

Hot interest in image sharing website Pinterest

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Guests use computers at a fashion exhibit in New York City in 2007. Pinterest has become the Web's hottest young website, particularly among women, by giving people virtual bulletin boards that they decorate with pictures showcasing interests in anything from food to sports, fashion or travel.

Christine Martinez spent the past week frolicking on the Caribbean island of St. Barth after becoming a star by sharing her sense of style at Pinterest.com.

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"Gawd I love Pinterest," fashion blogger Martinez said in a Twitter

message fired off between flights on Friday as she made her way back to her home in the California city of Oakland.

Nearly a million people have signed up to follow Martinez at Pinterest where people "pin" pictures they have taken or, in most cases, plucked from elsewhere on the Internet.

"I have a penchant for pretty," Martinez said in her Pinterest profile, which had a picture of her with her cherished dog 'Miles.'

As of Saturday, she had 43 Pinterest boards with more than 5,700 images reflecting her taste in jewelry, swimsuits, and more.

Pinterest is such an influential fashion venue that chic beachwear label Calypso St. Barth brought her to the French island territory for a week to "live pin" the label's swimsuit photo shoot.

"Pinterest is the latest procrastination tool of the masses," Avery Spofford of fashion website shefinds.com wrote in an online post citing Martinez's adventure as evidence of Pinterest's clout.

"Mostly, people just like to look at photos of puppies and cake and interior design," Spofford continued. "Us, too!"

Pinterest was launched in early 2010 and has growing at a dizzying rate in the past six months despite being invitation-only. The website reportedly has more than 13 million users.

Pinterest is driving more online traffic to retail websites than social networks LinkedIn, [YouTube](#) and [Google+](#) combined, according to a January report from Shareaholic.

"Pinterest's traffic charts aren't hockey sticks -- they're rocket ships,"

Internet tracker RJ Metrics said in an analysis released last month.

"Pinterest is the hottest young site on the Internet."

Brands are leaping onto Pinterest, setting up pages to appeal to prime shopping demographics or forming collaborations such as the one between Martinez's MilestoStyle.com blog and Calypso.

"The amount of free advertising a brand gets on Pinterest is ridiculous," blogger Kerry Sauriol wrote at WomenInBizNetwork.com.

"Without even having their own Pinterest boards, clothing companies, furniture designers, tech companies, and on and on have their products pinned and adored," she continued.

"Think of the marketing power of a brand that does have a board."

Other websites have begun adding "pin it" buttons inviting visitors to decorate Pinterest pages with images using a single click, according to co-founder Ben Silbermann.

"The last few months have been a whirlwind here at Pinterest," Silbermann said in a recent blog post. "It's humbling, and exciting."

The small Pinterest team works in box of an office in single-story building in downtown Palo Alto in Silicon Valley.

About a dozen engineers were working at rows of desks in an undecorated room when an AFP correspondent visited.

Pinterest said it was too swamped with attention from users and media for interviews.

Rampant pinning of images snagged from the Internet has raised concerns about copyright violations at Pinterest.

The website follows procedures set out in US copyright law and has a form at the site for reporting violations, Silbermann explained. Each "pin" has a flag icon for marking pirated content.

"We care about respecting the rights of copyright holders," Silbermann said.

"Copyright is a complicated and nuanced issue and we have knowledgeable people who are providing lots of guidance."

Pinterest fans include Dave Morin, a longtime member of the Facebook team who left the leading social network to start Path.

Morin sees Pinterest as part of a trend for people in "the world's biggest club" Facebook to form sub-groups based on interests or close relationships.

"Now that the world understands how to be social through the Internet people want unique experiences in different contexts," Morin said, noting that Path lets people intimately share with family and close friends.

"Pinterest has a space where you can talk about your deep interests," he continued. "In my case, deep interests in ski gear or photography gear."

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