

Utility switching site uses FaceBook app to boost referrals

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SuperSwitcher, a UK price comparison site for helping consumers switch energy suppliers and tariffs, is using a custom-made Facebook applet and social networking to boost referrals.

Many business are struggling to find a use for Facebook. Often the social networking site becomes an embarrassment, as staff vent their frustrations publicly at the company. It has also been losing out because over-zealous HR teams run background checks on new recruits by looking at their FaceBook profiles. And a recent study found that security on FaceBook is only "average".

However, SuperSwitcher is looking to capitalise on the social networking site's user base. Established by German siblings Anna and Friedrich Rojahn, SuperSwitcher targets 25 to 45 year olds, who the founders believe are most likely to switch utility suppliers and use social networking sites.

Friedrich Rojham, managing director of SuperSwitcher, said the site was using Facebook to make it easier for people to sign-up and use the service. Users do not need to register on SuperSwitcher to use the service. Instead, Rojahn said, "We are using FaceBook Connect to allow users to login using their FaceBook IDs."

He is also using FaceBook's social networking to enable users to broadcast to their friends how much they have saved on their utility bills. He hopes that since people value the opinion of their friends, new customers may turn to SuperSwitcher by referrals through Facebook.

SuperSwitcher has built a Facebook applet, allowing users to switch utility suppliers directly in Facebook, without having to move to the SuperSwitcher website.

In terms of technology, Rojham used external contractors to build the Facebook functionality, although he also runs a small internal IT team for the SuperSwitcher site development. "Facebook is only four years old. A contractor may cost more, but they will have the experience and can produce better quality code faster."

In terms of support, Rojham said the documentation was "quite good". He said, "There is a very active developer community, so if you do run into problems, these can be solved quite quickly."

However, he warned that businesses looking to develop on the Facebook platform may need to overcome tricky technical hurdles. "On the negative side of things, Facebook seems very focused on supporting PHP only. So if you are using a different language, such as Python, you sometimes have to create workarounds, or use solutions developed by others in the community, which are of course less well-documented, and help from the Facebook team can be harder to come by."