval, however.

While some users may not mind every comment being reposted on Facebook, the feature may alienate other users who desire better privacy.

Implementation: Facebook Connect is relatively simple to install. It requires Facebook code, javascript and some basic commands. For example, to enable FB Connect in the comment section, it's a matter of putting Facebook code into your source code, beneath the name tag - <fb:login-button>. Mashable offers a step-by-step guide to showing you the intall: <http://mashable.com/2008/12/11/facebook-connect-blog/>

Terms of Service: Facebook changed its terms of service (TOS) the second week of February 2009. Many have argued that the new TOS enables Facebook to do "anything we want with your content - forever," and that "what goes in never comes out."

Facebook's legal department says that "User Content and Applications/Connect Sites" are exempt from its claims on content ownership. Specifically, it wrote: "You may remove your User Content from the Site at any time. ... (H)owever, you acknowledge that the Company may retain archived copies of your User Content." However with further evaluation, it would see that when a user posts content to another Facebook user in any form, and if the either user's account, the content stays active and searchable. The new TOS applies to Facebook Connect content as well. Once content is reposted via Connect through a third party, such as Digg or Citysearch, that content will remain caught within Facebook even if a user deactivates his/her account and information elsewhere.

Update: Due to backlash in the Facebook community, the service reverted back to is previous Terms of Service agreement early in the morning on Feb. 18, 2009.



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Analysis:

We feel strongly that Facebook Connect could benefit some users. In particular, blogs that focus on celebrity and entertainment may prove good venues, as many mothers in the 25-40 age group are active Facebook users. (*Note: To date, there is no official demographic or user data released from Facebook.*) By enabling users to very easily repost their comments and share content from blogs to Facebook, this may increase a blog's reach and traffic.

At the same time, it allows Facebook users to both comment freely about stories and photos, which may violate a blog's editorial practices.

Additionally, it also offers the opportunity for users to only use the Facebook social ecosystem. There is a danger that users may spend more, if not all, of their time away from brand and its blog properties.

We have not found any direct backlash from CNN, San Francisco Chronicle or CNET. Publishers either have no opinion formed yet or are generally happy with the service.

Note: The CNN live coverage of the Inauguration using Facebook was not Facebook Connect. While CNN does use Connect, the Inauguration was simply a one-time video player integration. For more details, see: http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/161890-CNN_Facebook_Teaming_Up_For_Obama_Inaugural.php/

At this time, we recommend waiting until March/ April 2009 to see how the Facebook Connect platform develops and to see how and if the site's TOS changes to both appease its user base and to clarify its privacy policy and settings.

Additional Resources:

- Original Connect announcement: <http://developers.facebook.com/news.php?blog=1&story=108>
- Explanation of how Connect is being used by Citysearch, the San Francisco Chronicle and others: <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=41735647130>
- User-friendly explanation of "seamless browsing" using Connect: <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=43712967130>