New Jersey

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation. With over 1,000 people per square mile, it is nearly impossible to avoid social contact. In a crowded and diversely populated state such as New Jersey, social networking takes place in both physical and virtual forms. New Jersey’s urban, suburban, and rural populations conduct their social networking in many of the same ways residents of other states do; on public transit, at office water coolers, in hair salons and barbershops, in churches and schools, at bars and restaurants, and through clubs and organizations. Virtual forms of social networking continue to grow as the internet and technology provide more opportunities for groups with the same backgrounds, interests, and goals to connect. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube allow for conversation, collaboration, and sharing on popular topics in the state such as sports and politics.

New Jersey’s identity has always been deeply entwined with its neighboring states in the region. The residents are often divided by their identification with the New York area or the Philadelphia region. New Jersey is part of the media and marketing area labeled “Tri-State Region” that includes parts of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut and centering on Manhattan. It is also part of the Delaware Valley tri-state area that includes parts of Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, centered on Philadelphia. This central location among major northeast cities challenges New Jersey with finding its own social identity and establishing its own social networks while providing residents with access to the surrounding social networks.
Sports fans in New Jersey provide an excellent example of how New Jersey is divided by identity to the surrounding cities. Those in the southern region of the state (below Trenton) are loyal to Philadelphia teams. Those in the northern part of the state are loyal to New York Teams. Many residents located in the center of the state are split, as they have had media access to both the Philadelphia and New York media markets. Where are the fans of the New Jersey teams? Where are the New Jersey teams? New Jersey does not have a professional football team, despite the fact that both the NFL’s New York Giants and the New York Jets play and practice in New Jersey. The professional basketball (NBA’s New Jersey Nets) and professional hockey (NHL’s New Jersey Devils) teams are both located in the northern part of the state, leaving the southern sections out of the media market and out of easy travel to the games.

It has traditionally been a challenge for New Jersey’s own professional teams to attract New Jersey fans. There is evidence that the New Jersey teams are reaching out to fans through social networking in an effort to connect with and perhaps attract more fans. With Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, the teams are able to reach out to those who were previously out of the area markets. The New Jersey Devils Twitter account provides fans with a virtual play by play of every game, updating their feed as quickly as every two seconds as the puck is played. Fans outside of the radio and television broadcasts can still catch the action. The team’s Facebook page provides news and information as well as opportunities for fans to enter contests to win tickets to games and other promotional items. The fan base is active with comments, discussion and conversations on every posting. This social networking encourages fans to upload photos, engage each other in conversations and provides the team with a way to promote to a broader fan base.
Baseball fans in New Jersey must look to either the Philadelphia Phillies or the New York Mets and Yankees as there is no Major League Baseball team in New Jersey. As with the NFL teams, these area teams provide their New Jersey fans with the opportunity to connect via social networking sites. However those interested in following baseball within the state can follow the number of minor league teams located throughout the state. A majority of the minor league teams from a variety of leagues (AA, Can-Am, and ALPB) have a presence on the social networking sites Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube. The teams promote events and players while fans can provide feedback and engage in conversation about their favorite players. The emergence of social networking sites has provided New Jersey sports fans with another outlet for their conversations and sometimes heated discussion of local sports. Fans from all parts of the state can meet in a virtual space to share their passion.

Besides sports, another topic that New Jersey residents are passionate about is politics. State politics are an important part of New Jersey’s social networking. Increased access and usage to the internet has provided New Jersey residents with a wealth of political forums for information and conversation. Minor political parties are able to establish a greater presence through the use of social networking sites. Major political parties provide information and opinion using these tools as well. Progressive and alternative groups such as Blue Jersey have been able to get their word out to more people through their use of blogs, Facebook and Twitter. Politicians within the state have begun to embrace social networking, establishing Facebook fan pages, Twitter accounts and posting YouTube videos. Newark Mayor Cory Booker has over 1,000,000 followers.
on Twitter, and has even answered a request sent from a tweeting resident to help get a pothole filled.

Conversations about both sports and politics take place in the hundreds of diners that dot the landscape of New Jersey. New Jersey diners are an important part of the state’s social networking. With over five hundred diners in the state, very few residents are far from a diner. The state’s diners are located along the state’s networks of highways, providing physical networks of social contact throughout the state. More than just food is served at the counters and booths of New Jersey diners. According to Peter Genovese, in many communities, the local diner serves as a hangout, community center or town hall. Sports and politics are argued, gossip is spread and friends are made at the local diner. Some of these diners have entered the virtual world, establishing Facebook pages to both with their patrons and provide virtual space for their patrons to connect with each other.

Diners are not only an important part of the state’s social networking, but they are also a part of the state’s identity. It would not be possible to discuss social networking and New Jersey identity without mentioning organized crime. The organized crime network is perhaps the social network that is most often identified with New Jersey, thanks in part to the popularity of HBO’s *The Sopranos* which chronicled the life of a New Jersey mob boss. New Jersey’s social and political identity has been formed by both real and fictitious events involving the La Cosa Nostra network of families that has been established in New Jersey since the early 1900’s. With ties to both the New York and Philadelphia families, New Jersey’s organized crime network stretches throughout the state reaching outside it’s boundaries into neighboring regions.
It is these neighboring regions that often overshadow the state. Television and radio programming comes from either New York or Philadelphia. New Jersey did not have its own network until 1971 when NJN, New Jersey Network began after having been established by the New Jersey legislature. NJN now provides radio and online programming. In 1990, 101.5 WKKX-FM. was re-branded as “New Jersey’s Own” radio station with the tagline “Not New York. Not Philadelphia. Proud to Be NJ.” The station provides news and traffic updates from within the state, instead of the traditional view from out of state. This station’s talk format has created a network of listeners that agree or disagree vehemently with the sometimes controversial hosts on many topics, primarily state political issues. These conversations continue off the air on the site’s Facebook, YouTube and Twitter pages. Other news and information sources such as NJ.com, a major source that includes many of the major newspapers in the state, have expanded to social networking sites in order to reach more people and bring everyone into the conversation.

New Jersey’s social networking is not limited to sports, politics and news. Groups and organizations throughout the state use social networking to disseminate information and carry on conversations. Public transportation sites keep New Jersey residents up to date on delays and problems, easing their commutes to and from work. Higher Education institutions provide information on admissions, emergencies and research via social networking sites. It is not surprising that the Garden State has a strong presence of agricultural social networking sites, including research reports from Rutgers Agriculture Experiment Stations and regional locavores sharing their recipes. New Jersey job hunters can find state and local job postings via Twitter. New Jersey Libraries have a strong
presence in social networking. State and Local branches use social networking sites such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and YouTube to promote the libraries, answer questions, share information, and even provide training to patrons.

Social Networks in New Jersey are as varied as its population. The social networks that exist support the needs of the diverse communities. A drive from one end of the state to the other will lead one past VFW Halls, Rod and Gun clubs, Ethnic Heritage Societies, churches, barbershops, country clubs, 4-H Fairgrounds, Historical Societies and countless other local, state and national organizations where people socialize and network. A drive down the information highway for New Jersey social networks and organizations leads to a myriad of results representing the background, interests and talents of its residents.

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