

**June 2010** | Long gone are the days when 'online' was synonymous with social isolation and loneliness. In fact, we're now witnessing the exact opposite: technology is driving people to connect and meet up *en masse* with others, in the 'real world'. It makes for an interesting, easily-digested trend, begging to be turned into new services for your customers.

# "MASS MINGLING"

*Why the online revolution is fueling an ever-increasing range of 'real world' meet-ups*



Earlier this year, we touched upon the MASS MINGLING trend in our **'10 trends for 2010' briefing**, but this phenomenon now warrants its own, full briefing:

As predicted by digital gurus more than a decade ago, hundreds of millions of people *are* now living large parts of their lives online (and lovin' it!). However, this has not turned entire generations into homebound, anti-social zombies (another popular forecast). *Au contraire*: social media and mobile communications are fueling a MASS MINGLING that defies every cliché about diminished human interaction in our 'online era'.

So (for now), forget a future in which the majority of consumers lose themselves in virtual worlds, with cities dying and kids never seeing the light of day; **expect people to mingle and meet up** like there's no tomorrow. A definition:

**MASS MINGLING** | Thanks to the online revolution, hundreds of millions are now actively searching for, finding, connecting/signaling, and staying in touch with likeminded souls in the virtual world. Constant updates, GPS and mobile online access is now bringing this explosion of dating, networking, socializing and mingling to the real world domain.

Here's what driving this trend, in more detail:

# 1. People love to connect



MASS MINGLING follows the pattern of any consumer trend, whereby an existing human need is unlocked in a new way. In this case, interacting with other people - a **fundamental need** (which goes beyond simply enjoying one another's company, or being emotionally dependent on other people) - has become easier thanks to new technology.

So, no surprise here that hundreds of millions of people are now adding and tending to personal profiles (listing likes and dislikes, interests, preferences, physical assets, and opinions), making it easier than ever before to 'discover', or stay in touch with, like-minded others\*.

Think **friends and family, colleagues, romantic interests, and those sharing similar hobbies, interests, political preferences, grievances or causes**. And all this 'befriending' takes place in unprecedented quantities: never before were people able to build and maintain such extensive and relevant personal networks.

Some numbers:

- **Twitter**: 100 million+ users, with 50 million tweets sent each day.
- **Facebook** : nearing 500 million users. The average user has 130 friends, spends 55 minutes a day on the site and receives three "event invitations" to real-life gatherings every month (in December 2009, the company stated that 3.5 million events were created every month).

Next? According to [The New York Times](#), **Facebook will soon incorporate 'location'** in two ways: its own features for sharing location and APIs to let other sites and apps offer location services to Facebook users. This could well be a MASS MINGLING killer app.

- **LinkedIn** : over 65 million members. A new member joins LinkedIn approximately every second.
- A 'veteran' MASS MINGLING engine like **Meetup** has 6.1 million members, handling 2.2 million RSVPs and 180,000 meet-ups, in 45,000 cities a month.
- **Foursquare** has one million users, while **Gowalla**: 150,000 users.
- Nearly three quarters (73%) of online teens and an equal number (72%) of young adults\* use social network sites. 73% of adult profile owners use Facebook, 48% have a profile on MySpace and 14% use LinkedIn. (Source: [Pew](#), Feb 2010.)

\* Hundreds of millions of personal pages, feeds, status updates, tweets, profiles, blogs—courtesy of the Facebooks, the Twitters, the LinkedIns—are building an eternally up-to-date encyclopedia of individuals. Some thoughts on how this will lead to 'forever connected' amongst younger generations, from our fave media guru [Jeff Jarvis](#):

"Thanks to our connection machine, they [young people] will stay linked, likely for the rest of their lives. With their blogs, MySpace pages, Flickr photos, YouTube videos, Seesmic conversations, Twitter feeds, and all the means for sharing their lives yet to be invented, they will leave lifelong Google tracks that will make it easier to find them."

## 2. People love the 'real world'



Image courtesy of [flickr/rodrigoavera](#)

While the rise of the online world remains one of the premier (consumer) stories of our time, [URBANY](#) and the [EXPERIENCE ECONOMY /LIVING THE LIVE](#), with their decidedly 'offline' overtones, are enormously impactful too.

This incredibly powerful tandem of mass urbanization and experiences has resulted in an **orgy of real world activities and happenings** that are all about mingling; from countless cultural and not so cultural events, concerts, festivals, and seminars, to a burgeoning and truly global bar/dining/party scene, to a Warholian retail renaissance, to tourism & travel now being one of the world's largest industries, employing approximately 220 million people and generating over 9.4 percent of world GDP. In short, people have always, and will for a long time continue to enjoy interacting with other warm bodies.

**With online going mobile, why stay inside anyway?**



The **mobile web** has eradicated any wired person's dilemma whether to be offline in the real world, or being online but stuck in one location (in a room, or worse, in a basement). **Offline is now online, and online is offline.** More on that below ('An info-layer on top of daily life').



A quick side-step: **Traveling (and thus meeting up) has of course become easier, cheaper and yet more sophisticated on a global scale.** Forget recessions, strikes and Icelandic volcanoes: the **NO-FRILLS CHIC** travel-eco-system now includes low cost airlines from the Middle East to Asia, and funky Yotel/CitizenM style hotels from Taipei to Toronto. Making it possible to go anywhere and meet anyone, at low costs, without having to sacrifice too much comfort.

## 3. An info-layer on top of daily life



Photo courtesy of [Mistdog on Flickr](#)

Back to the beginning of this Trend Briefing: MASS MINGLING is happening because people *can*. There's now an all-

encompassing **information layer**\* on top of real-world daily life, that (especially when **mobile and location-based**), turns 'connecting' into 24/7 and 'on the go', further blurring the boundaries between online and offline.

This layer has created a space in which following, finding, tracking, connecting to, and ultimately (spontaneously) meeting up in the real world with interesting known and unknown people will be easy, automatic, instinctive, convenient, and even natural. And thus, for many, connecting to 'strangers' is rapidly becoming **second nature**.

For a glimpse of things to come, dive into location-based 'meet-up' services like **Foursquare** (now doing **700,000** check-ins per day), **Gowalla**, **Google Latitude** and **Loopt**.

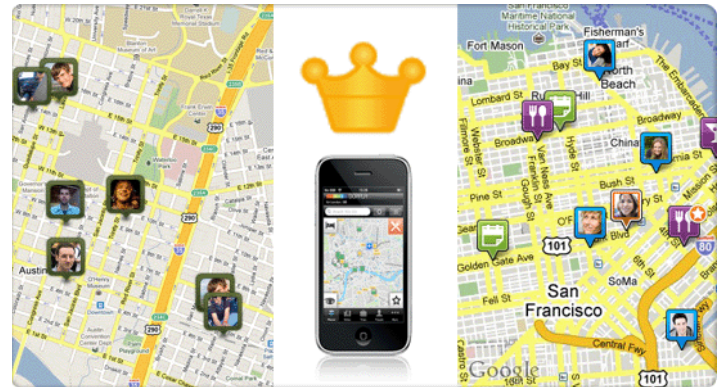
By the way, the first official **Foursquare Day** took place this April. News of the event spread by word of mouth, leading many users to organize parties and gatherings celebrating the social network.

*\* Let's not forget that this emerging layer also taps into a vast reservoir of local knowledge and content that has been growing online for years. This incredible info-infrastructure further helps (if not encourages) MASS-MINGLING prone consumers to select venues and activities (based on profiles, preferences, reviews etc.) before venturing out.*

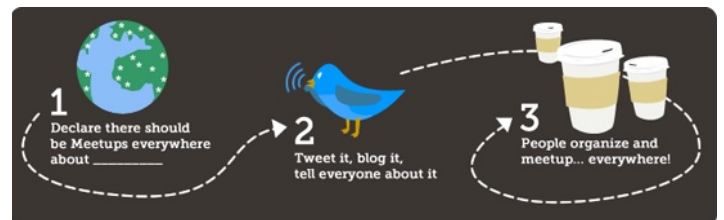
# Examples

As always, a number of examples, though there are so many, that this is really just a snapshot. We assume that virtually all of you have been taking part in this trend for ages anyway, so let's focus on anything that may help you *hone* your MASS MINGLING offerings:

## Location-based services



- Aforementioned **Foursquare** is a location-based social network that allows users to 'check-in' at various locations in cities around the world, broadcasting their location to their friends and meeting new people. In return, they are awarded points and badges, and can read tips left by other users.
- **Gowalla** is a social networking game that encourages users to share their location using a range of applications designed for mobile devices. The network features in-game 'items' which can be collected as bonuses or dropped and swapped between users at check-in 'Spots'.
- **Loopt Mix** enables users to find and chat to people that are nearby. The app also allows users to create their own profiles, like and tag content and also favorite contacts to make it quicker and easier for the user to access their social circles.
- Google's **Latitude** lets users see the approximate location of their friends and loved ones.



- New York-based **Meetup** recently launched a service for organizations, companies and movements to launch global events via the web. **Meetup Everywhere** is an

open and free platform which aims to spark offline events amongst communities of like-minded individuals, across the globe. The website enables organizers to map the meet-ups and share announcements and updates through users' facebook and twitter accounts.

- UK-based dating site **Lovestruck**'s iPhone app is aimed at single professionals. The service uses work locations as a base to link potential lovers and allows customers to enter their own status updates, such as 'FreeTonight' to inform other users of their availability.
- **Where the Flock** is an **iPhone app** that solves the problem of people needing to know how far away someone is at any given moment. The app enables consumers to bookmark locations, record a location of a parked car or view the speed a user is travelling.



- **StreetSpark** allows users to connect with people nearby who share their interests. The users set up profiles detailing themselves and the type of people they want to meet. When a match appears nearby, they will see a photo and some basic information. If both users signal their interest by pressing 'ignite', they can see more information about each other and chat.
- **Gatsby** is a mobile app that introduces users to nearby people with interests that they share. To use the service, users need to have a Foursquare account and add Gatsby as a friend, tagging themselves with the interests that they have, such as cooking or yoga. Gatsby then searches for people locally and texts both users with first names and shared interests.
- **Dutch 'Open Coffee'** is a LinkedIn initiative, connecting business professionals in various Dutch cities for a weekly Friday morning coffee networking event.
- In France, the "**apéro géant**" or massive aperitifs, with Facebook acting as an organizing tool, sees up to tens of thousands of strangers gather in an open space for a party. Some have been forbidden, as authorities are unable to hold individuals accountable for any accidents or to pay for the clean-up.



- **Urban Signals** is a mobile application that enables in-person connections between singles. The app works by broadcasting the location of users' based on GPS signals, which enables members to locate nearby singles and meet up instantaneously if they desire. Whenever their radar is switched on, they are shown the location, mood and status of fellow members of interest within their specified radius and "Signals" are exchanged between users to make contact.
- **Friends Around Me**, an iPhone app, markets itself as a mobile app for interacting with friends, 24/7, across social networks and without being tied to a computer. Users are able to locate nearby friends on a map, initiate group or multiple 'chats' and earn rewards for active participation with the service.
- **Flickr** has created groups of likeminded photographers and artists: they organize Local Meet-up events, which are organized and can be discussed within the dedicated forum areas on the Flickr site.



- **Plyce** is a mobile, location-based social network that connects friends and places. Features enable users to meet up with people and see where friends are; notch up points to receive badges, or share favorite places via chat and message options. The company is based in Paris.
- **Made in Local** is an interactive guide and social network where consumers can use different applications to plan and share experiences with their friends. Currently the guide is operational in Lausanne and in Tenerife.
- **Stackd** is a hyper-local social network that helps people in the same building connect for business or pleasure and make the most of what and who is close to home.

Stackd is a free online networking app created by communication design consultancy [Supermetric](#) as a self-initiated project that launched in December 2009.

- [Tagwhat](#) allows users to place digital tags anywhere on earth using augmented reality and location-based social networking technology. Users hold up their mobile device and geo-contextual tags (including meet-up plans) from friends/community members become visible.



- [Pink Map](#) is a gay location guide and gay dating tool, where users are able to create a profile and update their locations on the mapping feature. In April 2010, pink map launched a version two of its [iPhone app](#), enabling users to use the service whilst on-the-move, add their favorite locations and use a check-in function. Also check out [Grindr](#).
- [Dehood](#) is a social networking app that helps to bring people together at a local level. The app provides locals with a range of features, such as enabling users to create a local event, a twitter feed of local updates and a place for tips and suggestions to pass on within a user's local network.
- [Dopplr](#) helps travelers to share their personal and business plans with trusted others, enabling travelers to spot when their plans overlap, and plan meet-ups.
- The [Supper Club Fan Group](#) provides an online forum for fans of underground restaurants and supper clubs to share information about local events.
- [My Rete](#), the social proximity company, has developed an instant networking tool called [WhosHere](#). The app enables users to scan for nearby users; receive relevant profiles based on their selected criteria, and then directly chat and introduce themselves via the app.
- A fun MASS MINGLING sign of the times *pur sang*: a few months ago, [Please Rob Me](#) created a website to raise awareness of the potential issues that can arise from broadcasting personal location data online. The main warning focused on the threat of providing home address information and then sharing further location updates which could alert thieves when homes are vacant.

## B2C brands jumping on the bandwagon



- UK network Channel 4's hit show ['Come Dine With Me'](#) (in which amateur chefs hold competing dinner parties for one another) give fans of the show the tools to host their own parties with their Facebook friends.
- [Seth Godin's](#) fans have arranged unofficial [meet-ups](#) around the world, enabling members of the 'tribe' to meet and share ideas, while Fans of [Fred Wilson's](#) venture capital blog [AVC](#) can arrange [meet-ups](#) to discuss their shared interests. Meanwhile, [Techcrunch](#) invites its readers to arrange and attend [meet-ups](#) between fellow technophiles across the globe.



- In May 2010, [Microsoft](#) hosted a [secret party](#) in Atlanta to promote its social media focused phone, the [Kin](#). A few hours before the event took place, hints on the concert venue were dropped on social media sites Facebook and Twitter. Word quickly spread and more than 1,000 people showed up at the hip hop concert hosted by rapper Big Boi.
- In May 2010, Samsung projected a [large advertisement](#) onto the side of a building in Amsterdam to promote its 3D LED TV, as well as allowing users to experience the TVs on a smaller scale. The brand used a range of social media networks to spread word of the event, and mingling participants who checked in on Foursquare were offered the opportunity to win one of the 3D TVs.



- Disney has created a Facebook app designed to encourage US consumers to group-purchase cinema tickets for the opening weekend of Toy Story 3. **Disney Tickets Together** enables users to promote the event to their friends and organize group parties via facebook. After a soft-promotion of the app, via its **Toy Story 3 Facebook page**, Disney reported seeing groups as high as 80 people booking tickets to attend its third film.
- A recent **tweet** from SouthWest Airlines:: "Hey Panama City! Join us @ Tootsies @pierpark 9-11 tonight! 1st 100 customers to whisper #seaturtle at the door get drinks on us! #SWAECF".

Again, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Time to get going!

## Next & Opportunities



Expect the MASS MINGLING trend to be giving for a long time. While all of the above will go mainstream in the years to come, keep a (short-term) eye out for impromptu meet-ups of strangers, mobs and crowds with similar causes. Many of these meet-ups will revolve around generating **public attention**, or getting something done.

You are reading a PDF version of "**MASS MINGLING**" ([www.trendwatching.com/trends/massmingling](http://www.trendwatching.com/trends/massmingling))

Also (and rather amusingly), expect the new lament from sociologists and philosophers to be about the loss of solitude, due to 24/7 connecting activities (after having fretted over social isolation for years ;-)

Long term, younger generations will be at ease with meeting likeminded souls they've met 'virtually': it's a change in attitude that will fuel MASS MINGLING even more.

On the tech side of things, expect the triumphant rise of all things mobile to continue: iPhones, Android, Apps, iPads, 3G, 3.5G, 4G, Wifi everywhere, clouds, GPS (and Galileo, Compass and Glonass)- the list goes on! Which is yet another push for MASS MINGLING on steroids.

**For business, the opportunities are plentiful:** Anyone involved with anything that helps people getting and staying in touch, that gets people from A-Z, or that accommodates those people before, during or after meet-ups with others, should find it easy to dream up services and products that further facilitate one-off or recurring MASS MINGLING of your customers if not your brand fans.

At the same time, purely 'online' brands will have to further embrace the real world, by building a temporary or permanent real-world, physical presence. In the end, every business wants to be where its customers (physically) are. Of course, our recent Trend Briefing on **BRAND BUTLERS** comes to mind, too.

Oh, and what's trendwatching.com itself doing, mingling-wise? Well, while we're doing plenty of unofficial mingling, we *will* initiate a number of more structured **MASS MINGLING events for dedicated readers**, Seth Godin style. We'll announce these meet-ups early Q4, so make sure you are **subscribed** to our Trend Briefings.

Until then, make the most of the convergence of offline and online!