

Facebook's omniscient Graph Search: Yay or nay for marketers?

 By [Amy Johnson](#)

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Facebook's momentous announcement on Tuesday, 16 January 2012, saw the introduction of Graph Search, a significant upgrade to Facebook's search function that is intended to allow users to mine a wealth of data related to their network.

Every critic and social media purveyor has an opinion about the change, with some weighing in that the feature will become an invaluable asset to marketers, and others dubbing it a passing fad.

The Google Search of Facebook

What is Graph Search? Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, contrasted the new social feature with traditional web search, by describing how Graph Search will be very specific and catered towards the individual user. This is in contrast to general queries that return anything and everything related to a search term. It will allow individuals to answer very specific queries like, "Bands my friends listen to" or "Restaurants in Cape Town that my friends like". In simple terms, Graph Search is a very specific way of searching that involves the people who you're connected with on Facebook.

Google Search was originally responsible for bringing the treasures of the web to the fore, but Facebook now has access to a wealth of social data that a search engine could only dream of accessing. As Zuckerberg said at the launch of Graph Search, "... we can answer a set of questions that no one else can really answer. All those other services are indexing primarily public information, and stuff in Facebook isn't out there in the world - it's stuff that people share. There's no real way to cut through the contents of what people are sharing, to fulfil big human needs about discovery, to find people you with whom wouldn't otherwise be connected. And we thought we should do something about that. We're the only service in the world that can do that."

The naysayers

Of course, when one thinks about the potential to search personal information, privacy is the concern at the forefront of everyone's mind. A lot of information shared on Facebook is intended for private consumption, so users may move to make all of their information private. Facebook should tread carefully in this regard, as user loyalty may wear thin in the long run.

Graph Search: A marketer's dream?

Curious onlookers would have noted the move towards more visible promotions on Facebook as monetisation becomes more of a priority. Marketers have more features and tools at their disposal to reach their target audience, and Graph Search could be a new ultra-feature to add to their arsenal. For marketing, Graph Search could:

- *Give brands greater impetus to generate recommendations and word-of-mouth dialogue.* Since Graph Search will deliver public recommendations made via Facebook, the drive to get users talking will be greater than ever.
- *Add even more value to a user's "Like".* Since most searches will turn up results where a user has liked a brand or interest, securing a "Like" from fans will become even more important.
- *Add greater emphasis to check-ins.* Graph Search will make use of connections within a user's networks, so any check-ins made by a user's friends will be more searchable and thereby act as indirect recommendations.

One thing is clear; Graph Search will offer brands increased exposure. It'll make it easier for people to source businesses or content via recommendations, which means the potential to reach new audiences is noteworthy. This much-anticipated feature is only in beta testing phase, and time will tell its true benefits. However, the demonstrations that have been unveiled reveal that there is much to get excited about.

To learn more about effective social media marketing techniques, consider the online University of Cape Town Social Media course run by GetSmarter, which starts on 3 December 2012. Contact Nazley on +27 (0) 21 447 7565 or email nazley@getsmarter.co.za. Alternatively visit www.getsmarter.co.za.

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