Part IV
Riding the Facebook Viral Wave

The 5th Wave — By Rich Tennant

DARRYL PREPARES TO ENGAGE WITH THE AQUA INTERFACE PAGE
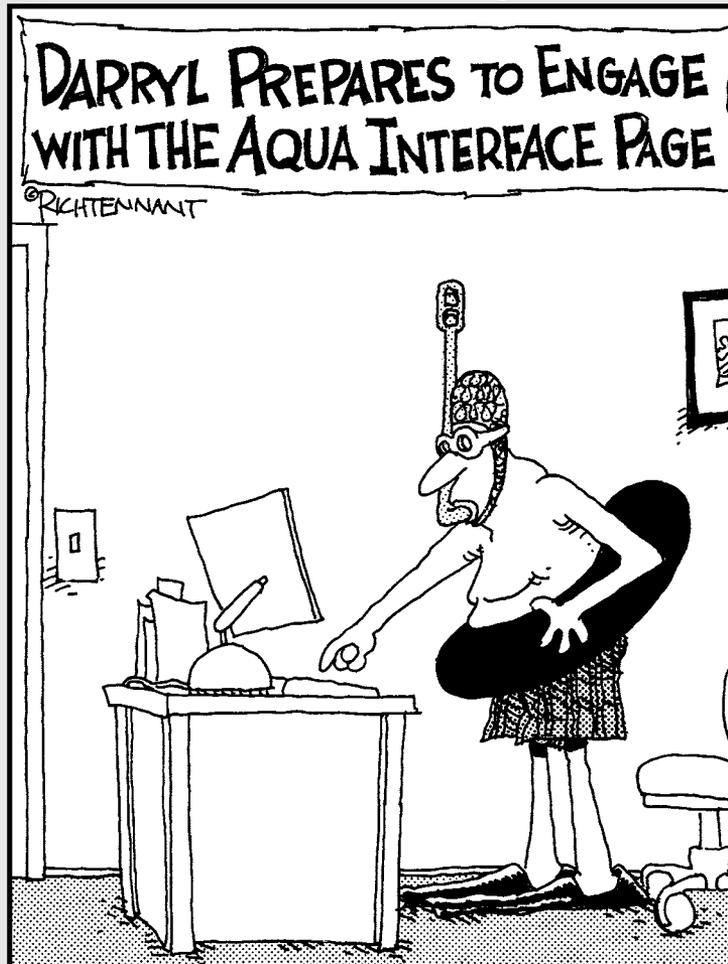
In this part . . .

Despite the great ideas you've gotten so far from the book, there are strategies and tactics that can make your Facebook presence even stronger! In this part, we discuss Facebook applications that can help you form a deeper engagement with your Facebook clients and then learn how to best leverage the Facebook API and platform for branding.

You'll find out how to host your own Facebook contest and conduct surveys that can give you insight into your target market. Finally, we show you how to extend the Facebook platform to your own Web site through Facebook Connect and tap into the viral features that have helped make Facebook so successful.

Chapter 12

Dressing Up Your Facebook Page with Applications

*F*acebook applications (apps) have become powerful tools for marketers. They can serve a variety of functions when installed on your Facebook profile and/or Page and are a great way to add some sizzle to your business's Facebook presence. In fact, Facebook apps are becoming so popular that 70 percent of Facebook members regularly interact with them every month.

Facebook now lists more than 52,000 apps in the Application Directory. Individuals and third-party companies created the majority of them. Facebook allows anyone to build an app that works on the Facebook Platform (as long as the app adheres to the Facebook developer guidelines). Although many of these apps are not intended for business use, such as games, trivia quizzes, and other time-wasting pursuits, the number of apps designed to address specific business needs are increasing.

We discuss how to create a Facebook Page in Chapter 4, and Facebook apps can now help bring your Page to life. Whether adding a presentation via the SlideShare app or posting content from a blog you write or admire via the Simple RSS app, apps are a key ingredient in customizing your Facebook Page and are becoming an important advertising and branding vehicle within Facebook.

Exploring Applications

Facebook apps are software modules that you can install on your Facebook profile or Page that adds a unique functionality that can further engage your audience with your brand. Apps can take on many different forms, from video players to business cards to contest solutions. Facebook offers countless apps for marketers that provide business solutions and promote the business enterprise. Here are a few examples of what apps can do for you:

- ✔ **FedEx Launch a Package app:** Send photos, documents, and other large computer files to a friend's Inbox.
- ✔ **YouTube Video Box app:** Import your favorite videos and add them to your Page for all to see.
- ✔ **The Visa Business Network app:** Make connections with other professionals and promote your business (See Figure 12-1) through other professionals.

For a list of our favorite business apps, see Chapter 19.

Figure 12-1: The Visa Business Network lets you network with other professionals within Facebook.
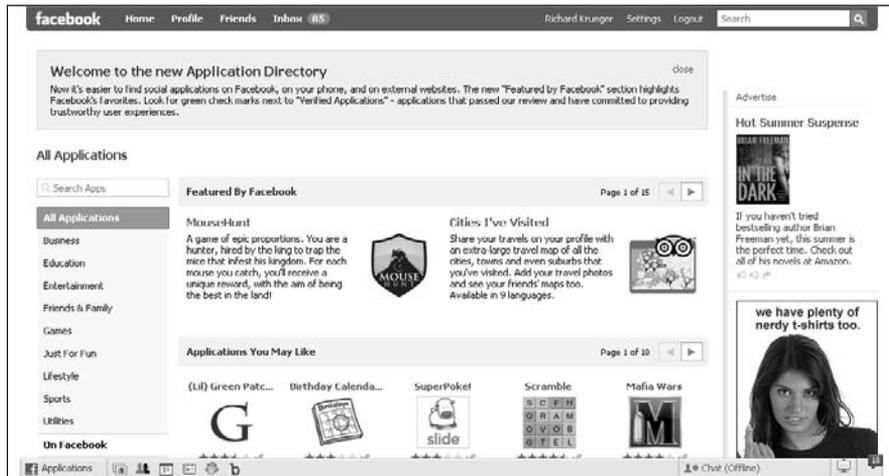
Finding an app

Facebook created a directory to help you find an app that might appeal to you and/or your business. To get to the Application Directory, choose Applications➪Browse More Applications in the lower navigation bar.

The Facebook Application Directory does a good job in providing quick and easy access to more than 52,000 apps in its library. The recently redesigned directory highlights several apps that Facebook recognizes as best in class on a rotating basis. Lower on the directory is a list of recommended apps. You can also search apps by keyword, application name, or type (see Figure 12-2). Clicking the Business category in the left column brings up a good selection of business-related apps. You can also click the Page link in the lower left column to view specific apps that install on Pages.

The bottom half of the directory is the Recent Activity from Friends section, which shows stories generated by the apps at key points of your friend's interactions (for example, filling out a survey) leveraging the Facebook News Feed technology. Stories that your fans see on their Home page let them discover new apps that their friends are using.

Figure 12-2: You can search for apps in the Application Directory.

Adding an app

After you identify an app of interest, you can click the link to view the app's Page. Much like other Pages, the app's Page offers a Wall, company info, reviews, discussions, and boxes, and allows for some degree of customization. You can even become a fan of an app via its Page.

From the app's Page, click the Go to Application button in the left column. Facebook then displays an installation page where you permit access to the app (see Figure 12-3) into your Facebook Page or profile. It's that easy.
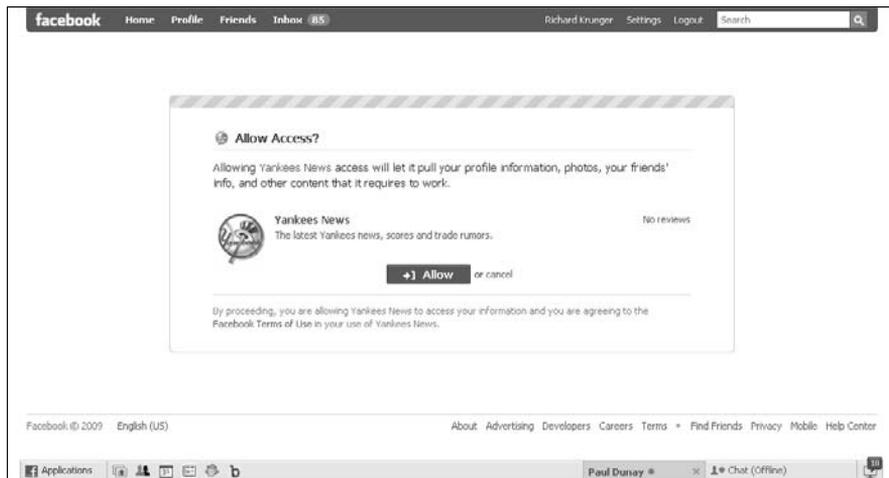
Some apps are designed for consumers, and therefore, can only be installed on profiles. Other apps are designed more for businesses, although you can install them on either your profile or Page. If you have more than one Page, the Allow Access page lists the various Pages and asks you on which Page you wish to install the app.

Deleting an app

To delete an application, simply choose Applications➪Edit Applications on the bottom left navigation bar. You're taken to the Application Settings page, where you can simply click the X to the right of the app that you want to delete. Facebook displays a pop-up window that states if you remove the app, it can no longer have access to your data and will be removed from your profile, bookmarks, and Apps page. Click Remove in the bottom of the pop-up window to delete the app.

REMEMBER

Some Facebook apps, like video, notes, or photos, cannot be removed. These are instrumental to the Facebook experience and Facebook has developed these internally.

Managing your apps

You can adjust your application settings by choosing Settings➪Application Settings on the top navigation bar. Here, you'll find all the controls to manage your apps. When on the Application Settings page, you can sort your apps according to the drop-down menu on the top right. Views include apps

you've recently interacted with (over the past month), your bookmarked apps, apps on your profile, authorized apps, apps that are allowed to post your interactions, and apps that you've granted additional permissions to.

Following is a run-down of key controls within apps:

✔ **Bookmarks:** Access your apps using the links in the Applications menu on the bottom left navigation bar. The top six bookmarked apps also appear as icons alongside the Applications menu. Bookmarks make it easy to access an app at any time. Please note, there will always be six bookmarked apps. As a new bookmark is added, the bottom one will slide off.

✔ **Authorizations:** Specify who receives your news stories about a specific app by choosing Settings⇨Applications on the top right navigation bar in Facebook. Additional Permissions lets you control stories published to your Wall that relate to the app. (See Figure 12-4.)

✔ **Wall Permissions:** Specify the types of stories related to these apps that you want to appear.

✔ **Additional Permissions:** Adjust when Facebook allows an app to e-mail you or access your data when you're offline.

✔ **External Web site Settings:** Change your settings for Web sites here.
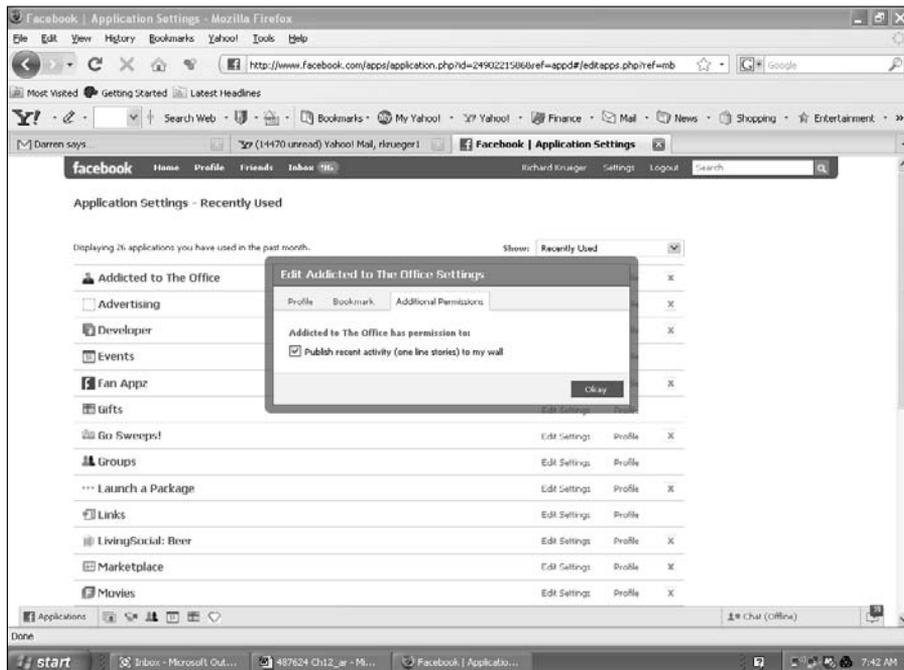
Figure 12-4: You can manage your apps from within the Application Settings.

Setting privacy controls

Facebook apps can generate news stories based on your interaction with the app. If you spend lots of time playing Facebook games, for example, you might want to pay attention to your app's privacy settings. There are a number of ways that application developers can create *triggers*, actions that generate news stories. Following are a few triggers to keep in mind when you interact with any apps:

- ✔ **News Feed:** Takes advantage of a member's News Feed and publishes stories to it (see Figure 12-5).
- ✔ **Privacy Settings:** Lets you grant approval to publish stories, add or remove the app's profile box, and control who sees them.
- ✔ **Alerts:** Sends alerts, or notifications, to a member's e-mail. Permission must be granted before a member can receive e-mail. Furthermore, the member who generates the action must approve before the e-mail is sent.
- ✔ **Requests:** Generates requests, which appear on the top right of a member's Home page. These requests are typically triggered by a member's friend, and often request confirmation (for example, John requests that you join him for a game of Scrabble).

Figure 12-5:
Facebook applications that generate news stories can leverage the viral effect of the social network.

Advertising on Facebook Applications

With members spending so much time interacting with Facebook apps, it didn't take long for the more popular apps to start selling and displaying ads. Developers suddenly had a lucrative revenue stream, while providing marketers with a highly captive and well-defined, app-hungry audience.

This new ad medium also spawned a new ad model — pay-per-install. Now, companies with their own apps could advertise on other apps, and pay only when the viewer installs the advertised app. Often, these pay-per-install ads are presented as recommendations, for example, "People who installed this app, also enjoyed these." And, many times, they appear on a landing page outside of Facebook where terms aren't dictated according to the Facebook policies.

With apps, advertisers could closely align their brand with a useful, perhaps even complimentary social activity (see Figure 12-6). Companies like Blockbuster, for example, could associate their brand with an app such as Flixster, a popular movie trivia game enjoyed by more than 17 million active monthly users.

Application advertising is a good way to ensure that a particular branded app gets enough installs, which in turn, generates News Feed stories and fuels viral growth. If you're willing to pay $1.00 per install on 50,000 users (a $50,000 ad budget), the amplified effect of attracting new users could significantly lower your total cost per user (CPU).

Figure 12-6: Some applications carry ads to incentivize you to download other applications.

Understanding Facebook as a Platform

Facebook opened up its Platform, or operating system, for developers to create engaging apps. Facebook maintains extensive resources for developers, from online tutorials to script libraries to bug reporting tools, and does not charge a development fee. More than one million developers have signed on to develop for the Facebook Platform.

TIP

Anyone can register to become a Facebook app developer (see Chapter 15), but it helps to have a good amount of technical know-how. If you plan to develop your own app, you should be well versed in PHP or other popular coding languages, including Ruby on Rails, JavaScript, or Python. You should have application management skills and understand the fundamentals of Web hosting.

Many businesses are starting to take advantage of the Facebook Platform and creating customized apps, also known as branded apps. They can be developed relatively inexpensively and are a good way to get exposure for a company if the app goes viral, spreading to many members. From large media companies, such as MTV and CNN, to small nonprofit organizations, such as Save a Dog (see Figure 12-7), which has more than 32,000 monthly users, companies big and small are creating customized apps to get in front of their Facebook community.

Figure 12-7: DogTime.com's Save a Dog app lets players earn points while saving dogs.

TECHNICAL STUFF

The Facebook Platform serves as a self-contained operating system unto itself. The API (application programming interface) extends that operating system to developers, allowing them to tap into a member's social graph (connections, information, location, and so on.) and drives social interactions. The underlying programming language that Facebook uses is dubbed FBML, giving homage to HTML, the common Internet language protocol.

Checking out resources for app developers

Facebook provides plenty of resources within its Facebook Developers page for both the novice and the experienced developer. To get there, scroll down to the bottom of your Facebook screen, and then click the Developers link. At the top of the next screen, you'll find links to Documentation that tells you how to develop a Facebook app, as well as Community that tells you where to go to interact with other developers.

Brand marketers must think virally while developing apps that motivate and engage the member. Often, this can take several design iterations to get it right.

If you're thinking about creating a customized app, whether you develop it yourself, work with an independent developer, or work with an app development studio, it's good to review the Facebook Developers page. For experienced developers, plenty of tools are available, including PHP Client Libraries, Debugging Tools, and information on various Hosting Services. (See Figure 12-8.)

Figure 12-8: Facebook provides ample resources for application developers.

Developing apps using WYSIWYG apps

Facebook offers several tools that provide a What You See is What You Get (WYSIWYG) environment to application development. With little or no technical skills, these apps promise that you'll have a fully functioning application up in no time. The Social App Studio (see Figure 12-9), which you can find in

the Facebook Application Directory, brings a template approach to some
of the most popular types of apps, such as gift giving.

Figure 12-9:
Social App
Studio lets
you build a
Facebook
app with
little or no
programming
knowledge.