



Busy Weekend

SOCIAL NETWORKING WATCH SNW -- Aug 4 -- Its going to be slow for news for a few days I'm afraid. We had a surprise and a rather busy weekend... [Alexandra](#). – Mark Brooks

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ASMALLWORLD, Founder Erik Wachtmeister – SNW Interview



SNW INTERVIEW -- Aug 2 -- **ASMALLWORLD** is exclusive to the jetset crowd, mainly in Europe. They may grow to one million users, in time. But size is not what counts with this social network. ASW is shooting to be the creme de la creme SNS. Now, would someone please send me a darn invite? Please?! – Mark Brooks

What's ASMALLWORLD's founding story?

I would say we're definitely a pioneer in this business. I had a passion to develop this as early as 10 years ago. I have a 25 year Investment Banking background and I was born into a diplomatic family. I have lived in places like Washington DC, New York, LA, Paris, London, Moscow, Stockholm, Kiev, etc. I have also had the opportunity to frequently visit the social "hot spots" around the world.

I realized there was an existing community out there, which I have named 'a small world' and this is what I refer to as the 3 million people that are connected by 3 degrees of separation. (As you know, the common notion is the world has 6 billion people and everyone is connected by 6 degrees of separation.) The people from the community tend to go to the same places, have a lot of the same interests and they all need trusted information which they typically get from each other as opposed to getting it on public websites or publications. There was this strong need to exchange information and information about other people in this community. So that was really my goal and passion to create a platform for this group of people. The purpose also is to create a super-network of Mavens (local experts) and Connectors (highly connected people). By aggregating this "collective intelligence" you get some fascinating results that the community as a whole can benefit from!

We launched the site in March 2004, which was at the same time that MySpace and Facebook were launching, except Facebook was a Harvard-only related network

I remember when I heard about Friendster in August 2003 and I was kicking myself because I thought I was going to be the first one launching a social network. But I was happy not being the first one because you can then learn from other people's mistakes.

What is the typical demographic on ASW?

The average age is 32. 95% of our audience is above 25. It is a very cosmopolitan and international membership spread over 200 countries, 325,000 members. It's largely a European audience; somewhere between 65% and 70%. The largest countries are UK, US, Italy, Germany and France, followed by Spain, Switzerland, Austria, UAE and Sweden. Our members have an interesting professional mix from the fields of investment banking, hedge funds, management consulting, law, advertising, media, fashion and government.

How does one become a member?

It's an organic system where our members decide how it grows. It's invitation only and all you need is an invitation from somebody who is already a member, with invite rights. We've traditionally used an algorithm referred to as our "secret sauce" that uses about 15 different variables that score the members and those who score the highest, end up getting the invite rights. Then you either get the right to. Typicall invite 12 people. The whole goal is for the community to grow in a way that keeps it intimate and filled with fun, interesting and compatible people.

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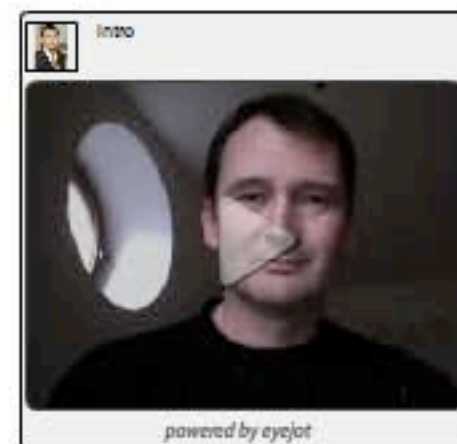
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MARK BROOKS



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Is it more of a country club feel?

It can have a country club feel, or that of a wedding party atmosphere where people let their "hair down" and are much more accessible to people in general due to the intimate environment. Depending what your angle is, it could also feel like a business club or sometimes like a very civilized night club.

The goal is that every new member should add something to the mix. Whether that means energy, ideas, information, as well as a sense of congenial spirit. The key word is intimate. The worldwide web is filled with places that are anything but intimate and so we're just trying to create a sort of intimate corner on the worldwide web and make the world smaller.

What makes you a little different from other sites?

Its kind of a one stop shop. We are a private social network. People can Skype, IM and send messages to each other. We have our own spam free private mail, an incredibly active forum divided into 12 different sections which is travel, nightlife and business related; a high end classifieds similar to Craig's list; a birthday calendar for everyone in your network; an interactive event calendar. There were 13,000 user generated events in ASW last year, which is a staggering number. We have a whole bunch of other cool applications including the City Guide. It is 100% user generated and interactive similar to a Zagat but including 30 categories in addition to restaurants and hotels. Our members comment, rate and rank restaurants, hotels, etc. around the world.

Do you have guidelines about people you should be inviting or not inviting? How do you maintain that?

Not really. We don't want to tell people who they should invite. We tell people to use their judgment. We can then monitor how they use their invite rights.

Our members are also very active in monitoring the community. They can report things that are going on and then we have a full time staff of web masters around the world who take action and enforce our rules by issuing a warning or sending people away to a place called ABIGWORLD and that's definitely a place you don't want to be in. We created ABW right after the launch in early 2004 and it's been a very effective tool, our own sort of online penalty box where you can end up for a few days or a few years.

Can they get out of the Big World at some point?

Our webmaster staff makes the decision. They have their own little legal system and it really depends on what you've done.

Let's talk about revenue. You have two sponsors now, Mercedes and Cartier. Can you tell me more?

Yeah, those are two big sponsors that we've announced. Last year, which was our first full year of online advertising, we had about 100 partners. I would say 90% of them are well known global brands.

Many of the social networks have complained about very low click through rates. Some people are saying its more branding advertising and we don't have to worry about click through rates. In your type of target audience, do you find that it's more about branding than click through?

It's definitely more about branding. We sell ads based on impressions. Our members want to get together in real life and that's why you have so many events going on. And therefore we have a very unique opportunity to connect our brands with events as opposed to just through banner advertising.

So you're both an online and off-line community, whereas most of the social networks are purely online?

I would say we are a real community where most social networks are not communities. It's not like you're going to meet somebody in Shanghai and say oh you're also a member of My Space how interesting. Let's go and grab a beer.

Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

We are building a company, and a brand that has already gotten worldwide recognition. We're getting more interesting people joining today than we did 2 or 3 years ago simply because we have today have achieved more awareness world-wide. I think 5 years from now we will be a larger network but with many smaller niche networks within. These niche network will enable our members to connect even more around similar backgrounds and passions. We'll certainly have state of the art tools that are available technology wise for our members to be super connected, whether it's through their mobile or to know where all their friends are within a radius of a few hundred meters.

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Is there a point where you say, ok we're not going to have this intimacy/exclusivity if we get too big?

Yeah. My guess is we can comfortably go to a million. Our goal is to grow very, very carefully and we'll grow also with the help of local committees. If we employ the right methodology, we can grow to a million people and still be as exclusive as we are today. The world is a big place. We'll shoot for a million in a couple of years and then we'll see where we are.

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