

# The Most Important Websites

## The Top Ten

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### GOOGLE

It's the most ascendant site of the decade and today the largest, with 164 million unique visitors in the US in October, according to ComScore. It launched in 1999 with only one purpose: to help people find stuff on the internet. Today the home page remains a spartan swath of white space. But the company is not just about Google.com anymore: It has parlayed its success in search to create an empire that spans TV, books, energy, healthcare and even the space industry.

### YAHOO

Yahoo spent the greater part of the decade chasing mirages in the form of Hollywood and Google. But Yahoo is an important web company—perhaps the most important—because it operates at internet scale without the benefit of a huge underlying search business. It's by far the biggest player in online-display advertising and remains a bellwether on every aspect of the business from premium inventory to its ad network, exchange and newspaper consortium.



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facebook

### FACEBOOK

Many things on the web are viral in theory, but none have spread with the viral force of Facebook, which now counts more than 350 million registered users globally. The question is what, if any, lasting power does Facebook have over those users? What Facebook did that Friendster and MySpace did not was to view itself as a platform rather than a destination. What Facebook has created is an economy and user base that wants and needs it to succeed. Will it? The next decade will decide.

### YOUTUBE

Founded in 2005, YouTube became Google's first mega-deal in 2006. The rest of the decade Google spent justifying the deal and attempting to show the company could make money. Now, it appears it can. YouTube is, in effect, the world's operating system for video, its cloud-based, crowd-sourced DVR. It is the world's second-largest search engine, third-largest website and a source of bandwidth efficiencies for Google. Former YouTube execs put its daily streams at 1.5 billion.



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### AMAZON

No one has changed the face of retail over the past decade as much as Amazon. Today, it's the eighth-largest US website, with almost 70 million unique visitors in October, per ComScore. But Amazon's also redefined marketing, building its brand on top of superior customer service in lieu of spending on traditional advertising. And while it's often seen as the big threat to traditional retail, more recently it's responded to its own digital threat by launching the Kindle electronic reader.

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## WIKIPEDIA

Inasmuch as Google organized the web, Wikipedia used it to marshal a global army of contributors and editors to document the world. If Google is step one on any fact-finding mission on the web, Wikipedia is often step two. Managing it has become a key function of marketing and PR. As it correctly states in its own entry, all of Wikipedia's strengths and weaknesses spring from the fact that anyone with an internet connection can add, edit or otherwise contribute to an entry.

## GAWKER

The New York media world was all too eager to slam the door on Nick Denton's upstart cast of blogs when they first started mocking the establishment in 2002. Now Gawker is the one more often mocked—well, imitated—in both tone and strategy as old media casts about for a web model. Gawker showed that bare-bones, targeted blogs could become real businesses. Even while Gawker's comment goes lowbrow, the network of sites courts high-end marketers with big, custom display units.

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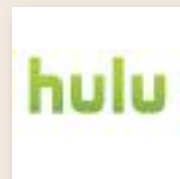
## DRUDGE REPORT

What's an editor worth? The original aggregator, Drudge showed the value of adding a layer of curation to the cacophony of voices and coverage on the web. Drudge's heyday was in Clinton's second term, but we're appreciating him for his lasting impact on the decade that followed. Now, just about every journalistic enterprise on the web does some level of aggregation and bringing in a curated selection of the best of the web is integral to what most online publications do.

## HULU

Do consumers want to watch TV on their PCs? The question was answered in 2008. Now the TV networks' biggest concern about Hulu is how to contain the monster they created. Disney, News Corp. and NBCU put much of their broadcast TV libraries there, with a quarter of the ads seen on TV. Now, more people watch TV online at Hulu than on all the network sites combined. The question is, when will the networks ask that Hulu derive a level of revenue from viewers comparable with TV?

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## NYTIMES.COM

It's not every decade that the world's most prestigious journalistic institution becomes part of the story itself. Or, at least part of the one about media's death spiral, one near and dear to our hearts here at Ad Age. Rather than obsess over J-school orthodoxies, the Times' newsroom is out-innovating the competition with a cast of successful blogs, interactive storytelling and new social tools for newsgathering and connecting with readers. We're rooting for them. **CPM**

\*Source: Adapted from *Advertising Age*, December 14, 2009.