



# Social Networking: Applications for Health Care Recruitment

### Executive Summary

- ▶ In today's competitive landscape for health care talent, nursing executives and human resource professionals need to assess and evaluate new avenues for recruitment.
- ▶ The strategy of filling positions by means of print advertising is becoming outmoded quickly.
- ▶ As an industry, health care typically lags behind other industries when it relates to technology.
- ▶ This is especially true in implementing any interactive strategies to target hard-to-fill positions.
- ▶ Social networking sites have appeared on the Internet landscape quickly and continue to flourish. Nurse leaders need to capitalize on this phenomenon.



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**S**OCIAL NETWORKING IS THE process of connecting entities together based on their social bonds or ties. It usually ties in directly with the "six degrees of separation theory" that everyone in the world is connected to each other through six other people. Social networks can grow and propagate by first connecting to other people and then building social bonds with them.

Social networking has been around a long time on the Internet and was also referred to as "social software." Examples of popular social software that existed before social networking became a buzzword are: IRC (Internet relay chat), instant messaging (the buddy list), forums (friends list), blogs (back links and organic linking between friends), Web rings (in essence social software), peer-to-peer software such as Napster, and shared browsing and collaboration such as Groove.

By the late 1990s entrepreneurs realized that the Internet could become the perfect medium for connecting people beyond their first or second-degree acquaintances. However, the first generation of free

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social networking sites (such as [sixdegrees.com](http://sixdegrees.com)) waned partly because they lacked revenue-producing business models and also because the technology had not evolved into a usable form.

Between 2001 and 2004, over 30 social networking startups were launched, backed by millions of dollars in venture capital. Unfortunately, some sites such as Friendster and LinkedIn still only offered the means to create online profiles and invite friends/colleagues to join their connection. People raced to build their profiles and community or connections then sat back and waited for something to happen (Roush, 2005).

### Impact of Social Networking Sites

In 2005, Rupert Murdoch, CEO of News Corp, spent \$580 million on the purchase of MySpace. With advertising dollars increasing, this appears to be a bargain price. According to *Hitwise* (eMarketer, 2007c), MySpace was the most popular site on the Internet in 2007 and has the greatest market share of visits. Google and Yahoo came in 2nd and 3rd, respectively, while Facebook, another social networking site, ranked 7th. How does this translate into actual visits? MySpace had 69 million unique visitors in the month of May 2007, while Facebook, which is currently gaining some momentum, had less than half that number.

As a result of companies believing that consumers *want* to be socially connected online, eMarketer has increased its projection for ad spending in the United States on social networks to \$900 million in 2007 (eMarketer, 2007c). MySpace and Facebook will glean 72% of all revenues for social network sites in the United States this year.

Interestingly, in late 2006 an international survey by Ipsos Insight, "The Face of the Web 2006," stated about a fifth of adults have visited a social networking site in the past and an equal number of Internet users have done so in the past 30 days (eMarketer, 2007c). South Korea ranked first, with half of all adults there having visited at least one social networking site in the past and over half having done so in the past 30 days. In comparison, approximately 25% of Americans have ever visited a social networking Web site. The top four countries listed in this survey were South Korea followed by Brazil, China, and Mexico. Ranking 5th was the United States with 20% of active Internet users visiting social networking sites within the previous 30 days.

According to a study by the UK Office of Communications (eMarketer, 2007a), which covered social networking use among broadband users in Japan,

China, and U.S. and European markets, 80% of Chinese users had discussed hobbies or interests online via a social network and 78% had used a social network to meet new people. In the United States, less than half (37%) visit these sites to discuss hobbies or interests; 36% chat with people they know or contact others they have lost touch with; 33% meet and chat with new people; 23% discuss personal issues online; and 18% discuss work-related topics online.

The social networking site users are a fickle bunch. According to a recent survey by Parks Associates (Blakely, 2007), the analysts found that half of the users regularly visit more than one site and one in six actively use three or more sites. What does this mean? Take the site Friendster, for example. After its launch in 2003, this social network site had more than 20 million users. Late last year (2006), Friendster had fallen to less than one million users (Blakely, 2007). Others migrated to sites with better video tools and music. Hence, loss of revenue.

### **Application of Social Networking to Recruitment**

Reaching candidates in new and innovative ways always has its risks; however, strategic targeting can reap big rewards. Let's take a look at MySpace's demographics.

According to comScore, Inc. (2006), MySpace.com has become more popular among older Internet users. The most significant shift has occurred among teens 12 to 17 years of age, who accounted for 24.7% of the MySpace audience in August 2005, but today represent a much lower 11.9% of the site's total audience. Conversely, Internet users between the ages of 35 to 54 now account for 40.6% of the MySpace visitor base, an 8.2% increase during the past year.

Xanga.com has a younger user profile, with 20% of its users in the 12 to 17 age range, about twice as high as that age segment's representation within the total Internet audience (comScore, Inc., 2006). Not surprisingly, Facebook.com, which began as a social networking site for college students, also draws a younger audience. More than one-third (34%) of visitors to Facebook.com are 18 to 24 years old (Millennials), approximately three times the representation of that age segment in the general Internet population (comScore, Inc., 2006). Another site worthy of mention is Sconex which is a networking site limited to high-school users. Targeting the social networks that attract young teens (12-17) can be very useful for "seed-planting." In other words, reaching out to the younger generation can promote career paths into the health care industry.

According to a survey by SelectMinds (eMarketer, 2007b), young workers use business-oriented social networking sites for career development. These sites serve as a job search engine providing them with career information that is pre-qualified by its users and, therefore, credible. Almost 75% of GenYers

(Millennials) said they viewed these networks as very important, compared with 66% of workers age 30 to 39 and 61% of workers over 40. Some of these sites include LinkedIn, which has over 8 million members, Ecademy (based in the UK) with 100,000 members, Ryze which has 250,000 members, and Spoke, a sales generation tool with a social networking component, which encompasses 30 million people from 900,000 companies.

Recently AfterCollege.com launched Alumni Connect to its Web site which allows their registered job seekers to connect with alumni working at various companies through a trusted employment-based network. Using Alumni Connect, students and recent graduates can contact alumni to inquire about exclusive opportunities and gain a better understanding of a particular industry or company. The service is available through over 1,400 academic departments and student groups that partner with AfterCollege. Thus students can maintain valuable relationships that they form using online social networking sites, while still keeping their professional and personal lives separate.

Prior to initiating any new recruitment advertising venue such as social networking, *strongly* consider working with your advertising agency partner to ensure that you implement an online tracking tool. By tracking candidate traffic, you and your agency can quickly make quantifiable changes to your interactive strategy on an ongoing basis, thus resulting in the best return on your investment. The following are some recruitment/branding suggestions that can be used on these sites.

- Recruiters can search most of these social networking databases for possible candidates. Keep in mind that currently most of these sites are free to register as a user.
- You can place job postings on many of these sites.
- Placing banners on such pages as the home page, targeted group pages, the classified section home page and/or search results pages may drive traffic to your company's Web site while branding your organization.
- Create a company profile on sites such as MySpace. Develop a site that interacts with the audience; the goal is to pique interest, create brand awareness, and drive potential candidates to your Web site and ultimately into your applicant tracking system. An example of this is the U.S. Marine Corps. Their profile (<http://www.myspace.com/marinecorps>) is attention grabbing. It contains videos, friends, and a quick means to contact a recruiter. They easily met their recruiting goals in 2006 since this site was launched (Wheeler, 2006).

Another relatively new site is SecondLife. This is a 3D social networking site. Users, or residents, create avatars, can make purchases, buy land, and, of course, meet other residents in this online society. Some com-

panies have tested this site for recruitment purposes by holding virtual job fairs. Kelly Services, which purchased SecondLife real estate earlier this year, provides in-world residents an online, interactive gaming experience where avatars participate in a range of job-scenario adventures and have the opportunity to inquire about real-world career opportunities that exist through Kelly.

### What's Next?

The term *Web 2.0* is a phrase used to describe how the Internet is increasingly becoming a community-driven medium using social networks and Wikipedia-style (online free content encyclopedia) dynamic resources (Robson, 2007). Most current Web 1.0 sites lack the ability for cross-site content sharing. The best resources are so vast and complex that they require an inter-networked system of listings and the databases that can be hosted in many places have the best chance to flourish.

In the past couple of months there have been several articles with exciting events that will change the landscape of the large social networks. Mark Zuckerberg, the 23-year-old founder of Facebook, made an unprecedented move in June 2007 by opening the Web site to outside programmers. He is attempting to transform Facebook into a springboard for launching Internet applications (Allison, 2007). Also in June, MySpace announced the launch of an enhanced version of its video site (MySpaceTV) designed to compete with Google's YouTube (Woodson, 2007). Not to be outdone, in July, Google announced a "Socialstream" prototype which was created in 8 months by a group of graduate students who Google funded. The Socialstream Web site reads: "A service model allows many social networks to be linked together, letting them share both content and the nature of the relationships of the people who use them" (Geron, 2007). This plays

into the research that users elect to visit many networking sites.

Every day can bring something new into the space of social networking, which will keep users interested and visiting their sites. This fact supports an ideal environment for recruiting both actively and passively. Most importantly, let's not forget that these sites can also be used to entice our younger generation into a future health care career. \$

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