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Social networks are now so well established, that there are now a core 'top 5' social networks which are most popular which doesn't change from year-to-year. There are around a dozen further platforms to choose from other than these, however, you should consider the proportion of active users and how it fits in with your product before investing huge amounts of time developing a presence on them.

The key ones are:

**Facebook**
Facebook is still, far and away, the most popular social media platform. It boasts 1.59 billion worldwide users and has the most evenly-distributed demographics of any platform.

While not the best platform for sales it is definitely the premium platform for increasing awareness of your brand. The sheer reach of your brand’s content on Facebook makes it a must-use.

Whilst we’re not talking specifically about advertising via social media in this webinar I thought it would be worth pointing out that the targeting capabilities in the Facebook advertising tool are fantastic. Because users put their personal detail onto the platform, you can target based on those details. Imagine targeting your ad not just by basic demographics, but by job title, the age of a user's children, or the fact that they recently returned from holiday.

Something to be aware of, however, is the dramatic generational changes happening at the top. The well-documented decrease in popularity has been widely put down to the increase of parents on Facebook - a fact that, understandably, has terrified 17-year-olds everywhere.

If your market is teens, I’d recommend you put more time into Snapchat or Instagram.

**Twitter**
Despite being, arguably, the second-most recognized platform out there, Twitter is fourth in usage with 230 million monthly active users. It does however deliver a staggering 1 billion unique visitors to websites via embedded links each month.

A great part of Twitter for business is that its users have a higher tendency to follow brands there than they do on any other platform. Users are on the site to keep up-to-date about what’s going on, which is why celebrities and musicians do so well. In fact, so many Twitter users are there to listen and learn that only 60% are actually actively posting!

Twitter is also essential for relationship-building with influencers and communication with your customer-base. This makes it an important platform for marketers from every industry.

Since Twitter has added inline images, it’s become pretty apparent that including a picture in your Tweets increases engagement. Social-media company Buffer has seen an 89% increase in Favourites with images over those without, and a 150% increase in Retweets.

**Instagram**
Instagram has now exceeded the user base of Twitter with over 400 million active users a month but its user base is skewed towards a younger demographic. Instagram has a user engagement rate of around 4%, far exceeding Facebook and Twitter. Around 40 million photos are shared on Instagram every day.
Because of the dominance of the 18-29 age group on Instagram, businesses with that target market should be on the site.

**Google+**
Google+ users are 67% male. The majority are in technical and engineering fields. The average age is 28.

Although the platform boasts 2.2 billion profiles, only 4 million or so are active (the huge number of users can be put down, in large, part, to Google’s purchase of YouTube in 2006).

Google+ is ideal for content sharing. Its compatibility with YouTube, the Google Hangouts function (which is great for video conferencing) all function to make brand awareness and content marketing simple.

Top Tip for techies: Since Google’s Hummingbird algorithm was integrated into SEO back in 2013, social shares have become a high priority for online business. In fact, Google +1’s are one of the most important factors in determining SEO.

**Pinterest**
Pinterest has, in the past year, vaulted its way to the #3 spot as most popular social media platform.

84% of those users are female - which makes it the second most popular site by far for this demographic.

Pinterest’s demographics are interesting not just because it’s so astoundingly female-dominated, Pinterest also has the second-highest percentage of internet users in the £50,000+/year income bracket, and 34% of Pinterest users have a household income of £100,000+.

In fact, Pinterest has far and away the best ROI for those businesses that fit its demographic base. 70% of Pinterest users use the platform to get inspiration on what to buy (compared to, for instance, 17% on Facebook).

**LinkedIn**
The platform touts itself as the ‘professional social network’, and in that respect it’s accurate with 414 million users, 38% of internet users with an income of more than £55k are on the platform.

79% of LinkedIn users are aged 35 or older, making it the oldest platform in this list. People use the platform to check up on business partners, find jobs, and network. Users tend to use LinkedIn periodically, rather than on an hourly basis like hardcore users of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

LinkedIn is for professionals, and it's about professionals. It's hugely influential in the job hunt, both for employers and applicants. It's great for networking, and the content sharing function via the pulse platform is superb.