

Media and Information sites thrive in popularity as consumers seek the 'real world' on the web

Contributed by Nielsen
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UKOM/Nielsen data shows 35 of the web's top 50 brands are accounted for by social media and "traditional" businesses up from 19 in 2004

The online world is increasingly reflecting the offline world, with the web's 50 most-popular brands consisting more than ever of businesses established in the "real world" and sites serving the interaction between "real people", according to UKOM/Nielsen study of how the profile of the web's most-visited sites has changed since 2004.

Names such as Freeserve, Lycos, Demon and Kelkoo, which once appeared among the web's elite, have now been replaced in the Top 50 by brands such as Facebook, Twitter, Sky and John Lewis.

The rise of social media and traditional offline brands

UKOM general manager James Smythe explains:

“Over the last seven years, we see two broad developments: first, huge growth in the use of sites built on social content, where we mostly find contributions from people we trust; and second, websites with a high-street or “real-world” presence translating the strength of their offline brands into online audiences.”

In January 2004, only one web brand among the Top 50 - Friends Reunited “ was powered by social media. Now there are 10, including sites like YouTube, Wikipedia and TripAdvisor.

Meanwhile, seven years ago, only 18 of the top 50 sites had an established offline presence, such as Argos and the BBC; this has now increased to 25.

Smythe continues:

“The web has always made it easier for people to feed their fundamental desire to socialise, but the critical element of trust in social online environments has now become mainstream. Likewise, traditional brands have successfully harnessed the trust and confidence consumers have had with their established businesses offline, by migrating them to their sites on the web.”

Media and Information sites thrive online

These two broad developments are showcased by the increasing concentration of “Media” and “Information & Reference” brands in the Top 50.

In Jan 2004, nine media companies featured in the UK's 50 most-popular brands online. By January 2011, the number had risen to 16, with the growth principally coming from TV broadcasters (ITV, Channel 4 and Sky) and national newspapers (Associated, News International and the Telegraph) “ all essentially “traditional” media businesses.

Similarly, the rise in the number of Information & Reference brands in the Top 50 can largely be attributed to the rising popularity of social media and a growing acceptance by consumers of “anonymous authority” “ trusting the provenance of unedited content uploaded by users unknown to them.

The number has shot up from a single site (Yell.com) in Jan 2004, to seven sites (including Wikipedia, eHow and WikiAnswers) in Jan 2011.

Telecoms & Internet Services slip down

However, the growing popularity of Media and Reference & Information brands on the web has meant other sites have slipped out of the Top 50. The sector experiencing the most casualties has been Telecoms & Internet Services, which in Jan 2004 used to account for a hefty 11 of the top 50 brands, with names like Tiscali, NTL and Blueyonder.

Now - following the decline of the early ISPs, and the fact that media companies, like Sky and Virgin, now offer Internet connectivity as part of their packages - just three Telco brands feature: BT, Orange and Skype.

Other sectors with a diminishing presence in the Top 50 over the last seven years have been Technology, losing five brands (such as Real and Macromedia); Travel, losing four brands (such as Lastminute and EasyJet) and Finance, losing three brands (Egg, Barclays and Halifax).

The “Magnificent Seven”™ web brands

While the profile of businesses populating much of the Top 50 has changed since 2004, the Top 10 has remained largely stable. Seven brands - MSN, Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, BBC, eBay and Amazon - have all retained their top-10 status each January, and have since been joined by social-media stars YouTube, Wikipedia and Facebook.

Facebook, the world’s biggest social network, only debuted in a January UK Top 50 as recently as 2008 – entering at no.12 – but has since risen to become the country’s third most popular web brand, with more than 26 million unique UK visitors from home and work computers.

Google started the year in top spot for the first time in 2006, and has remained at the summit each year since, now attracting more than 35 million unique UK visitors every month.

Back in Jan 2004, the no.1 position was held by MSN with less than half Google’s current number of monthly visitors (17 million). Today, a site with this level of users would barely make the Top 10, such has been the growth in online traffic.

About UKOM

The UK Online Measurement Company, is a cross-industry organisation set up to specify and oversee the robust measurement of online audiences, to the standards required for the purposes of brand campaign planning by advertisers and agencies. It is run by the IAB and AOP representing media owners, with oversight by ISBA on behalf of advertisers and IPA on behalf of agencies. UKOM is powered by Nielsen data.

UKOM/Nielsen figures are a measure of the actual behaviour of unique individuals accessing the Internet from personal computers within home and work locations. The figures come from a fully-representative opt-in panel recruited via traditional offline as well online methods.

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