

Does Open Social Mean You Should Be Open to Social Networks at Work?

By Commercial Investigations LLC

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The development of application programming interfaces (APIs) like OpenSocial could change the way we conduct business.

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News Release

For Immediate Release

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November 2008 (Troy, NY) Many companies block employee access to social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. In the future this may seem as ridiculous as blocking employees from using Microsoft Windows. Social networking is becoming less of a novelty and more a part of the functional web. Salesforce.com, LinkedIn, MySpace and Facebook as well as Microsoft, Yahoo and Google are all trying to compete, yet collaborate, as the web continues to evolve.

The result is that online social networks may finally be turning a corner towards becoming useful business tools. The days of “poking” your friends online, getting bitten by a virtual vampire or sending someone a virtual margarita may finally give way to productive workdays spent in social networks getting some actual work done. LinkedIn, Facebook and MySpace are already useful for networking and collaborating with people in your field as well as prospecting for new clients or employees. But will the web “widgets” or “gadgets” of the future that are developed and deployed in “containers” or “platforms” like MySpace and Facebook change the way we use the web for business. With the OpenSocial standard being led by Google, more companies are definitely going to try.

OpenSocial is an initiative being led by Google, in partnership with MySpace and others, to develop a common set of application programming interfaces (APIs). This means that a developer can create an application in OpenSocial and not have to write separate code specifically for each “container that it will run in. over 18 Companies and social networks have joined the OpenSocial initiative. Facebook is not one of them.

Prior to the OpenSocial announcement by Google, there was tremendous buzz within Silicon Valley when Facebook launched its own API and opened up its site to developers early in 2007. Later in 2007, Microsoft purchased a 1.6 percent stake in Facebook for \$240 million. In the middle of the Yahoo! and Microsoft merger talks there is a battle for the big web companies over a piece of this “platform” pie. Much of this positioning seems related to developing and leveraging a web operating system, further evident by Google's introduction of its own web browser, Google Chrome.

So what does OpenSocial mean for business networks or established companies looking to monetize and extend their presence on the web? There is a thin line between social network and a professional network. For example, Oracle and Salesforce.com were once early supporters of OpenSocial.

A likely trend is that more established brick and mortar companies will be developing APIs. With other initiatives like OpenID, users will expect more data portability. This is likely to affect online business models as well. If the right application related to your business expertise and niche is developed, it could become useful and portable across many sites and be different software.

At Commercial Investigations, we have developed an application called CIChecked or Certified Identification. Currently, it's an online identity verification trust mark that can be purchased at CIChecked.com and then displayed on users' online profiles and email signatures. As more real world transactions and interactions happen online, our model will be able to integrate background screening into many online environments. In the future your clients may spend a majority of their work day in the "container" of their choice, and the availability of your application to run within that container could mean getting their business or not. An open mind and being open to OpenSocial could make all the difference.

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