

# September's Facebook Changes: Implications for Marketers

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## Highlights

- During their 2011 F8 conference, Facebook informed the public of three new changes: Timeline, Open Graph Applications and Insights.
- The Timeline affects personal profiles, creating a chronological display of photos, posts and comments from birth onward; it may roll out to Pages in the near future.
- The Open Graph changes allow for more integrated applications (apps) that will interact with the Timeline, news and comment feeds; music sharing is part of this new feature.
- The changes to Insights include additional engagement metrics that allow marketers to look beyond “likes” and “fans.”
- For users these changes mean a self-populating personal history, access to more apps, and possibly better brand experiences on Facebook.
- For marketers these changes bring opportunities for branding, application development and consumer engagement, as well as a heightened emphasis on crafting a thoughtful social media strategy.

## Key Information

In Q3/Q4 2011, Facebook released changes to its website. The primary changes are a new design for profile pages called “Timeline,” a more integrated Application development system within Open Graph, and advanced analytics tracking for Pages through the Insights system. These changes bring new opportunities and challenges for marketers.



The new Timeline feature:

- Changes the layout and information on a profile page. The new design is less post-by-post, and more dynamic, showing photos, comments, posts and key information over time—recent events are displayed in detail, while events from the past are rolled.
- Provides large space for imagery and self-expression.
- Allows users to delete and change activity seen by other users; however, photos and comments are more visible than in the past.
- Displays user interaction with applications, including cooking, music and sports, and integrates this information into the profile page and newsfeed for others to see.
- Allows users to “backfill” their personal history by adding photos to certain years from their past life. For example, someone that joined Facebook in 2011 can add photos from 2003 and tag them as such. On the profile the 2003 photos will appear under the 2003 header.
- Has not yet been applied to Pages, but may in the near future.

The new app development options in Open Graph will:

- Allow Web developers to create apps that sync users’ offline and online activity with Facebook activity.
- Allow apps to be active on a user’s Timeline and seamlessly integrate with their Facebook usage. Examples include apps that track running routes, cooking recipes, and music preferences.
- Differ from previous Facebook apps in that new versions will not require constant user approval to pull data and information, but rather will always be “on.”
- Challenge marketers to create more engaging and continuous interactions with their fans—interactions that fans find worthwhile.

The new analytics offered in Insights will:

- Provide metrics such as friends of “fans,” “people talking about this,” “reach” and “virality” that look at talk-value and go beyond “likes” and “number of fans.”
- Aggregate results week-by-week to show changes in performance.
- Be available to all Page administrators in real time.
- Allow marketers to improve their Facebook marketing strategy and optimize based on results.
- Integrate with other analytics packages such as WebTrends.



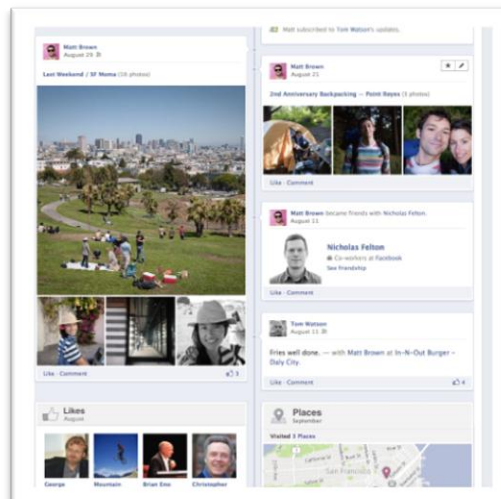
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## Implications and Action Items

### I. Timeline

The Timeline provides a dynamic and engaging experience for users, both for owners of a profile and for visitors to that profile—an experience that marketers can leverage to more effectively socialize their brand. The Timeline layout, while available for individual profiles, has not yet been rolled out to Pages. However, most believe that the Timeline layout will eventually be applied to Pages as well; should that occur, the implications are numerous. For marketers, the new Timeline will create brand management and monitoring challenges and opportunities. In order to assess the impact of this change for your brand, we have outlined some key steps to consider taking.



**Step 1: Know your audience.** Marketers should first understand their audience's uses and expectations for Facebook. You should be able to state your Facebook fans' demographics and technographics<sup>1</sup> so you can identify proper messaging, tone and level of tech savvy. You should determine if your fans employ Facebook for personal use or professional use so that you know how open they are to interacting with your brand. You should know whether your fans are loyal lifetime customers or if they are one-time shoppers, so that you can identify the types of messages and offers your fans might be want or expect from your Facebook page.

**Step 2: Develop a content strategy.** Once a key audience has been identified, it is important to decide what you will post and how often you will post it. Will your content be customer service-based and practical, or will it be inspirational and creative? Will you fill in your Timeline (including the years before your brand had a page) or will you leave the past blank? Developing a content dissemination schedule, perhaps one that aligns with other marketing initiatives (such as promotions, PR releases, events, etc.) will help keep your page updated and dynamic.

**Step 3: Determine a monitoring approach.** Since the new Timeline puts emphasis on topics that are most popular, old posts and comments that received a lot of fan activity in the past may resurface. This could be a positive or a negative depending on the context of the popular post. While we rarely suggest deleting posts, marketers should consider the impact of an old PR snafu that resurfaces and be prepared with a strategy for re-addressing any issues that arise. In addition, you should have a style guide of *when* and *how* to respond to customer comments and questions, and *what* to do in the event that any of your followers start harassing your profile or other fans.

**Step 4: Improve imagery.** The Timeline design allows for more branding through an increased emphasis on photos and visual elements. In particular, the large hero space at the top of the profile page provides considerably more creative room than previously, while individual photo posts receive varying size treatments throughout the Timeline. This means two things: one, you will have more room to play with your Facebook design and two, that you will have to pay more attention to the assets on your Page. For example, if a page lacks photos or the photos are of poor quality, that may leave an impression that your brand doesn't care about its Facebook Page. Like a website, fan pages are a gateway for consumers—a gateway that either draws them in, or turns them away. Consider what you want your Facebook Page to do and say about your brand, and what type of imagery best lends itself to the interactive medium.

<sup>1</sup> Technographics® is a Forrester research strategy that is used to identify how certain customer types utilize technology.

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## II. Open Graph Applications

With the upgrades, marketers will be able to build better relationships with users by developing apps that socialize their content and objectives across followers and over time. However, to do this, marketers need to develop apps that are worthwhile to a consumer. Therefore, when building an app, there are some steps to consider along the way:

**Step 1: Identify a need.** All the same recommendations from Step 1 in the Timeline section above apply to developing a proper Facebook app. First you should understand your audience and their needs and then identify topic areas for your app.

**Step 2: Poll your audience.** Once you have come up with a short list of ideas, consider polling your Facebook fans to see what they think. This will serve multiple purposes. One, if they are engaged and care about your brand's Facebook presence they will provide useful information that will help make your app better. Two, if they are not engaged they will likely not participate in your polls and in doing so will reveal themselves to be not interested in your app. And three, in polling your audience, you will show your fans that you value their input.

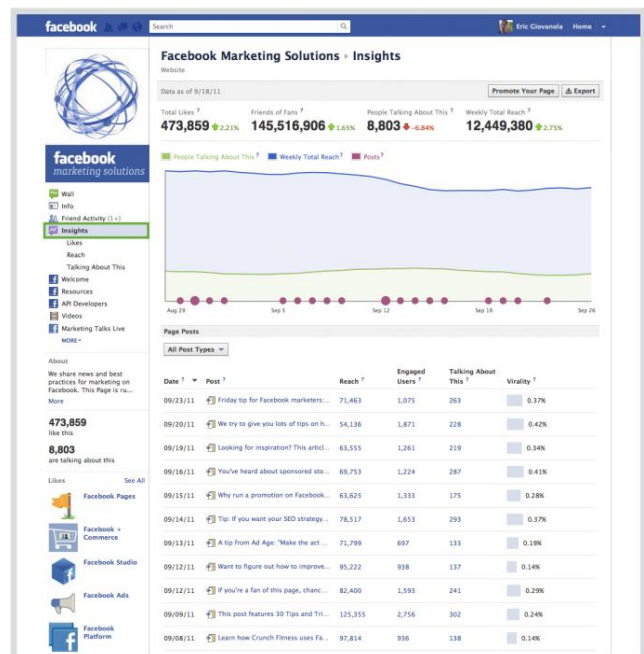
**Step 3: Design and test.** Design a few iterations of the best idea and test those ideas with your actual Facebook audience. Consider requesting their input on a microsite or test platform to demonstrate how your app works. Or engage individuals in focus groups or ethnographies. To take testing to the next level, consider a pilot program where you release an exclusive version to a few users and use them to socialize and perfect the application.

**Step 4: Deploy and track.** Once you have identified the optimal content to meet the needs and expectations of your fans, and have developed the app, you can deploy it into the marketplace. Once deployed, research should continue. You should track the number of users of your app, what they are posting, how they are using the app, and their reviews—both formal reviews and mentions of your app in social media forums. You can use this information to optimize your app for its next-generation deployment.

## III. Page Insights

Prior to the changes, marketers sought to gather fans and accrue "likes." Now with the Timeline and app upgrades, as well as Facebook's ad platform, brands can seek to establish more talk-value among their fans and track and analyze this talk-value using the new reports available in Insights. While Insights is never a comprehensive measure of a brand's social networking health, the recently added metrics will help brands to better understand what consumers like and dislike about their Facebook presence. The information can also be combined with other analytics tools to provide a robust picture of a brand's performance. The steps to do this are fairly easy:

**Step 1: Check it out.** The Insights functionality is available to all Page administrators, so all you have to do is log in and view your metrics. Consider this first view your baseline for comparison to all future reports and results.



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**Step 2: Set goals.** Setting goals is about identifying the KPIs that are most meaningful to you in achieving objectives. What do you want to learn? What do you want to achieve? Consider the value of getting high numbers in “total reach” vs. “people talking about this”—in other words, in quantity vs. quality. There is no correct answer here; however, generally speaking, social networks are best used for engagement and dialogue (quality) rather than numbers of fans (quantity). Once you have determined your ultimate goal, take note of your baseline and determine how much you want to improve your performance.

**Step 3: Create a test plan.** Establish a test place that coordinates with your content strategy (see Section I, Step 2). Consider testing different types of messages and content that you believe is relevant to your audience—your goal will be to evaluate the performance of the different messages/content to see which one performs better.

**Step 4: Analyze results.** During your test, review the reported data in order to compare and identify which type of material performs best.

**Step 5: Integrate and optimize.** Facebook's API integrates with a number of analytics packages, such as WebTrends, so that brand managers can get a holistic report on their marketing campaigns. Beyond this quantitative data, you should also look at qualitative data, such as actual consumer quotes, comments and reactions, in order to complete the performance evaluation. Once you have results, you can start to define optimization strategies for moving forward with the most compelling and best performing content.

## Conclusions

Facebook's new Timeline design and app options provide marketers with opportunities for engaging social consumers. These changes create a more interactive and visually compelling Facebook experience. However, as with most new digital experiences, a need arises for marketers to think through their approach to the medium and enact a strategy that appropriately fits in line with their audience. Understanding an audience, testing your options and optimizing based on data in Insights, are a few of the steps recommended for the successful use of these recent updates to Facebook.

If you are interested in discussing the impact of these changes for your particular brand, RTCRM is here for you—just contact your Digital Strategist, Account Manager or our Business Development office.

More information on the Timeline, Open Graph Apps and Insights can be found online:

Timeline: <http://www.facebook.com/about/timeline>

Open Graph Apps: <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/beta/>

Insights: <http://www.facebook.com/FacebookInsights>

All: [http://www.facebook.com/f8?sk=app\\_283743208319386](http://www.facebook.com/f8?sk=app_283743208319386)

