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Sorry Zynga, Farmville Needs Facebook

By Jared Newman | Posted at 11:42 pm on Sunday, May 9, 2010



There's apparently some drama happening between Facebook and Zynga, maker of the wildly popular social games Farmville, Cafe World and Mafia Wars.

The beef is primarily about Facebook forcing game developers to use Facebook Credits for in-game purchases, [says TechCrunch's anonymous sources](#). Facebook takes a 30 percent cut of all Credits transactions, and Zynga makes a lot of money by selling items that speed people's progress through the game. You can see why there's tension.

In case things go from bad to worse, Zynga's reportedly preparing its own social gaming site, and is prepared to leave Facebook completely.

I agree with CNet's Daniel Terdiman that [both sites need each other](#). Facebook relies on Zynga for daily traffic — [as of December](#) more than 26 million people played Farmville every day — and Zynga uses Facebook as the primary platform for all those users. Moving them would not be easy.

Still, Zynga depends more on Facebook than vice versa because of the very nature of its games. Farmville's biggest critics note that the game is not fun, per se, but it's addictive. In a fascinating essay on what's wrong with this game, SUNY Buffalo professor A. J. Patrick Liszkiewicz [explains](#):

The secret to Farmville's popularity is neither gameplay nor aesthetics. Farmville is popular because in [sic] entangles users in a web of social obligations. When users log into Facebook, they are reminded that their neighbors have sent them gifts, posted bonuses on their walls, and helped with each others' farms. In turn, they are obligated to return the courtesies.

Without Facebook, Zynga loses this crucial layer of interaction between friends, the meta-game that makes Farmville worth playing. Zynga Live could try and replicate it, but it'll never be as tightly woven as Facebook's existing network.

If Zynga leaves Facebook completely, as the company has reportedly threatened, it would be suicide. Farmville is not a good enough game to stand on its own. It needs the social structure of Facebook more than Facebook needs Zynga in particular. After all, there's no shortage of imitators who would love to take Farmville's place atop the app charts.

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1. *Bouke Timbermont* Says:
[May 10th, 2010 at 2:28 am](#)

I'd love to see Zynga take the risk and leave facebook... and fail bigtime. I mean: when Farmville started Zynga was perfectly happy with their 70% cut, but only now, when Zynga for some reason started thinking it's bigger than facebook – which it isn't – it starts complaining. This is the very definition of greed: wanting more just because you think you can get more, not because you think it's fair.

Zynga owes everything to facebook: the only reason FarmVille, Maffiawars, and every single other facebook application gets popular, is because facebook offers a huge customer base which makes it easy to share games and events with friends.

If Zynga thinks it doesn't need that: great, leave facebook. But I know it does.

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2. *Cathy* Says:
[May 10th, 2010 at 4:53 am](#)

I recently left Farmville, after they demanded that I give them my email address as a condition of playing the game.

Leaving Facebook (which has it's own problems now, would be a mistake for them. While a proportion of the Facebook players might follow them, recruiting more players would become a problem, I think.

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3. *Tom B* Says:
[May 10th, 2010 at 7:22 am](#)

They need Facebook. They also need to drop Flash. The performance in Farmville is a HUGE issue. You can sit there a minute or more switching over to visit a neighbor's farm.

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4. *Mike J B* Says:
[May 13th, 2010 at 5:48 am](#)

Zynga has no talent. The class of games they make anyone could make.

Zynga has no creativity. Apparently "Mafia Wars" ripped off "Mob Wars", "Farmville" ripped off another farm game, etc. They're just good at Facebook-spamming. How will they carry that over? Switching to email spamming? Maybe they should integrate with iGoogle. :P

Zynga has a massive ego, thinking they're the next best thing in the game industry, when they're probably more like a passing fad. Honestly, they only care about profit: I don't see how they're any better in morals than the greedy bankers who brought down the housing market.

Facebook games are annoying and one of the reasons (next to privacy) why I hate Facebook. "John Doe has found a duckling that wants a new home, do you want to give it a new home?" "Jane Doe has found a penguin that wants a new home, do you want to give it a new home?" (And those would be two different games.) "Bob Smith needs you to join his Mafia to set up his new operation in Salt Lake City." Every time I block a game's notifications on my friend feed, two more pop up. I joined a social networking site, not a flash gaming site.

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[...] The social gaming industry is consolidating quickly. (FT also Technologizer) [...]

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