

Facebook Adds 'Marketplace' of Classified Ads

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Facebook started a gradual rollout of Marketplace on Friday afternoon. A handful of the site's networks, or interest-related groups started by members, will have Marketplace access by day's end and all members should have access within a week, according to a Facebook spokesman.

The service is open to Facebook members and is free of charge.

Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Friendster are based on facilitating connections between members. But while MySpace has had a formal classifieds section on its site since its 2004 inception, Facebook and Friendster have not explored that market until this week. It is one more way that these sites can keep current members logged on while also pulling new users away from online classified giants like Craigslist.

The idea for Marketplace resulted from an engineer hack-a-thon, an all-night event where Facebook engineers are permitted to work on any project that interests them, according to a spokesman. The launch of Marketplace does not spell the end for existing classified-related Facebook networks, however. Classified site Oodle.com started a Facebook network earlier this week.

Marketplace will have four general categories: "For Sale," "Housing," "Jobs," and "Other." Those sections will be split into sub-categories for more detailed offerings. Members can access the Marketplace homepage via a link on the left-hand navigation bar of their online profile, according to Facebook.

When a member posts a classified ad on the site, a note will be added to that member's profile and to the "news feed" of all their friends. Users can also opt to create a larger note on their profile, and member networks will profile a sampling of advertisements on their portal pages as they're added.

User ads can automatically be read by that person's friends but they can select whether or not to put that ad out to their networks or the Facebook population at large. Users who are not friends with a classified poster will only be able to view the ad and not the poster's profile.

"There was a recognition by us that in social networks, classifieds can act like a conversation," said Oodle chief executive Craig Donato. "Lots of us are Facebook users and were sending messages back and forth" so the Oodle Classifieds network was "a more structured way" to handle those messages, he said.

Oodle, which recently came in second behind Craigslist for a Web 2.0 classifieds and directories award, worked with Facebook to leverage the site's API and enable members to share their posts with friends, Donato said.

In a bid to attract members, Oodle will donate \$1 to Natural Resources Defense Council for every person who signs up before June 16, up to \$10,000. As of Friday afternoon, it had attracted 482 members.

Craigslist, which has reportedly turned down buyout opportunities, benevolently welcomed Facebook's new ads section.

"We don't look at other companies as a threat or competition given that we see ourselves as providing a public service to the community," said Susan Best, a Craigslist spokeswoman. "Providing free classifieds to the general public is a service the public seems to appreciate and finds valuable."

Another social networking site, Friendster, also jumped on the classifieds bandwagon this week. It launched a multi-year partnership on Thursday with online listing provider OLX. Members can access the section through a "classifieds" link on the Friendster.com toolbar and will be directed to the OLX database.

Editor's Note : This story was updated to include comments from a Craigslist spokeswoman.

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