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# Indian social networking sites go niche

By **Harini Subramani** in Mumbai

SOCIAL networking communities created in India have not hit the chord with the audience as much as their global contemporaries such as Orkut or Facebook. While these sites have not been able to take off in a big way, they have also not been complete failures.

According to industry watchers, the mantra for success in this arena is to be able to create a niche.

"It is quite essential to differentiate your site from the rest," said Shivanandan Pare, chief operating officer (COO), *Bigadda.com*, a networking site started in August 2007. Part of the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG), Bigadda uses celebrities and Bollywood to attract traffic.

According to Pare, it is not easy to turn such ventures profitable. The company earns revenue through its associations with successful brands such as Airtel and Samsung. "This is essentially a game with a long gestation period," he added.

Around 2006 and 2007, social networking

## Around 40 pc of the Net traffic is hooked to networking sites

sites such as *BigAdda*, *Yaari*, *minglebox* and *DesiMartini* were launched but not all gained enough traction. Currently, many of these sites are either in hibernation or have shut down. *Yaari* does not exist anymore, *minglebox* has changed its focus towards education and *DesiMartini*

was acquired by HT Media last year.

"It became essential to bring in a local flavour to the content to survive," said Yogesh Bansal, chief executive officer (CEO), *Apnacircle.com*.

The craze for networking sites clearly exists among the young generation. Hence, companies continue to invest in such ventures. Apnacircle is a website that works on the lines of LinkedIn and helps people find jobs. The company generates revenues from advertisements. It will take at least another two years for the company to break even. "Due to the creation of the niche, the target audience is quite limited and hence, the reach may not be as much as for the global networking sites," said Bansal.

Of the total Internet traffic, 30-40 per cent is hooked to social networking sites.