

Facebook: 65 million users connect through mobile devices

September 10 2009, By Mike Swift

Facebook says more than 65 million people around the world now regularly use a mobile device to access the social network, more than triple the number who connected through a smart-phone or other mobile device nine months ago.

That number of regular monthly mobile users likely makes the [social networking](#) giant one of the world's most popular mobile Internet sites, Facebook and analysts said, and executives with the Palo Alto company said this week that mobile is emerging as a key to continuing the rapid growth of Facebook's global footprint.

But just how Facebook will capitalize on that growth remains to be seen.

While the bulk of Facebook's mobile users are in the United States, Canada and Britain, executives said this week that the number of people connecting to Facebook Mobile is also growing rapidly in developing countries such as Indonesia, which has the fourth-largest number of Facebook Mobile users.

"We're working with almost every country on the planet," said Henri Moissinac, head of Facebook Mobile, "except North Korea."

In the United States, analysts say the growing popularity of the [iPhone](#) and other [smart-phones](#) is a big source of growth for Facebook Mobile. The company Tuesday released a version of Facebook for Google's [Android](#) mobile operating system, having released a free iPhone

application in the spring, as well as versions for BlackBerry and Nokia smart-phones.

Facebook Mobile launched in 2006, a simple mobile site in English with a few basic features, such as status updates and photo uploads. As recently as December 2008, Facebook's two mobile sites -- one for any mobile browser and one for smart-phones such as the iPhone -- had about 20 million mobile users. Facebook's mobile sites are now translated into more than 60 languages, and the company does business with 180 [mobile phone](#) operators worldwide.

What Facebook has yet to do, said Karsten Weide, an analyst who follows online advertising with the research firm IDC, is to demonstrate how the rapid growth in the number of its mobile and Web-only users will translate into the kind of advertising revenue that justifies recent valuation estimates as high as \$10 billion.

"Facebook's strategy is, we'll get the eyeballs first; we'll drown out everybody else, and then we'll figure out how to monetize that," Weide said. But in terms of realizing the kind of advertising revenue that would justify such large valuations from that strategy, "I'm skeptical," Weide said.

Moissinac acknowledged that Facebook sees mobile at this point primarily as a means to attract new members, rather than a source of revenue. "The goal is to drive engagement," he said. "We want Facebook to be in your life -- it's always on."

Knowing exactly how Facebook Mobile compares to other mobile services is difficult, because analysts are still developing tools to measure mobile use. But Facebook said that if Facebook Mobile were a standard Web site, it would be the 31st largest on the Internet.

Moissinac said mobile users as a group are twice as engaged as Web-only users, spending more time sharing photos, writing on their friends' walls or doing status updates.

As to why [Facebook](#) is so popular in Indonesia, an equatorial island archipelago in the Pacific that is the world's largest Muslim country with 237 million people, Moissinac shrugged.

"The TV is crappy?" he said.

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