



Welcome to the weird wild web

Face it: Aussies log on for laughs

Jessica Lawrence

IT'S the staple of any self-respecting young person, professional and networker, but Facebook is attracting some bizarre devotees.

There are now thousands of groups on the networking site ranging from the serious to the ridiculous.

Aussies have signed up in droves to groups like "Addicted to *Sex and the City*", which boasts 42,858 members, while "I'll never give up on Britney" has 7744.

"F--- the stingray that killed Steve Irwin" has an impressive 6114 fans and "Actor, singer, sex god — is there anything David Hasselhoff can't do?" has 6051.

"I don't care how comfortable Crocs are, you look like a dumbass" outstrips most of the competition, with a whopping 858,045 members opposed to the rubber sandals.

Behind that is "I yell at inanimate objects" with 34,780 members and "I wanna party with Corey Delaney" (Worthington) with 1536.

"I wish I knew how to dance on treadmills" has a surprising 1647 fans.

University of Queensland expert Dr Melissa Gregg, who

is researching the site, said Facebook groups were a reflection of a "shared global popular culture".

"The people who use them are responsive to popular culture, and they are media-savvy and want to be shown to be in

touch with news, entertainment and celebrity gossip," Dr Gregg said.

"There is a shared global popular culture now and this means we get to participate in conversations and jokes about that popular culture.

"It's also a way of users communicating with their friends what they like, and you could compare belonging to one of these sites to supporting a football team.

"The only real concern is that it's so banal, and does not have a lot of substance."

Some of the most unlikely candidates have also set up their own pages.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao now has a Facebook page with 46,659 supporters,

trumping the main page of US President George Bush with a mere 12,359. The gloss may have slightly washed off, but Kevin 24/7 still has a few fans; 21,757 have signed up to his Facebook page.

Another 400-plus groups are devoted to loving or hating the PM. But Premier Anna Bligh has a paltry three groups devoted to her, with 80-strong Team Bligh the only backer.

Dr Gregg says it's not just young people logging on.

"Older people have a lot of free time and they seem to be using these sites as well," she said.

"Of course young people are going to be interested in talking about pop culture and older people, perhaps politics.

"While some people might find them frivolous, you can't devalue the fact that some people find these sites fun and it's just a new option for people to spend their leisure time.

"Facebook is allowing people to communicate and form relationships based on a wider range of interests than perhaps popular culture and media have provided in the past."

QUT psychologist Dr Elizabeth Tindle said joining groups gave members a sense of "belonging".

"It's also a form of personal expression and for young people a chance to challenge the norms of authority," Dr Tindle said.

lawrenceje@qnp.newsltd.com.au



SAVING FACES: Web expert Melissa Gregg says Facebook groups, from Party Boy's to the President's, reflect a shared global culture Picture: **Adam Smith**