

An Economy Game

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The popular social network Facebook enables web developers to use its platform. This gives some powerful opportunities, and something I'm experimenting with is a concept I call Friendonomy – short for Friendship Economy.

The basic idea is to take the principles of the real economy and compress them into a computer game. Unlike most games though, the aim is to make incentives for the players to behave better in the *real* world.

If you sit down and reflect for a minute, it becomes quite awesome how strongly the economic system affects our behavior. The million percent per century return, the technological revolution, the remarkable increase in living, which the system in the free world enables – I think is best summarized by Viktor Frankl: "Life can be pulled by goals just as surely as it can be pushed by drives." It's simply magnificent that most of us work really hard (for our own benefit perhaps, but indirectly for society), when welfare money alone would make one's quality of living better than even the rich could expect a few generations ago.

Back to the Friendonomy. Social interactions are basically the same now as they have always been. Sure technological inventions have made it easier to stay in touch, but the incentive system itself isn't changed. One might argue that an act of friendship will not include money, and thus be outside any incentives the fiscal system enables. That's why I made an artificial economy. The core of the game is,

not very surprisingly, a stock market. Each user can trade shares in any of its friends' future incomes. The trading is technically quite similar to the real thing.

The stock market in itself would perhaps be amusing enough, but one would in the end trade nothing more than thin air. The fundament of the game is very simple. Each day you can acknowledge one (but not more than one) of your friends, and the same friend cannot be acknowledged more often than once every ten days. If people want to compete in the game, they will of course make this a daily routine. Since you gain no more, or no less, by choosing a specific person over another, chances are you will pick the one who made the best impression on you recently.

Since both giving an acknowledgment and being acknowledged gives you Friendonomy Dollars (owning shares in givers or receivers will too), a person would in theory behave better in real life for the hope of getting more credit in the online game. Of course it may stop here, and not be something that really happens. However, the idea itself of incentivizing people through merging the virtual and the real world is something that can put our society one step further in the right direction.

Visit the experiment at

<http://apps.facebook.com/friendonomy>