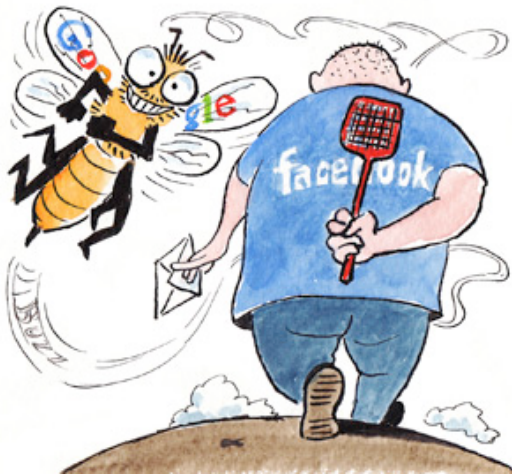


## Google v Facebook

### Generating Buzz

#### The search giant makes a belated attempt to take on the social-networking site

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FOR years Google has stayed on the fringes of the social-networking industry, leaving the field largely to the likes of Facebook and Twitter. Now, however, it is making a determined foray into online friendships. On February 9th the search giant unveiled Buzz, a networking service that will be closely integrated with the firm's e-mail offering, Gmail. Google no doubt hopes Buzz will help it catch up with the leaders of the networking world—but the chances are slim.

Google's move is a sign that the world of social networking and that of other online services, such as e-mail and search, are rapidly converging. Social networks such as Facebook, which boasts over 400m users, have become popular tools for communicating online and for posting information on a host of subjects. Google and other search engines have begun to incorporate content from social networks in their results.

Buzz represents the latest attempt by Google to muscle its way into the networking market. It already has a social network, Orkut, and a Twitter-like service called Jaiku, but neither has been wildly successful. The search firm is betting that at least two things will make Buzz more buzzworthy. One is that it lets Gmail users create a network easily from their e-mail contacts. Given that the e-mail service had 176m users in December, according to comScore, a market-research firm, that should give Buzz a handy launch pad. Buzz is also able to exploit Google's search know-how to help users identify the material of most interest to them from the flood of data pouring into its networking pages.

This filtering ability is distinctive, but it will not be enough to make Buzz hum. Making it easy for users to turn e-mail contacts into pals on a social network is no guarantee of success either. Some users worry that this feature raises privacy problems, by revealing who they e-mail most often. Moreover, it is unlikely that people who have already set up social networks elsewhere will want to create yet another one from scratch. Yahoo! introduced similar features some time ago, yet still lags Facebook.

Nor is it clear that Google, which has fingers in multiple pies, will be able to match the focus of outfits such as Facebook, which lives and breathes social networking. On February 10th the search giant added yet another business to its fast-growing portfolio when it announced plans

to launch an ultra-high-speed broadband service in America. Facebook, meanwhile, is working on various projects to improve its own network. Its hive of activity is even said to include an e-mail service that will compete with Gmail. More battles loom.