

Is this The Beginning of the End for Facebook?

Written by

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I found out recently that in September 2011, in the U.S., the average number of minutes that each Facebook user spent on the site was 410. Last year, that month's average was 287, signaling a 42% increase. Also during September 2011, Facebook commanded 14.7% of total U.S. consumer Internet-usage minutes, the most of any website. Given that the site is still on a growth trend, how could I be crazy enough to ask if it's the beginning of the end for Facebook? Let's explore.

One of the things you in the technology industry is how fast things can change. Big companies can come and go in extremely short periods of time. Yahoo! was once what Google is today. MySpace was once what Facebook is today. Innovation happens everywhere and waits for no company.

Rightly or wrongly, what's caused me to start to evaluate whether Facebook has peaked is my own declining use of the site. I find myself using it less and less each day, sometimes going days or weeks without checking it. Interestingly, I have also observed that many in my network are posting less often. What may be happening is that consumers are experiencing Facebook fatigue.

I recently polled 100 college graduates and shockingly, not all of them were on Facebook. But perhaps not surprisingly, nearly all said they were basically bored with the site and had been

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using it significantly less, or cancelled their account all together

Now, depending on how heavy of a technology user you are, you may find the idea of Facebook on its way out surprising or not surprising. For example, many of the young people I surveyed conveyed that they were ready for something else. Call me crazy, but I firmly believe that Facebook has either peaked or is on the cusp of peaking.

All of my thinking on this comes, of course, on the heels of news reports about Facebook's preparing its IPO. But it also comes at a time when Facebook has to overcome negative press due to a settlement with the FTC over privacy issues. Those events are on opposite sides of the spectrum and could potentially be used to argue for or against Facebook's long-term staying power.

If you've been using Facebook for more than a few years and think back to how you used it in the beginning, you'll most likely remember using it quite frequently for long periods of time. Much of this initial time spent connecting with friends and family or rediscovering old friends was what made Facebook great. Even many who are new to Facebook may still find themselves using it heavily by doing some of those same things.

But at some point, Facebook usage becomes more about profile management and quick checkups than heavy usage. Now, although this isn't bad, it's not what Facebook wants as it looks to maintain a large, healthy business.{jcomments on}