

Social Networking Changes up a Gear

Got some spare time on your hands and don't know how to fill it? Tired of watching TV all the time? Then why not start social networking. That seems to be the conclusion many have reached according to a recent survey which suggests social networkers are spending more and more time online.

MySpace recently commissioned a study – the cleverly titled 'Never Ending Friending' – to track the habits of social networkers. Not surprisingly, it concluded that the social networking phenomenon has increased Internet usage. Indeed for the 14-40 age group that tend to use social networking sites, almost a third admit their time spent online has increased.

In previous studies of internet usage, television viewing time has never been affected either way by increased or decreased time spent at the computer. This time the statistics tell a different story; the study reports that serious social networkers are sacrificing valuable TV time in favour of the internet. Non social networkers are watching on average an additional 2 hours of television every week: that's a weeks worth of Eastenders.

The most popular social networking site is certainly MySpace according to the survey. It wins hands down in terms of %age of time spent online although Facebook is another firm favourite. MySpace accounted for an amazing 12% of total US internet time in December 2006 – an impressive figure for a site that is still in its relative infancy.

Whether social networking sites work as a marketing channel is still open to debate. Essentially a social network represents an opportunity for people online to share their interests and make product recommendations based on common areas of interest. Still some believe the 'social' aspects would be compromised by a bombardment of marketing messages.

