



## An entrepreneur's vision of online social networking

**With the fast-growing proliferation of social networking sites on the internet, it's become common for many people to spend time at work and at play socialising and making new friends online. Indeed, having several social networking accounts on popular platforms like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Flickr is par for the course for many, such as Singapore-based Danish entrepreneur Thorben Linneberg.**



But having a vibrant online social life has its downsides, as Linneberg found out, as he missed out on events he was invited to because he'd forgotten to log into a particular network. He also thought there had to be an easier way of managing and dealing with the numerous emails, requests and other notifications from his various social networking accounts.

So towards the end of 2007, he founded a company called Aureliant to develop a new social networking tool called OrSiSo that enables people to manage their various accounts through a single channel. OrSiSo, which stands for Organise, Simplify and Socialise, acts as an aggregator of social networking sites. Using an algorithm-driven engine called SocialCraft, OrSiSo also enables people to filter and block unwanted information from others who are not

close friends.

"The OrSiSo platform aggregates your social life, and it makes sense of it, it filters away all the noise," says Linneberg, who turns 39 this year.

His innovative idea has won some industry recognition. This year, OrSiSo won the Mobile Monday Best Early Stage Startup award, as well as the Adobe/Nokia Open Screen Project Award.

Linneberg says OrSiSo will be ready for a full launch in a couple of months, as it's still at the beta stage, albeit available online since April. When it's fully developed, the plan is for OrSiSo to be available not just on computer desktops but also on mobile phones and on cable television. Currently, OrSiSo supports nine social networks, which include Facebook, Friendster, Bebo, Twitter, Flickr and LinkedIn. It also supports instant messaging platforms such as Yahoo, MSN, AIM and Google Talk. Plans are afoot to add shopping sites such as Amazon and eBay, and entertainment sites such as YouTube, Last.Fm, Vimeo and DailyMotion.

Besides hoping to attract users by word-of-mouth, Linneberg has secured a tie-up with Starhub, a

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Singapore-based telco and cable operator, to offer SMS and VoIP services.

“The growth strategy is partly to partner with Starhub, to leverage on their user base because just on their Pfingo platform (a Skype-like service) they have several hundred thousand users,” says Linneberg. “And also they have about 33 per cent of the market share in Singapore for mobile users. And so we want to leverage on that to initially grow and get some traction.”

Linneberg is also working to import OrSiSo onto television, with the idea of developing a cable-compatible platform, which would be patented and subsequently licensed to cable operators. With this in mind, Linneberg is also in talks with set top box manufacturers.

While many businesses are badly affected by the global economic downturn, Linneberg, who has founded previous start-ups that did not succeed, believes that the stars are now aligned for him.

“Social networking has actually grown throughout this recession. If anything, it looks like this industry is recession-proof because the less money people have, the more time they spend on socialising at home because that’s kind of free,” says Linneberg. “You see a lot more pictures being stored on Facebook in the last quarter than in the same period last year, because people simply have more time to sit at home. They empty their digital cameras, they update their stuff.”

To be sure, Linneberg has something of a resilient streak in him. About three months ago, he was involved in a traffic accident in which he broke both his arms and a leg. Four operations and five weeks in hospital later, the tall and lanky Dane says he’s happier today than before the accident.

“I would say that I’m almost a little bit more happy today than I was three months ago,” he told INSEAD Knowledge in an interview. “And I’m sitting here talking to you in pretty good shape. When things this bad happen to you, you get five weeks in a hospital bed to think about your life.”

“There are two types of people: ones that look inward and maybe get depressed and think that everything is against them. I’m just happy to be alive and I think I have been reminded about the simple things in life again ... So I’ve had some stark reminders about how fragile life is, but the way I look at it is that ... I’m improving and getting better everyday. I’m actually extremely happy.”

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