

**T**HIS year, Facebook is 10 years old. It's been a decade since founder Mark Zuckerberg launched the site, originally intended to be a social networking site for his fellow Harvard students, and seemingly changed the online landscape overnight. Does anyone use Myspace any more? Facebook is now a publicly listed company worth – on paper at least – billions. Yet, its value has raised questions about its commercial viability. Sure, it has 1.3 billion active users – a number close to that of, say, China's total population – but how can this be monetised? And, what would happen if, overnight, everybody just stopped using it?

Then there's Twitter, the site launched in 2006 that limits messages to 140 characters and is now among the top 10 visited internet sites and boasts 645 million users. Twitter is not only changing the way people communicate, but the way consumers engage with businesses. Within seconds, a message can be viewed by millions of people, whether you're acquainted with them directly or not. Similarly, Pinterest and Instagram have created a new way of succinctly presenting information and images to the world.

But it can be a minefield, this social media. The news is littered with errors in judgement from celebrities and politicians, either directly because of social media or through information disseminated by it. From a commercial standpoint, getting the message wrong can be hugely costly. Equally, the rewards for getting it right can be enormous. For the pay-to-play amusement industry, social media offers an opportunity to broaden its base and engage with both operators and players that has never really existed before. Yet, arguably, the industry has yet to even scratch the surface.

Sega Amusements has been building its social media strategy over the past two-and-a-half years, utilising Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

"We started with a strategy of doing all four platforms, starting with Facebook, built it up and really drove the whole thing and expanded it to include all departments," said general manager Justin Burke. "And it's not just 'here we are, here's Sega,' but really integrated with our customers and their customers as players."

The result has been greater interaction with players who provide valuable feedback, images and thoughts on the games they are playing. "It's certainly a very good way of engaging," said Burke. "It's quick, immediate, first-hand feedback – good or bad – that you can react to. Sometimes you hear things that perhaps you didn't think you were going to hear and you deal with it. That's good, raw data."

Sega uses each of the platforms differently, whether to host competitions and giveaways, or to provide sneak previews of its latest product releases, like it did for its new Transformers game. "It's not just 'here's the new product, here's the information,' it's real engagement – getting opinions and getting views from players."

Chinese manufacturer Universal Space, also known as UNIS, had, until last year, mainly focused on YouTube for demonstrating its machines, although it had dabbled with Facebook.

"During 2013," said the company's Steven Tan, "one of our objectives was to integrate far more with the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, etc."

During the last year, the company also created its own media site, www.media.unisgames.com, which is designed to not only act as a central point to access its social media but also has a "wealth" of other press and media information relating to the company and its products.

"We find that different social networking sites have various benefits and uses," continued Tan. "Facebook reaches out directly to our staff, distributors and operators. This is where we post informal news regarding UNIS staff, shows, exhibitions, awards and even weddings!"

Twitter, he said, is different in that it is fast moving and provides a means for communicating generally with a variety of people. Pinterest is "more of a display area," whereas LinkedIn is a "powerful direct marketing tool" – a forum to exchange ideas, discuss trade issues, find out information and get feedback.

Social media, said Allen Weisberg of photo booth specialist Apple Industries, is an "absolutely crucial tool" for customer communication. "It's where so many consumers 'live' today – on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and the rest," he said. Apple Industries has invested a great deal of time and thought into different ways to leverage social media. The company has found a way to monetise social media through its Face Place photo booths, providing a tangible link between social media and the cash box. Since launching its Smile 2.0 platform with networking capability in 2011, all Face Place photo booths have allowed customers to email their photos and videos to friends or post them on Facebook or Twitter. Customers can do this directly from the booth, using the touchscreen.

"Social media is a super-successful up-sell for Face Place operators because it gets 30-50 per cent of our customers to double their average spend from \$5 to \$10," said Weisberg. "For the operator, the extra expenditure is pure profit because it costs him nothing to digitally distribute an image. There is no paper cost, for example."

Furthermore, locations also boost their profile by including their logos and information in the photos that customers share via social media.

Every Face Place photo booth with the Smile 2.0 platform gives the location serious "promotion power," Weisberg said. If a couple – Bill and Jennifer – visits a bar where they have their picture taken in an Apple photo booth, they can then upload that to their Facebook accounts. If each has, say, 500 friends on Facebook, a thousand people now know that they have

visited that specific location.

"Those 1,000 friends not only see Bill and Jennifer; they also see the logo at the bottom of the image that says, 'Johnny Fever's Bar and Grill, Miami, Florida.'"

"It is an incredible marketing tool that locations never had before – one that actually pays them for publicising themselves."

Locations can also use Face Place to collect email addresses of customers,

which enables them to reach out, communicate and begin to build closer, long-term relationships with their customers, Weisberg said.

Although not directly linked to the cashbox, there are other benefits to integrating social media into the play experience itself. Sega's latest launch, Plants vs. Zombies, provides players with a QR code at the end of the game that links through to www.segascorers.com, where players can access leader boards. The company has also launched a new initiative with Plants vs. Zombies plush, where each item comes with a swing tag featuring a QR Code linking to a website that gives codes to unlock features in the game itself. This, said Burke, creates a loop between the game, prizes and social media.

"Sega Scores will appear in more games and, where possible, we will tie plush into the game as well. It's engaging players back to the game and back to the venue. It enhances the game play so that the experience continues on."

UNIS is presently using social media as a marketing and communication tool, but it has a long-term plan that "embraces the capabilities that it offers," said Tan.

"Generally speaking, I think that our industry is now starting to realise how important social media networking is," he said. "Many of us might have missed opportunities in the past to interact with our customers and audiences alike, but I do think that the trade has now realised the potential that Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn have and is looking to embrace the opportunities they offer."

Staying abreast of all the latest trends within social media, however, is a challenge in itself. The popularity of Facebook has reportedly taken a hit in recent months, for example, as users migrate to other sites. Burke also suggested that in certain territories, like Russia and Japan, Facebook is a long way behind homegrown social media sites.

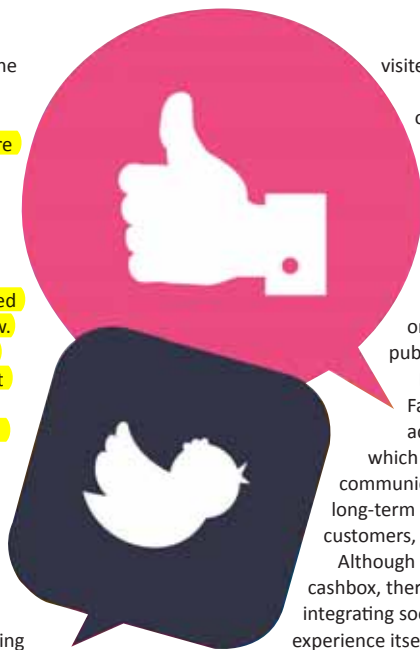
"You have to be mindful of that," he said. "Russia, for example, is a big territory of ours. You can't ignore such sites because it is what people there are using; you've got to look beyond the mainstream."

Maintaining a social media programme can therefore be a time consuming process, as it is something that "cannot be ignored for a week."

The rewards, however, are potentially great.

"It's not a competitive thing," said Burke. "The more everyone gets involved, the better. It will build the overall audience for the industry."

**Simon Liddle**





The Apple Photo Me series of machines is a top-selling product for Warehouse of Games. The Magazine Me application on one of the machines is demonstrated by WoG operations manager, Waleed Atik

The largest booth ever taken at the DEAL show by Warehouse of Games will see the company reacting to the rapid expansion in FEC projects throughout the Middle East, which continue to make the region the most vibrant and expansive in the international community.

Primary products which visitors will be able to see first-hand have come from the big trade

shows around the world over the past few months, from Europe, North America and Asia. Premium marques which Warehouse of Games handle include Raw Thrills and the cream of the American company's IAAPA releases will be in Dubai. Batman, the driving game, has now arrived at the Warehouse of Games offices in Jebel Ali as well as the new Raw Thrills video game Aliens Armageddon, the redemption game Barrel of Monkeys and the latest version of the big sports shooting game, Buck Buck HD. This one will be available in two sizes, 42ins and a Panorama 80ins monitor. "We are still receiving demand for the Snocross," said Yuhanis Nawasreh. "It has been very successful in the Middle East and we have imported and sold over 100 units."

From Adrenaline will come the Fruit Ninja, the FX2, Skylanders Cloud Patrol, Monsters Factory and Jet Pack, all redemption games. The existing Blackout games can now have a ticket redemption addition. "Everyone loves the game and players have demanded the addition of tickets; now it can come as either novelty or redemption."

From Five Star Redemption will come the 15ft Mega Oct-o-Score and the 10ft version the Mini Mega Oct-o-Score, both huge single player models which Warehouse of Games can only positively criticise: "They invested far too much in some superb mechanism and the finish is of a quality we have not seen in the redemption business for some time."

The Apple Industries photo booth range will also be on the stand, a genre of games which has been something of a revelation in the Middle East with its add-on product features which elevate the income dramatically.

SkeeBall products will be there led by



the redemption game Crazy Curves and the ICE range of products will be represented on the Warehouse of Games stand as well as on ICE's own booth. The new Down the Clown redemption product will be the highlight. From the Chinese manufacturers comes the range from UNIS, led by Up and Away, Storm Blaster, Duo Drive, Square Gator and Congo Bongo plus Funfair Bash. Another noted Chinese maker, Wahlap will show its Overtake video driving game on the Warehouse of Games booth. From Taiwan will come Saint Fun with its Battle Ride game which it has produced in partnership with a Japanese software house. Memo Park rides will be there from Italy and of course the Simuline eight Seat 4D Theatron will occupy a large space.

Semnox, the Indian-based debit card systems supplier, will be represented on the Warehouse of Games booth as well as Namco with its Drop the Hook including the new software; Global VR will have a new product available and the Polish company WIK will have its air hockey game on the booth.

"The booth has to be larger this year because quite simply we will have more products to show," said Nabil Kassim. "This seems to be an effect which we are encountering every year these days, but that just reflects the expansion which is happening in the market."