



Niche competitors crowd into MySpace

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Is [MySpace](#) losing its cool? Margaret Marks, 17, thinks so.

The Birmingham, Ala., high school senior was an avid user of the No. 1 social networking website for two years.

"But I never use it anymore, because most people my age now use Facebook," she says. "I can talk to people I haven't spoken to in years, and you can join college networks and meet people. MySpace is good for looking at bands and music, but for your own website, Facebook is much better."

As the social networking phenomenon continues to grow, competitors are snapping at MySpace's heels — er, portal. Facebook, Xanga, Wayn, vMix and others are salivating over MySpace's 95 million users and recent crowning by tracking service Hitwise as the Internet's most visited domain, surpassing longtime champ Yahoo Mail.

THE COMPETITION: [USA TODAY profiles four sites aiming to invade MySpace](#)

By some accounts, there are more than 200 sites, many aimed at niches. Facebook focuses on high school and college students, while vMix chases the camera-phone crowd with tools for elaborate video and slide shows. "The 12-34 demo wants to create and control their (media) experiences," says vMix's Terry Ash. "They want to flirt, they want attention, and they want to be noticed."

Like MySpace, these sites let people join for free and create their own Web pages, complete with profiles, photos, blogs and messaging capabilities. They also let you add friends to your site.

Social networking sites have not been without their problems, from sexual predators to reports that cyber criminals may be targeting MySpace users.

To deter predators, the House late Monday overwhelmingly passed a bill that would keep libraries and schools from allowing children to access social networking sites, as well as chat rooms. It now goes to the Senate.

Social networking sites remain immensely appealing to the young — and increasingly so to advertisers. This year, marketers will spend about \$280 million to advertise on MySpace and its competitors, according to eMarketer's latest forecasts. By 2010, that figure could grow to \$1.8 billion.

Toppling MySpace could be an uphill battle. According to Hitwise, in the week ending July 22, MySpace captured more than 81% of visits to online social networking sites, or about 52 million unique visitors, while Facebook was a distant No. 2 with 7.7%.

Bridget Savant, 19, a college student in San Diego, says she briefly switched to Facebook but is back with MySpace. She says it's great for checking out potential dates. "It's like full access to someone's room and cellphone."

