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'Hey! Nielsen,' Why Are You Going Viral? Researcher Develops Social Network To Measure TV, Internet, Music, Celebrities

by Joe Mandese, Friday, Aug 24, 2007 8:31 AM ET

FIRST THERE WAS MYSPACE. THEN there was Facebook. Now the world's biggest researcher is launching "Hey! Nielsen," a new online social community where people can discuss - and influence - TV, music, movies, Internet sites and celebrities. "Part opinion engine, part social network, and part buzz tracker, Hey! Nielsen is the place to share opinions on your favorite entertainment," reads the description on the beta version of the [site](#), which is currently open only to Nielsen employees, but which will go public by the end of September.

The site, which Nielsen executives describe as still being in "stealth mode," was more than a year in the making, and was conceived by Nielsen Media Research CEO Susan Whiting following an internal "innovations" workshop. The site also is the first new product created jointly by virtually every division of the Nielsen Co., including Nielsen Media Research, Nielsen Entertainment, ACNielsen, Nielsen's business media, wireless and interactive units, and social media analytics firm Nielsen BuzzMetrics.

Interestingly, the site is not being managed by Nielsen BuzzMetrics, but by Nielsen's communications department, though Nielsen Senior Vice President-Communications and de facto "Hey! Nielsen" project manager Karen Watson says the BuzzMetrics team has been a key player in conceptualizing the new social network and has been developing content for it.

"It involved a lot of different Nielsen business units, which is why it's housed in [the communications department]," she says, adding that it still is unclear specifically what type of product or products would actually grow out of the new community.

"We think the product is some measure of how fans are engaged with content and how they interact around content and also how influencers develop in a social networking setting," she explains. "We don't know how people will use it. We hope people will come because they understand that we have clients who will be listening to them and want to listen to them. It really will be there Web site. It's really about the users coming on and telling us what they think."

Watson says Nielsen has quietly been discussing the utility of the site and the data and applications that might grow from it with a select group of researchers from the TV industry, but that it would likely be at least a year before it generates useable media or marketing research.

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But it seems likely that the social community could impact several existing lines of Nielsen research, as well as Nielsen Co.'s new NielsenConnect unit, which has been developing new products and analytics by leveraging and commingling the assets of various Nielsen divisions. New products emerging from the site are likely to compete with existing media and marketing research firms such as Marketing Evaluations Inc.'s Q ratings, which rank the impact of celebrities, personalities and characters for casting movies and TV shows and for serving as endorsers and spokesmen for brands and products. According to the description on the "Hey! Nielsen" beta site, it will include a "rate it" feature enabling users to "add a rating to your opinions to let other members know where you really stand and track how much 'Hey! Factor' your favorites have."

Another likely outgrowth is a massive online panel for conducting experiential marketing and research similar, especially the kind that has become popular among film, entertainment and TV marketers. That would appear to compete with firms like Alloy that specialize in that.

Watson cautions that product plans are still preliminary and that Nielsen will first need to take "Hey! Nielsen" public, and begin working with clients to develop specific applications, but she said it is likely that Nielsen might use it as a viral marketing and sampling opportunity for entertainment and media brands, including the distribution of "schwag" and other "fun prizes."

In addition to the general market social network, Nielsen also is developing an "Oye! Nielsen" site for the Hispanic and Spanish-speaking online community to share their thoughts and opinions about media and entertainment.

Watson declined to elaborate how various Nielsen business publications like *Billboard* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, which cover the entertainment industry might be involved or would utilize the data, but she said it would be an integrated effort that is consistent with the way Nielsen is trying to manage all of its operations these days.

Beyond that, there already are some interesting conversations taking place on the "Hey! Nielsen" site blog that imply some of the directions the company may be heading in.

"In addition to teaching us never to stop too long at a tollbooth, 'The Godfather,' also gives us the advice, 'keep your friends close, and your enemies even closer'," Steve Ciabattoni, senior content manager at Nielsen wrote in a recent post. "We think this strategy works on Hey! Nielsen as well. You'll notice that when you click on a member name, you can see all sorts of things about that member's likes/dislikes, including how they've rated topics and all of their opinions and comments. You'll also notice a button that allows you to add this person as a 'Recommender.' You'll definitely want to add a few people that you think share your sensibilities and preferences, but don't disregard how having someone who is your opposite, your Bizarro Superman if you will, can help you figure out how you may like or dislike something. If you know that you always disagree with a certain member and they are raving about something, there's a good chance that's going to make you avoid that movie or CD. Adding in recommenders who have varied tastes is important too. Their opinions and comments can often help expand the palette of your entertainment world and teach you new things... like telling you that the quote from 'The Godfather' is originally from Sun Zu's 'The Art Of War.' If only Sonny Corleone would have had us as a recommender..."