

# What Facebook 'likes' can teach you about customers



Nick B, 2013-17-04

Are you on Facebook? I'm sure you are. There are around one billion members, after all. With the planet's population recently hitting 7 billion around 15% of everyone on earth is on Facebook. If it was a country it would be the world's third biggest in terms of population.

That's not bad for Mark Zuckerberg's social network, which was only launched in 2004. Even then it was restricted to university students in America and only opened up registration to everyone in 2006. But the impressive stats do not end there.

[This piece in Gizmodo](#) points out just how much power Facebook now has online. There have been over 1.13 trillion 'likes' since the feature was introduced in 2009, around 300 million photos are uploaded each day and the site now hosts 219 billion photographs. There have been over 17 billion location-tagged posts and over 210,000 years worth of music played on the site.

But what does Facebook do with all that information? Every time a user likes something on the site, or is tagged at a location, or comments on someone else's status, it all goes towards building up an image of that user. Of course, Facebook uses that information to target adverts that it hopes the user will want to click on; that's how the company makes most of its \$5 billion revenue.

But there are other uses for all that data, one that shows how context can be applied to data. [Researchers at Cambridge University](#) have claimed that a person's sexuality, political opinion, intelligence and more can be determined by looking at what they do on Facebook.

The study monitored 58,000 volunteers, who had their Facebook likes fed into algorithms and matched with information gained from personality tests they had undertaken. Some of the revelations were a little strange and, to be honest, pretty irrelevant. For example, the study claims that Facebook users who like curly fries tend to have a higher intelligence and those who like The Dark Knight have fewer Facebook friends than those who have not liked the Batman film.

But it did also show how data can be used to throw up more details about people that had not been revealed. The study was able to differentiate between Democratic and Republican supporters with 85% accuracy and predict male sexuality with 88% accuracy. Relationship status and substance abuse were also predicted with startlingly high accuracy.

The point here is that, in this era of Big Data, adding context to all the information collected on customers can give a business much better insight. This in turn means decisions are made based on much more information, greatly increasing the chances of making the correct decision.

People are generating vast amounts of information about themselves online these days, and businesses are collecting that information. But without proper context around that information – such as where it came from – it is essentially useless.

As more aspects of our lives head online, the amount of data created by the likes of Facebook and Twitter and countless other online services will continue to increase. Collecting the data is one thing; [adding](#)

Technorati Tags: [cloud,context,big data,facebook,zuckerberg](#)  
[ng context](#) to it to get the most out of it is another, equally important matter.

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