

I more than 'like' you: Company diversifies Facebook buttons

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Sure, you can "like" a store on Facebook, but you can't easily tell all your friends you "want" that new pair of jeans, "love" that handbag or "own" that sleek electric guitar.

Minneapolis-based 8thBridge Inc. is seeking to shake up the world of [Facebook](#) by adding these new buttons of endearment linked to the [social media](#) site. It hopes the options will encourage Facebook users to broadcast their shopping desires on their pages - and make the social media site all the more attractive to advertisers.

The firm had centered its business on encouraging users to buy items directly on Facebook, but retail sales never took off because most consumers still prefer to shop on a retailer's website.

So now, 8thBridge is doubling down on Facebook, surmising that if users broadcast their shopping opinions to their friends, advertisers will be interested.

"It's word-of-mouth marketing. That's where the value is," said Wade Gerten, CEO of 8thBridge.

A consumer can click on the words "want," "love" and "have" next to a dress on American Apparel's website, prompting a post on their Facebook page. Friends will be able to view the selected item on Facebook and can even go to the company's [retail website](#) to purchase the product.

Analysts said they believe 8thBridge's new Facebook marketing tool, called Graphite, will help boost sales for retailers. Now, Facebook users will be able to differentiate if their friends want an item or if they already have it. In addition, the retailer will be able to know what consumers are interested in buying and could offer them a discount for wanting that dress.

"It's almost like your gift registry, but it isn't around your birthday," said Mike Gatti, senior vice president of member relations for the National Retail Federation. "It's all the time."

Already, more than a dozen retailers from Guitar Center to Oscar de la Renta have signed up for the new [marketing tool](#), generating more in sales for 8thBridge than what it made during all of last year.

Companies pay on average \$5,000 a month to use the tool and a one-time subscription fee, which costs less than \$10,000, Gerten said. As a result of the signing up, each brand gets to pick its own expressions to post on Facebook.

More companies are ramping up their marketing budget on Facebook because of the intimate way they can connect to the consumer and their friends. This year, companies worldwide will spend \$7.7 billion on social network advertising, according to data analytics firm eMarketer Inc.

"I think every retailer is exploring this space now. They have to," said Tim Brunelle, president of the Minnesota Interactive Marketing Association. "There's a greater cost to not experimenting. So why not give it a shot?"

Stacey Shulman, chief information officer of American Apparel, said 8thBridge's tool fits in well with the retailer's social media strategy.

"It allows us to get detailed insights about the popularity of our products beyond the 'like' button," Shulman said in a statement.

Indeed, 8thBridge says 57 percent of consumers who click the "like" button on Facebook already have the product, according to its own survey. That may have alienated some shoppers who wished to express their relationship to the brand in a different way, the firm said.

8thBridge is known for launching the first store on Facebook in 2009 for 1-800-Flowers.com. The company was founded in 2008 and is a winner of the Minnesota entrepreneurial competition Minnesota Cup. Gerten declined to state the exact number of employees, but said it is in the 30-person range.

Last week, Gerten toasted his team, investors and friends for 8thBridge's new product launch at a gathering at the Crooked Pint Ale House in Minneapolis.

"The hard part is over, and now it's party time," Gerten said as he greeted his guests.

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