

Bebo social network expands into Europe

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Customers surf the internet at a cyber cafe in London, 2003. Social networking website Bebo announced the launch of five new European-language versions, its first major expansion outside the English-speaking world.

Social networking website Bebo on Monday announced the launch of five new European-language versions, its first major expansion outside the English-speaking world.

Owned by America Online, [Bebo](#) claims to have more than 22 million users worldwide, almost half of them in Britain.

Until now Bebo was available only in English and in Polish, compared to the 40 [language](#) versions offered by market leader [Facebook](#).

From Monday users will also be able to choose French, German, Italian, Spanish and Dutch.

"We think there are lot of opportunities in the Western European market, both for user potential and for monetisation," Bebo's international vice president Nicole Vanderbilt told AFP.

"International expansion is a key part of our growth strategy," she said, adding that Bebo had "very ambitious plans" for the European market.

Once a niche for teenagers and technophiles, [social networking](#) has exploded into the mainstream, with industry research suggesting more people logged on to membership community websites than e-mail services in December.

Worldwide, more than 240 million people used a social networking service in December, according to figures from Nielsen online.

Over the past year, Bebo slipped from third to eighth position in the global social networking market, according to the research firm comScore.

Vanderbildt said she was confident Bebo could reverse the trend.

"It's a fast changing market," she said. "If you look back two years ago the leaders then are totally different than the leaders now."

Bebo also moved to increase its foothold in the US market last week with the launch of a new Latino version.

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