

Millions say, 'No, thanks' to Facebook

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Too much hype and too little substance, Facebook, the policeman's friend and privacy advocates' nightmare. The real world is tiring of fake friends, snoopers and CIA/NSA surveillance.

NEW YORK — Don't try to friend MaLi Arwood on Facebook. You won't find her there.

You won't find Thomas Chin, either. Or Kariann Goldschmitt.

More than 900 million people worldwide check their Facebook accounts at least once a month, but millions more are Facebook holdouts.

They say they don't want Facebook. They insist they don't need Facebook. They say they're living life just fine without the long-forgotten acquaintances that the world's largest social network sometimes resurrects.

They are the resisters.

"I'm absolutely in touch with everyone in my life that I want to be in touch with," Arwood said. "I don't need to share triviality with someone that I might have known for six months 12 years ago."

Even without people like Arwood, Facebook is one of the biggest business success stories in history. The site had 1 million users by the end of 2004, the year Mark Zuckerberg started it in his Harvard dorm room. Two years later, it had 12 million. Facebook had 500 million by summer 2010 and 901 million as of March 31, according to the company.

That staggering rise in popularity is one reason Facebook Inc.'s initial public offering was one of the most hotly anticipated in years. The company's shares closed at 38.23 on the Nasdaq stock market Friday under the ticker symbol FB. Facebook achieved an estimated market valuation of \$105 billion, making it worth more than Kraft Foods, Ford or Disney.

Facebook still has plenty of room to grow, particularly in developing countries where people are only starting to get Internet access. As it is, about 80 percent of its users are outside the U.S. and Canada.

But if Facebook is to live up to the hype and reward the investors who clamored for its stock, it needs to persuade some of the resisters to join. Two out of every five American adults have not joined Facebook, according to a recent Associated Press-CNBC poll. Among those who are not on Facebook, a third cited a lack of interest or need.

If all those people continue to shun Facebook, the social network could become akin to a postal system that delivers mail only to houses on one side of the street. The system isn't as useful, and people aren't apt to spend as much time with it. That means fewer opportunities for Facebook to sell ads.

Fine for grandkids

Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, says that new communications channels — from the telephone to radio, TV and personal computers — often breed holdouts in their early days.

“It’s disorienting because people have different relationships with others depending on the media they use,” Rainie said. “But we’ve been through this before. As each new communications media comes to prominence, there is a period of adoption.”

Len Kleinrock, 77, said Facebook is fine for his grandchildren, but it’s not for him.

“I do not want more distractions,” he said. “As it is, I am deluged with email. My friends and colleagues have ready access to me, and I don’t really want another service that I would feel obliged to check into on a frequent basis.”

Kleinrock says his resistance is generational, but discomfort with technology isn’t a factor.

After all, Kleinrock could be the world’s first Internet user. The University of California at Los Angeles professor was part of the team that invented the Internet. His lab was where researchers gathered in 1969 to send test data between two bulky computers — the beginnings of the Arpanet network, which morphed into the Internet we know today.

“I’m having a been-there, done-that feeling,” Kleinrock said. “There’s not a need on my part for reaching out and finding new social groups to interact with. I have trouble keeping up with those I’m involved with now.”

Thomas Chin, 35, who works at an advertising and media planning company in New York, says he may be missing out on what friends-of-friends-of-friends are doing, but he doesn’t need Facebook to connect with family and closer acquaintances.

“If we’re going to go out to do stuff, we organize it [outside] of Facebook,” he said.

Some people don’t join the social network because they don’t have a computer or Internet access, are concerned about privacy, or generally dislike Facebook. Those without a college education are less likely to be on Facebook, as are those with lower incomes. Women who choose to skip Facebook are more likely than men to cite privacy issues, while seniors are more likely than those 50-64 years old to cite computer issues, according the AP-CNBC poll.

About three-quarters of seniors are not on Facebook. By contrast, more than half of those under 35 use it every day.

The poll of 1,004 adults nationwide was conducted by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications May 3-7 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Just another chore

Steve Jones, a professor who studies online culture and communications at the University of Illinois at Chicago, says many resisters consider Facebook to be too much of a chore.

“We’ve added social networking to our lives. We haven’t added any hours to our days,” Jones said.

“The decision to be online on Facebook is simultaneously a decision not to be doing something else.”

Arwood, 47, a restaurant manager in Chicago, said she was surprised when colleagues on an English-teaching program in rural Spain in 2010 opted to spend their breaks checking Facebook.

“I spent my time on break trying to learn more about the Spanish culture, really taking advantage of it,” she said. “I went on walks with some of the students and asked them questions.”

Kariann Goldschmitt, 32, a music professor at New College of Florida in Sarasota, Fla., was on Facebook not long after its founding in 2004 but quit in 2010. In part, it was because of growing concerns about her privacy and Facebook’s ongoing encouragement of people to share more about themselves with the company, marketers and the world.

She says she’s been much more productive since leaving.

“I was a typical user, on it once or twice a day,” she said. “After a certain point, I sort of resented how it felt like an obligation rather than fun.”

Besides Facebook resisters and quitters, there are those who take a break. In some cases, people quit temporarily as they apply for new jobs, so that potential employers won’t stumble on photos of their wild nights out drinking.

Goldschmitt said it takes effort to stay in touch with friends and relatives without Facebook. For instance, she has to make mental notes of when her friends are expecting babies, knowing that they have become so used to Facebook “that they don’t engage with us anymore.”

“I’m like, ‘Hmmm, when is nine months?’ I have to remember to contact them since they won’t remember to tell me when the baby’s born.”

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