

Social network approach to viralising articles

By [Matthew Buckland](#)

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One of the key viral elements of content websites, such as news sites, are the “email to a friend” links you see on many articles. Personally, I don’t use these, but I know they’re valuable: there’s a type of user that religiously use these links as a way of sharing.



Obviously, they introduce new traffic and users to a site, so they’re a key growth element. But they’re also an **outdated viral element**. In fact, the old “send to a friend” is looking rather late 1990s/early 2000s as a web feature.

Since the social networking revolution, **contact mining** and **social networking mining** as a way of building contacts have become more sophisticated ways of sharing content than the old “email a friend”. These days, the “email a friend” links should be replaced by replaced by contact mining.

Sites such as [Octazen](#) and [contact mines](#) offer open source PHP and .net solutions for you. They allow users to build up contact lists on your site, and then share in a more sophisticated and efficient manner (ie without having to monotonously type out emails or remember email addresses).



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From your point of view, it will encourage more sharing and you, the content publisher, are one step closer to behaving more like a social network, rather than just a boring old traditional publisher.

It’ll also allow you to do other things, such as flag users on the system with common interests, or allow you to “follow” another user to see what they are reading or recommend.

In fact, online media and corporate websites need to **get with it**. They’re being left in the dust by more agile, aggressive and more sophisticated development coming out of the social media and social networking sectors of the web.

• Adapted from [original blog post](#) published on 19 February 2009

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Matthew Buckland is GM of Publishing at 24.com. He’s the former boss of the *M&G Online* and co-founder of blog aggregator *Amatomu.com* and group editorial blog *Thought Leader*. He has spoken locally and around the world on online media issues, including New York, London, Amsterdam, Germany, Dublin and Kenya. He’s a prominent blogger, blogging regularly at www.matthewbuckland.com on new media, Web 2.0 and technology issues.

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