

WSJ's Web site adds Facebook function

By SETH SUTEL

NEW YORK

The Wall Street Journal has just accepted Facebook's request to be online friends.

Hoping to tap into the growing buzz of online social networks, the Journal is adding a feature to its Web site that will allow readers to see which Journal stories are popular among that user's Facebook friends.

The feature, which goes live early Wednesday morning, is called "SeenThis?" and is powered by a company called Loomia Inc. Financial terms weren't disclosed.

Loomia already provides WSJ.com with another feature called "People who read this ... also read these stories" which appears on the right-hand side of the text of a story.

News Web sites will commonly feature lists of the most popular stories on the site, as measured by the most views, most e-mailed or most recommended or blogged about.

But by showing articles that were read by viewers who apparently had similar interests, the Journal is hoping to harness some of the magic of successful shopping sites like Amazon.com Inc., which will make recommendations to shoppers based on what other buyers also bought.

Adding the link with Facebook takes the idea a step further, by letting viewers see what stories their own friends are interested in, not only those of the general WSJ.com readership.

Daniel Bernard, general manager for Wall Street Journal Online, said the "SeenThis?" feature will be opt-in only, meaning it won't start up unless the viewer expressly asks it to, and users can opt out any time.

The application also won't collect personally identifiable information on which people are reading which articles, just aggregated information on which articles are being read most by those in a readers' group of Facebook friends or networks.

Loomia's chief executive, Dave McMurtry, said the Journal was the first media company to fully implement the "SeenThis?" application. General Electric Co.'s NBC Universal and CNET have also signed up to use it.

The module that will be visible on the Journal Web site is something called a "widget" in Internet lingo -- a small, self-contained application that does a specific task.

The user can also add that application on to his or her Facebook page, where it would show users not only which Journal articles are most popular among that users' friends and networks, but also video and other material from CNET or other providers.

Bernard said the Journal's goal in adding the fixture was not only to help make the Web page more functional for

its existing users but also to try and lure in new users from outside sources such as Facebook.

Other newspapers have also been developing widgets that people can post to their Web sites or pages on online social networks like Facebook in hopes of bringing in more online traffic and spreading awareness of their brand name.

The New York Times offers an online crossword puzzle through Google Inc.'s personalized Web pages as well as a news quiz application on Facebook. Gannett Co.'s USA Today also offers users widgets for various uses, as does The Washington Post Co.

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