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Networked Out: Are There Too Many Social Web Sites? Sites such as MySpace and Facebook have multiplied. But time for interacting is as scarce as ever.

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You already MySpace. You're LinkedIn. Your slobbery canine even has a page on Dogster. But how many online social networks can you be on before it makes life too complicated?

Four, says Beth Simas, 24, a graduate student at the University of California, Davis, who is a member of LinkedIn, Facebook,

MySpace and inCircle, a community for Santa Clara University alumni.

"I don't even keep up with the ones I'm in. I rarely log on to all four during the month – it just takes too much time," says Simas, who dumps other network invitations.

If we aren't already cyber-networked out, we're hitting online networking fatigue as we navigate the plethora of new social sites dedicated to everything from divorce or paganism to firefighting or anime.

"We've only got so much time in the day, and that's what it boils down to," says Fred Stutzman, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina's School of Information and Library Science. "You want to be there with your friends, you want to hang out with them, but when there are so many social networks, we can't really meaningfully spend time there. And if you're not getting meaningful interactions, then it's not all that fun."

It's only natural that social interactions today have moved to the Web, since 65 percent of Americans spend more time with their computers than with their significant others, according to a study by Kelton Research and Support.com. The average visit to a social network site lasts more than 21 minutes, up from almost 15 minutes last year, according to Hitwise, an Internet measurement company.

And that's not counting the number of times a person visits those sites in a day.

"The purpose of social network sites is to hang out with your friends," says Danah Boyd, a fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School.

Teenagers visit each other online because parents keep them from seeing each other in person as often as they would like, Boyd says. College students use sites like Facebook as a procrastination tool. And the highest online social network usage for adults is during weekdays, when they're supposed to be working, Boyd says.

MySpace and Facebook continue to dominate social networking – MySpace maintains about 72 percent of the market share and Facebook holds 16 percent, says Heather Dougherty, director of research at Hitwise.

Other social Web sites – such as Bebo, BlackPlanet, ClubPenguin, GaiaOnline, myYearbook, hi5, Classmates and Yahoo!360 – each claim about 1 percent or less of the market, she says.

So, how do you decide where to spend your time?

It's all about organizing your socializing, says Stutzman of the University of North Carolina. People hang out mostly at what Stutzman calls "egocentric social networks" such as Facebook and MySpace, and then go to niche sites that center on eating, music or traveling when they're looking for a good restaurant or a new band, or perhaps planning a trip.

"There are these profiles where we spend most of our time and we have these others that serve a purpose or fulfill a need," he says. "So you can have a profile there, but you probably don't spend all day every day there as you would on MySpace."

If John Foley were to look for a birthday present for his wife, he would click around Pronto.com, the social shopping site, and look for someone with a similar style for ideas on what to get, he says.

The Web site is vertically focused and useful, not meant to compete with Web sites focused on "gratuitous communication," says Foley, who serves as the site's president.

"People don't go to Pronto every day like they do Facebook, but they do go to Pronto when they're shopping, to see what people like," he says.

But social networking simply to network still fulfills a purpose of staying connected – so connected that you know the minute your friends and acquaintances who live thousands of miles away update their profiles.

"Five hundred friends, that's not real. But we can have 500 contacts, people we've met who can provide some sort of value at some time," Stutzman says. "And to be able to keep them a few mouse clicks away is interesting – it's social capital, and that's important for things like getting a job."

While MySpace still commands the numbers, some believe users are letting their profiles idle there while moving to Facebook, which increased its market share last year by 51 percent (from almost 11 percent to more than 16 percent, while MySpace's went from 79 percent to 72 percent), according to Hitwise.

That movement is much like how people change the regular bars they go to during their lives, says Harvard's Boyd.

"You care more often than not about where your friends are than the bar itself. Social network sites look a lot like that," she says. "These online spaces in a way are digital models of these social spheres we're used to. . . . It's like going to a new bar – you have to learn what the different drinks are – but big deal, most of it looks the same."

Still, the usefulness of MySpace didn't outweigh the time and effort it took to maintain the profile for Ila Zapanta of Sacramento.

She deleted her profile a few weeks ago.

"I just came to the point where for a while, I stopped using it and I realized I didn't miss it," she says. "It was too time consuming."

Zapanta, 26, a sales manager at Raging Waters, is still on LinkedIn to maintain her business contacts, but isn't sorry about saying goodbye to MySpace.

"MySpace is beneficial for bands, businesses and 16-year-olds," she says. "As an adult with real responsibilities and limited time, I'd rather use my time elsewhere – I'd rather have a real conversation with someone face to face, or hang out for coffee or watch a game together.

"And to be honest, anyone you really want to keep in touch with, you will keep in touch with them."

That doesn't include all 80 of her MySpace friends.

"Some of those people who were my friends on MySpace weren't really my friends in real life," she says. "I wouldn't tell them all personal stuff, and if I was having a birthday party, I wouldn't invite them all."