



This article is written by [Girish Sharangpani](#), CEO and founder of [The Knowledge Labs](#). Girish is a proven technology practitioner with expertise in setting up IT incubation centers, software development, product marketing, and communications. He has over 20 years of experience; predominantly in the information technology space. As a writer, Girish has co-authored technical and research papers on breast cancer, has created posters that were presented in international conferences, and has written patents, FDA, and regulatory documents. He has a graduate degree in advance accounting and auditing from BMCC, University of Pune, and a postgraduate certification in Computer Applications from the same university.

CONFESSIONS

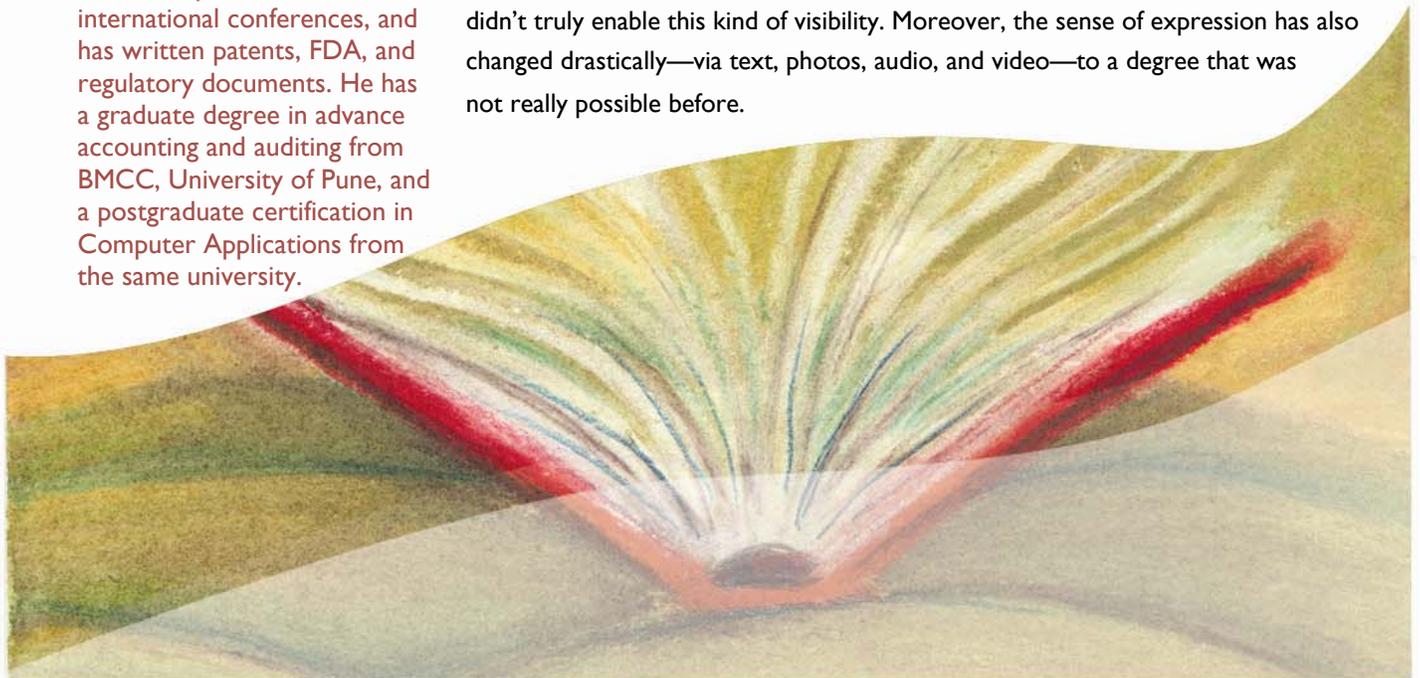
Social Networks – Do They Hold Any Good?

Not really if you were to ask me.

I was never really a social networking buff to be honest. I was pulled into them by invitations, sent by people close to my heart; invitations I simply could not have refused. I feel the strength of your network comes from the relationships you forge with your connections. And this is, generally, a close-knit group, where you share ideas, views, aspirations, pictures, poems, ... your works. I simply don't see a point in reaching out to hordes of people who are part of one or more social networks; people who are connected with each other through some unknown entities. However, this is just my side of the story! Reality might be different...

It's important we understand the basic premise and purpose of social networks—that they are meant to scale self-expression, both in terms of the extent of self-expression as well as the reach. For instance, a person on Facebook, LinkedIn, or MySpace, could have thousands of friends. This was not possible before the advent of Internet.

Earlier communications and community innovations like email, chat rooms, and IM didn't truly enable this kind of visibility. Moreover, the sense of expression has also changed drastically—via text, photos, audio, and video—to a degree that was not really possible before.



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Think of a scenario where a talent/ reality show similar to “*Who wants to be a millionaire*” had been produced solely by the capabilities of the contestants, without the expertise and talent of those in the background - the producers, directors, writers, et al. As talented and entertaining as the contestants were, the resulting production quality, the level of emotional involvement, the TRP ratings, the viewership - the whole deal actually - was likely to be far inferior to what we all see on air today.

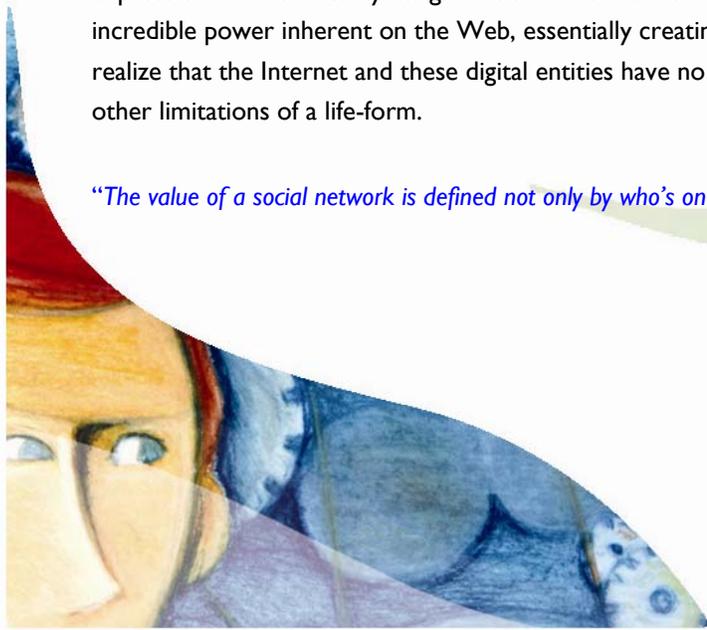
Social networks should be seen in a similar way; self-expression is the name of the game today, a new profession I should say. And such networks allow people to self-express, allowing them to do so with most creativity and productivity. They help you bring your expressions and emotions into mainstream business model—a new industry that could eventually stand tall alongside the traditional setups like movies, TV shows, publications, etc.

Leveraging via social media is not at all new; we’ve had it since the beginning of the newspaper. However, over time, the whole purpose and thought behind setting up such networks, to reach out and communicate with those who matter to you, is lost. I think social networks are getting overplayed these days. There is no newness, no innovation; they appear to be worn out, with complete lack of cutting-edge thoughts and imagination. The legions of the mega corporations who have been launching new social networks almost every day - simply to ride the buzz wave (if there was one) - are now reconvening to figure out what to do.

Yet in all this craziness, in a complete maze of networks, it would befit those who want to enter into this space anew to take a step back, take a deep breath, and realize something fundamental - that such networking is a micro-phenomenon of a much larger macro-trend that the Internet has spawned over the years—a digital way to self-express. And today’s social networks, along with other forms of social media, like blogging, video/ music-sharing, wikis, virtual world, and so on, are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the long-term potential of digital self-expression. This is a reality! Organizations who are working in this space must learn how to effectively leverage the incredible power inherent on the Web, essentially creating a parallel universe of digital entities. And they have to realize that the Internet and these digital entities have no geographical boundaries, no laws of physics, or any of the other limitations of a life-form.

“The value of a social network is defined not only by who’s on it, but by who’s excluded” — Paul Saffo.

~ Girish Sharangpani



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