

FB and the giraffe business

BY GWENDOLYN NG

A NUMBER of your friends, along with your friendly minister, have suddenly morphed into giraffes on Facebook.

No, the giraffe isn't a hot choice for display photos among your Facebook friends. It's all part of the Great Giraffe Challenge, the latest trend to go viral on the social-media platform, alongside others such as Bitstrips.

The challenge has users guessing a riddle circulated on Facebook, and then changing their display picture to that of a giraffe for three days if they are wrong.

The flurry of online activity on Facebook is not only pure fun for its users, but it also makes business sense for the world's leading online social network. Facebook reported a 60 per cent revenue increase in the third quarter to US\$2.02 billion (S\$2.5 billion), reported The Associated Press.

Despite the stellar results, an analyst quoted in an Agence France-Presse article warned that teenagers may be losing interest in Facebook.

Social-media fatigue is a very real concern for more mature platforms such as Facebook, said social-media expert Michael Netzley, and fads such as the giraffe challenge help to establish the platform's position as a social space where "we go to get the latest and greatest".

"The longer Facebook can delay the inevitable social-media fatigue with its site...the longer it has to push forward the pursuit of revenue and advertising dollars, said Dr Netzley, the academic director of Singapore Management University's executive development.

What gets users hooked onto a Facebook fad? The entry barrier must not be high and it must be easy for users to get involved in the online activity, said Nanyang



GAME ON: Acting Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin's Facebook display picture is a nod to the Great Giraffe Challenge trend, in which users change their display picture to that of a giraffe for guessing a riddle incorrectly. PHOTO: INTERNET

Technological University (NTU) Associate Professor and sociologist Sam Han.

For instance, Bitstrips features comics that allow users to choose templates of scenes to express themselves. (See sidebar)

UFM 100.3 radio DJ Tan Yan Wei said that having interactive elements in Facebook posts heightens interest and drives traffic to the radio channel's official fan pages. The 27-year-old said: "When I post funny jokes or anecdotes, there will be a handful of responses. But the response is much greater when I post an interactive quiz on my fan page."

He gamely took on the penalty for failing to guess the answer to the giraffe quiz and replaced his Facebook display photo with that of a giraffe.

One of the more prominent giraffes on Facebook is Acting Min-

ister for Manpower Tan Chuan-Jin, who posted a cartoon giraffe with the message "This is one wacky viral. Like", on his Facebook page on Tuesday.

Many users said they took part in the Great Giraffe Challenge for fun, and experts added that the desire to feel like part of a community helps fuel such Facebook phenomena.

Ms Pat Law, founder of social-media consultancy Good-Stuph, said: "The (desire) to express oneself and partake in a community and, thus, strengthen one's sense of belonging, has existed from the start of civilisation."

Dr Netzley said: "We like having common experiences with others and openly sharing that we took part in those experiences. It makes us look credible or 'in the know'."

Prof Han said that Facebook fads are not very different from the yesteryear craze of, say, owning a Tamagotchi digital pet raised in egg-shaped devices.

He added: "Fads have always been around. Facebook just intensified the fads; they get circulated much faster."

nggwen@sph.com.sg