

Chapter 1: Custom Apps for Fan Page Timelines

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- ✓ Using apps for Facebook marketing
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- ✓ Discovering iframes, Application Pages, and Canvas Pages
- ✓ Finding out what apps can do to increase engagement

If you're a Facebook marketer, you're likely always looking for ways to increase the engagement that you have with your customers. For many Facebook users, interesting status updates aren't enough to hold their attention. Facebook apps allow you to create a far more engaging Facebook presence. You're not just looking for more people to visit your Fan Page Timeline and Like it; you also want to give fans more of a reason to interact with your brand or find other value.

An app can be as simple as a means to host a custom image for Application Pages, or as complex as an interactive video game. Apps are designed to deliver all the interactive elements of Facebook to your fans in a custom way. Fans can Like, comment, post, and interact in countless ways with other sites, with games or within your Fan Page Timeline. Apps use some of the existing features of Facebook, but any web-enabled code can be used to develop custom apps for Facebook (such as PHP, JavaScript, and other web software languages).

Using Apps for Facebook Marketing

Companies that make apps for their Fan Page Timelines want to make Facebook a more engaging environment and extend the connection to their audience of fans. The most common appearance of an application on Facebook is the Application Page, also referred to as a *tab*. Within a Fan Page Timeline, you can create any app and install it into an Application Page, limited only by the capabilities of the web itself. Some apps are a simple element, such as an image to enhance your Fan Page Timeline, and some apps are more complex, such as interactive elements your fans can use. Building an app gives you the opportunity to integrate more deeply into the core Facebook experience. Your app can integrate with the News Feed as well as notifications and other features. Here are a few of the things that apps can add to your Facebook integration:

- ◆ **Share content in a new way.** Apps can use many, if not all, of the elements of the web by using iframes. This means that you can view anything that can be created on the web through any web browser. The only limitation is size — if you can write the code, you can do it. Facebook has been phasing out FBML, a custom code language specific to Facebook. The iframe model means that the content that you would host elsewhere (on another service or website) can be viewed within the tab or Canvas Page on Facebook. This means that whatever you would like to share can be shared on Facebook as well.

Apps can also interact with other elements of Facebook if you build the features into the apps. This includes participants within the app having the ability to post content on their Facebook Timeline and more.

- ◆ **Gain followers in a relatively short time.** Apps enable you to put together powerful promotions, which allow you to create an interactive experience for your fans. Doing so can empower you to create promotions, contests, and more, which enable you to grow your Facebook audience in a relatively short time.

Because apps can interact with Facebook features such as the News Feed and notifications, a successful promotion has sort of a viral effect and can draw other participants through friends. With these features, you can catapult your audience to a new level.

- ◆ **Provide a valuable service.** The longest lasting and most effective apps are those that provide some kind of value to the consumer, not just an interesting experience with your brand or Fan Page Timeline. Games that offer a desired value to users will be used more and uninstalled less. This sort of value leads to strong audience engagement, allowing a greater impact from a marketing standpoint. It's fine to have a Facebook app that allows you to virtually pour your favorite soda and share it with your friends, but if you can actually use a Facebook app to get weather updates or create customized birthday cards, then you can get so much more mileage out of the app.

Services may include games for some. Games are very addictive to certain players. Certain games might have a great success rate with players, and lead to in-game purchases for new levels and features. More than half of Facebook users log into games and at least 20 percent of them have purchased in-game features. Aside from generating revenue through in-game sales, apps of this sort can be an advertising opportunity as well.

Extending the Facebook Experience

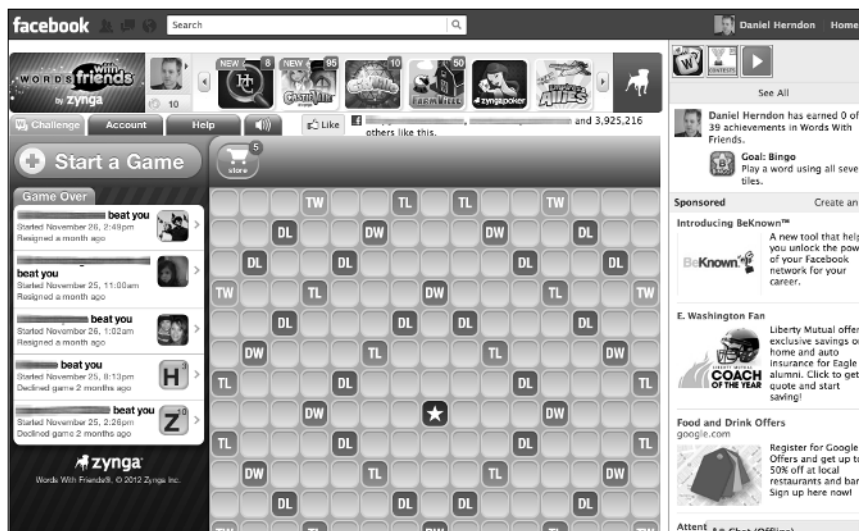
Apps take connecting with an audience to new levels in several ways. Here are some of the ways that Facebook apps extend the capabilities of your Facebook marketing:

- ◆ **Screen real estate:** One of the simplest things that you gain with a Facebook app is more space. You have limited space for your content within Facebook, and it all has to fit into a format that is compatible for Facebook. Both tabs and Canvas Pages provide this to you.

Tab apps can use up to 810 pixels of screen width; Canvas Page apps by default are 760 pixels of screen width but can be set to a fluid width that allows it to take up the full width of the user's browser. A Canvas Page is literally a blank canvas where your content would be displayed. This is done by directing the app to a URL that you provide in the creation of the app.

This real estate means that you can include more pictures, videos, and other content into your Fan Page Timeline — content that isn't possible within the Timeline, without an app. Having that space is valuable to a marketer because you can offer more features or say more things with Canvas Pages and Application Pages. The extra screen width also makes games more enjoyable, such as the Canvas Page for the Words With Friends game, shown in Figure 1-1.

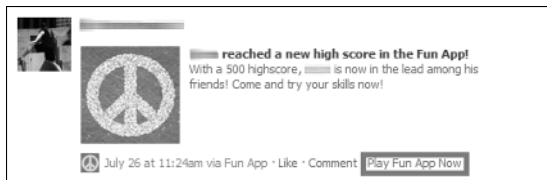
Figure 1-1:
More real estate with Canvas Page apps.



- ◆ **Social channels:** The reason why apps help provide a great avenue for growing fans is that they easily move through the key social channels that make Facebook interactive. Features include bookmarks, News Feed content, and more. Imagine a friend is participating in a new, fun game. While he plays, he may be prompted to share his story relative to his Facebook experience on his Timeline as a status update. (See Figure 1-2.) Perhaps he will be asked to invite other friends to enjoy the game. Inevitably, his activity within the app will also show within the News

Ticker to the right of the screen on each of his friends' home pages. This encourages his friends to also play the game. Some may simply check it out, but not play, while others will play and share it. Social channels allow Facebook apps to expand their coverage to a broader audience.

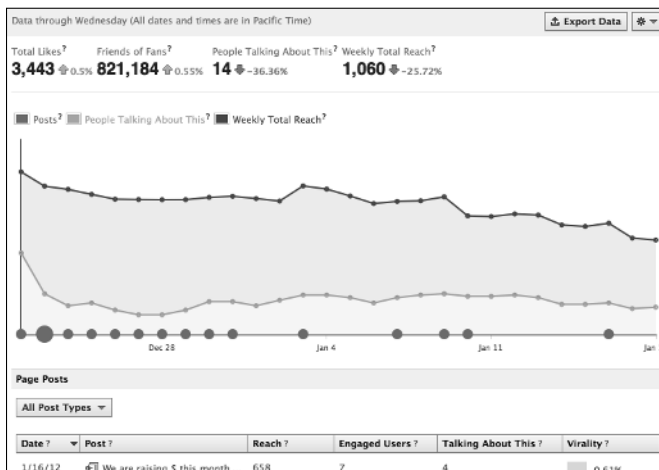
Figure 1-2:
Social
channels.



- ◆ **Analytics:** It isn't enough to only know how many fans you have. Marketers need to know what kind of people they are, what their interests are, and how they can market to them. Fan Page Timelines are all equipped with Insights, the Facebook analytics tool, as shown in Figure 1-3. Facebook Insights for apps tells you how users interact with your app, what sites refer traffic to your app, and what user actions contribute to active user count, as well as providing demographics on your authorized users and active users.

Knowing this information means that you can fine-tune your app, its content, and your marketing surrounding it to be sure that you get the most out of it as a marketing tool.

Figure 1-3:
Facebook
Insights
shows how
fans interact
with your
app.



Discovering iframes

To offer apps on your Fan Page Timeline, you will quite possibly need to do as much building off Facebook as you would on Facebook. Both Canvas Pages and Application Pages are blank spaces provided by Facebook in which you input an app URL that Facebook will then display through an iframe. This means that much or all of your content isn't on Facebook at all — it's simply viewed through a window.

In HTML elements, frames allow an HTML browser window to split into segments. To put it simply, it's basically like viewing two websites or portions of websites at the same time. iframes are simply that except that they're specifically within another page.

In terms of Canvas Pages, the page itself is built through Facebook's setup procedures, and then the content within the page is viewed by directing to the appropriate web location. To illustrate this, Daniel built an app on a Canvas Page that is directed to a URL not specifically designed for the space. Figure 1-4 shows a made-up company built to test a web concept. As you can see, once the foundation of your app is built within Facebook, an iframe allows you to display any content on the web of your choosing.

Figure 1-4:
Canvas
apps can
direct to any
site.



Increasing Engagement with Apps

Apps have capabilities specifically designed to increase the engagement of a Facebook user. You can deploy mechanisms within the programming of your app to increase an individual's use of the app, as well as increase the number of people using the app.

Bookmarks

When someone starts using your app, Facebook creates a bookmark for that user. This bookmark appears within the user's home screen (as shown in Figure 1-5) so that she can quickly return to that app to use it again. If the user has several apps that she uses, she has several bookmarks. The bookmarks are ordered based on how often the user uses your app. If a user has several bookmarks, those bookmarks may not display at the same time in the default view.

To encourage reengagement, icons have numbers to the right of them, indicating that they have a new request from someone via that app or game. This encourages people to continue activity within the app.

Figure 1-5:
Bookmarks
provide
quick
access to
your app.



Social discovery

Real-time social app activity is one of the greatest drivers of increased engagement. Facebook calls this *social discovery* from the developer's perspective. People are more likely to interact with an app if their friends are also interacting at the moment, especially when it comes to entertainment apps such as games. To the right of each Canvas app screen is a real-time Ticker that shows a feed of what friend activity is currently happening.

When a user first enters an app, Facebook presents stories that are most relevant to that app. These stories are about that user and his friends interacting with that app. After the user uses the app for a while, the updates in the Ticker begin to broaden to include what friends are doing in other apps as well. This includes apps that the user currently uses and has installed on his Timeline, as well as apps that he hasn't installed but his friends have. The content of the Ticker is intended to be as relevant to the user as possible. For example, if the user is playing a game, the News Ticker displays stories related to other games.

Social discovery helps users find new games when Facebook generates stories about friends playing games. When an app is used, Facebook receives a ping indicating that a user is playing the game. Facebook apps ping Facebook five seconds after the user begins using the app and again every five minutes. The pings trigger stories that say something like “Bob Smith is playing Words With Friends.” If Facebook doesn’t receive that ping for 15 minutes, the story changes to something more like “Bob Smith Used Words With Friends.”

App developers can turn off social discovery. This is most applicable if the app is for more personal information, such as weight management or dating. The development tools for games have other achievement story options that can be sent to the News Ticker (shown in Figure 1-6) using the achievements API. This is applicable if your app is a game that has score milestones or levels. Those achievements can show up on the News Ticker as “Bob Smith has won a new bicycle!” These achievement stories are also social discovery because they allow other players to see what their friends are doing and increase awareness or activity for other games through that social component.

Figure 1-6:
The News
Ticker
shows game
stories.



Draw people in with notifications

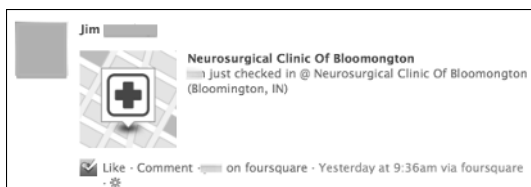
Notifications allow apps to stand out prominently without being intrusive. They do this by sending notifications to the notifications bar in the same way that you receive other notifications. Essentially, the user has to allow the app to send a notice to friends inviting them to the app. Notices can also deliver other features, such as giving a virtual gift to a friend. This creates another way to invite new users into the app experience through the friend network of the players. Notifications are triggered by requests within the app, of which there are two kinds:

- ◆ **User-generated requests:** These requests are confirmed by the user and can be sent by the user to friends, in the form of invitations or virtual gifts.
- ◆ **App-generated requests:** These sorts of requests can be sent only if the recipient specifically permits the application within his or her Timeline. These sorts of requests can be used for app reengagement such as “Jane Smith has completed her move; now it’s your turn!”

Publishing stories

When using an app, a user can publish stories about what he’s doing within the app, such as the foursquare check-in shown in Figure 1-7. Your app can prompt users to publish these stories within the app. If the user chooses to publish the story, it will publish to the user’s Timeline and may appear in the News Feed of the user’s friends. When stories are published from the app, they include a link to the app and can include an attachment such as an image. Images often represent an accomplishment such as a badge that the user earned. You use the Feed Dialog to publish content to your user’s Timeline, which is a feature that prompts users to publish something to his or her Timeline. Every app requires the user to grant it permission to access his or her Facebook Timeline. This feature doesn’t require any further permissions.

Figure 1-7:
Publishing
stories.



News Feed discovery stories

The discovery stories appear in the Ticker when someone begins using a new app, but they also appear in the News Feed of friends of the user, as shown in Figure 1-8. These stories are triggered when a user first installs a new game or starts using an app. Because the first thing a user sees when logging in to Facebook is the News Feed, these stories can be highly visible. However, because users have the ability to control (to some degree) what kind of content they see in their News Feed, depending on user’s settings, they may not see updates in the News Feed about your app.

Users’ permissions with apps

In most cases, apps access the user’s Timeline to use the social features such as posting updates or displaying stories in the Ticker. All apps require that users permit the app to access their Timelines. To ensure that your

app is a success, it's important to have a fair understanding of Facebook's authentication process. The permissions process typically contains more specific permissions for each part of the Timeline that can be accessed by that application. This all happens through one authentication process, but each item is displayed to the user asking to verify that he or she permits this. Figure 1-9 shows the screen a user sees when granting permissions.

Make sure you include the appropriate permissions within your app. Too few permissions might prevent your app from providing the necessary features it is intended to deliver for the user. For example, if the function of your app includes posting badges to the user's Timeline, you certainly need permission to access the user's Timeline. The downside is that requiring too many permissions can deter users. There is a direct correlation between the level of permissions required to use an app and the number of people using it. Too many may result in the user being uncomfortable granting those permissions. This certainly is also dependent on the trustworthiness of your brand or app and the quality as well. If the quality of your app and the demand to use it is high enough, the required permissions are less of a concern for most people.

Figure 1-8:
Discovery
stories in
the News
Feed.

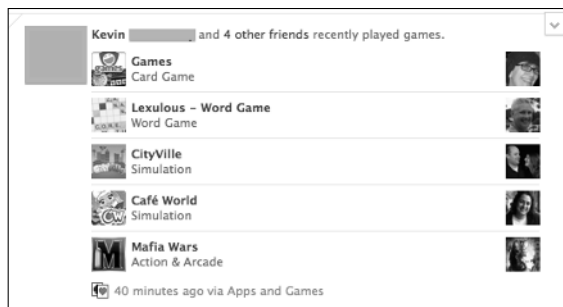
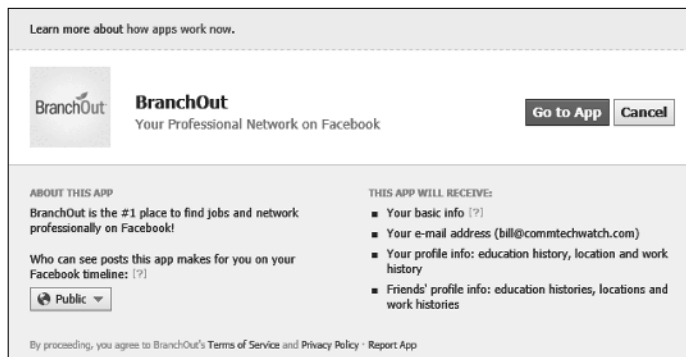


Figure 1-9:
Granting
permissions
for an app.



Facebook apps use OAuth 2.0 protocol to allow a user to authenticate an app and give your app permission to perform functions on the user's behalf. The OAuth 2.0 process has three steps that must be completed.

- ◆ **User authentication:** Verify that the user is who she claims to be (she is legitimately logged into her own Timeline). To authorize your app, users are asked to log into their accounts using their login credentials (username and password), as shown in Figure 1-10. If they're already logged in, Facebook validates the login cookie in their browsers to validate their identities.



Figure 1-10:
Users must
log in to
authenticate.

- ◆ **App authorization:** Your application needs certain access to the user's Timeline, such as the permission to post updates or invite friends through the app or access to personal data such as e-mail address or activities. App authorization ensures that users know what data and capabilities they grant the app access to. Permissions within an app cover any type of access to the user's Timeline. For example, if the user completes the post and clicks the button to post an update, the app needs to have permission to post updates to his or her Timeline. This process happens at the same time as the user authentication portion (refer to Figure 1-10). After the user allows the app, OAuth redirects the user to the destination site within the app and passes along an authorization code.
- ◆ **App authentication:** After the user has been authenticated and the app has been authorized by the user, app authentication occurs. (This happens behind the scenes, and the user doesn't see this process.) The authorization code gained in the prior steps is used to authenticate the app by sending this code and the *app secret* (a private code unique to your app) to the Graph API token endpoint. To put this in simple terms, app authentication verifies that the app has proper clearance by making sure the process has been followed. Essentially, Facebook collects a unique code from the individual giving the app permission and from the app itself to be sure that all things match and the right steps have been taken.

This process is more valuable than it is complicated. Since the rise of social media, spammers have managed to find more and more opportunities. This means that the only way that you could spam someone is by following the technical rules, and that makes it really difficult to do. This eliminates the majority of spam.

Apps that don't require user permissions

Apps that access data or features within someone's Timeline must have the OAuth authentication process followed. Many apps deliver only front-facing features such as playing a video or linking to a site. These apps still require a similar process to set up, but bypass the need for user authentication. Custom tabs are a great example. In most cases, tabs are more of a customized Fan Page Timeline, not a game or tool that requires any special access.

What you lose with an app that doesn't require permission is some of the features that often help the popularity of a Fan Page or app to grow virally. Depending on your goals, you may want to weigh this option. This works great for building your Fan Page Timeline into a customized website. The example shown in Figure 1-11 is an app that doesn't require OAuth from the Fan Page visitors. In this case, the tab provides information and a stronger brand representation to the visitors, and isn't intended to increase engagement or drive traffic on its own.

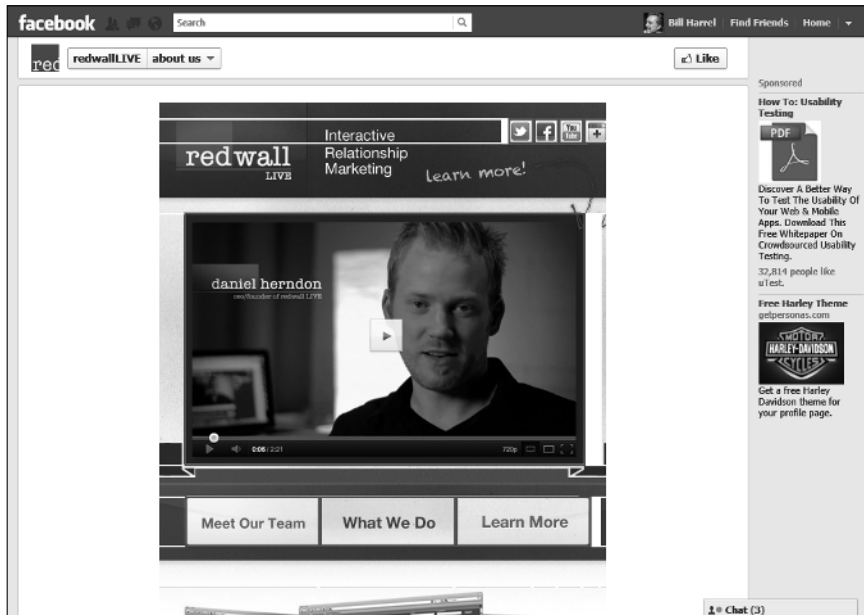


Figure 1-11:
Apps that
your users
don't need to
authenticate.

Static HTML apps do require an app secret. Any authorization with this form of app is done with the administrator of the Fan Page Timeline, who ultimately is the user of the app.

Features that encourage sharing with friends

Typically, there are two primary objectives for an app from a marketing standpoint. The first is to increase the engagement level with your current fans or users. The second is to build your audience by encouraging sharing.

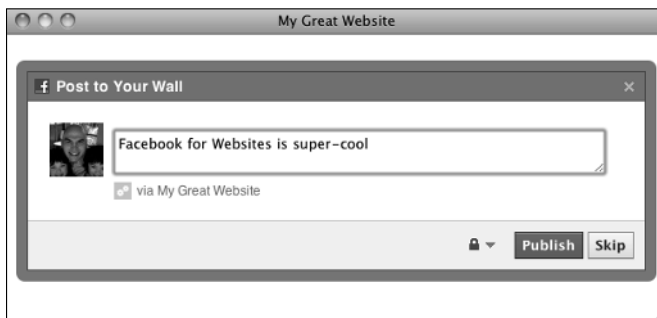
The following sections describe some of the specific features that help to make your app more social and encourage users to share with friends. These can be separated into three segments: The News Feed, requests, and automatic channels.

The News Feed

The News Feed is the first thing that users see when they log into Facebook. This is where people find out what their friends are doing.

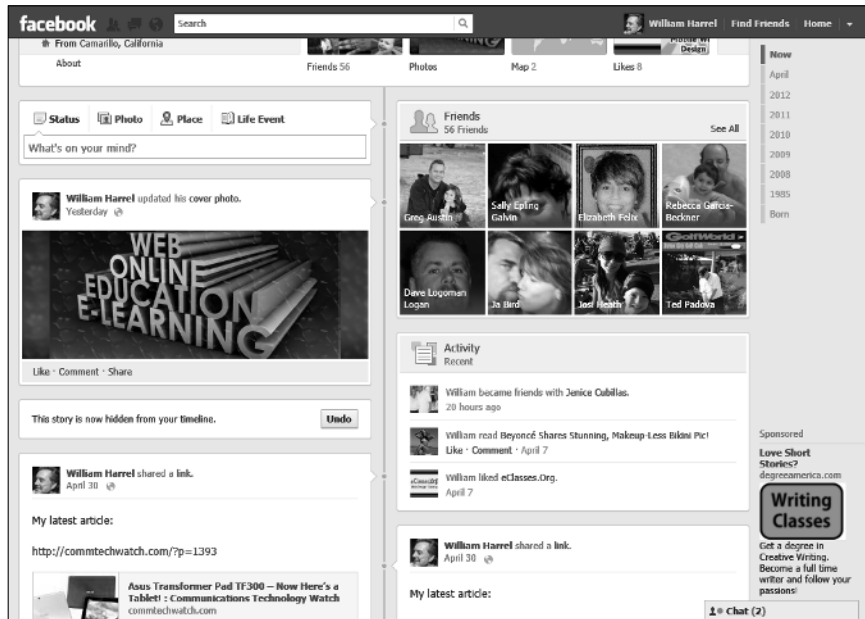
- ◆ **The Feed Dialog** prompts users to publish updates, and it's self-explanatory, as it's a dialog box that allows the user to post an update to her feed. You can see what users see in Figure 1-12. This is what Facebook recommends as the best way to ask users to publish stories about your app. It doesn't require that the user log into your app or grant it any special permission; it's essentially a shortcut to post a status update.

Figure 1-12:
The Feed
Dialog.



- ◆ **The Feed Graph Object** is for situations where certain app activities trigger a post to the user's Timeline. This requires that the app be given the authorization with posting privileges through the OAuth process. The end result is to post onto the user's Timeline, without the dialog box described in the Feed Dialog bullet. A Feed Graph Object is shown in Figure 1-13.

Figure 1-13:
The Feed
Graph posts
to a user's
Timeline.



- ◆ **The Like button** allows users to share content from an app or a website (using Facebook social features) and post it on their Timelines. This action shows up as an activity update on users' Timelines and in their friends' News Feeds. Updates may say something like "Bob Smith Likes My Great Website."

Requests

When app users want to invite friends to take action, they do this with requests. Apps can generate requests as well if the app has been given the corresponding privileges. There are two types of requests:

- ◆ **User-generated requests** are sent by explicit action from the user. In this case, a certain activity might trigger the request. Typically, you would create a feature in your app that says "invite your friends" or another similar request. A dialog box appears, enabling the user to send or cancel the request.
- ◆ **App-generated requests** are sent by the app; however, this can happen only if the user has given the app permission to submit requests to her friends lists when she authorized the app. This request is related to an activity (such as completing a turn in a two-player game), and then a defined request is sent (such as indicating to the other player that it is his turn).

Automatic channels

The automatic channels are those that are enabled by default. These features encourage more use and traffic to apps and Facebook. You don't need to do anything additional for these channels to be in place because they are part of all apps.

- ◆ **Bookmarks**, described previously in this chapter, enable people to quickly return to your app.
- ◆ **Notifications** let app users know when they have a request, an update, or anything else to respond to. These appear to the right of the bookmark.
- ◆ **Dashboards** are screens that show the bookmarked links of the apps a user has used recently and those that friends have used.
- ◆ **Usage stories** are the activity updates that show up in the News Feed or in the Ticker. These are typically targeted at people who haven't used your app to attract new users.
- ◆ **App profiles** are similar to a Fan Page Timeline or a personal Timeline. App profiles include a Timeline, info tab, and configurable tabs as well.