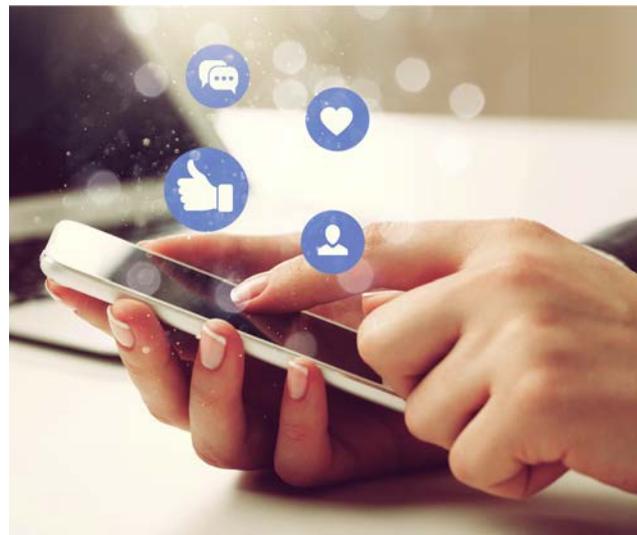


Socializing Safely: Protecting Yourself Online



Most of us use Facebook or Twitter. It's an enjoyable way to catch up with old friends, keep in touch with far off relatives, and learn about new trends. However, social networking has a price that many don't realize: the loss of individual privacy. Every bit of information we share exposes us in ways that can compromise our safety and security. Others may access your personal information without your knowledge.

Social media makes it easier for a stalker or cyber stalker to locate and track a potential victim's every move. Apparent innocuous information can be collected over time to create a whole picture of one's whereabouts and habits. Statistics show that one in six women and one in 19 men will be stalked in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) 2010 Summary Report).





Here are tips on how you can stay safe and still have fun on social networking sites:

Once Something is Posted, It's There Forever

The internet is like an elephant — it never forgets. Whatever you post, tweet, update, or share — even if deleted immediately — can potentially be captured without your knowledge. This is especially true of social networking sites including private messages shared between two people and postings to a private group. There is no such thing as “private” in the world of social media. Any post can potentially be grabbed, copied and mirrored on other sites — not to mention hacked by thieves or subpoenaed by law enforcement agencies.

Remember, Big Brother is Always Watching

The government keeps a copy of all your tweets. According to the Library of Congress blog this means “Every public tweet... with the total numbering in the billions.” And experts predict the information will be searched and used in ways we can't even imagine.

Be Cautious of Location Services

Geo-location services, apps, Foursquare, or any method which shares your location is potentially dangerous. Facebook's “Places” feature could allow a guest in your home to turn your address into a “public place” on Facebook making it accessible to everyone. Your only recourse is to flag your address to have it removed. If you are at an event with friends, you may be unknowingly “tagged” in a photo, making your location known to the world without your knowledge.

Separate Your Personal and Professional Life

If you work with high risk populations, avoid creating accounts accessible by the public. Some create more than one social networking account: one for their professional and public lives and one that's personal for family and close friends.

If doing so, tell friends and family to post only to your personal account. Don't let the names of your loved ones appear on your professional pages. Avoid being tagged in events, activities or photos that may reveal personal details. If they show up, delete them immediately.

Keep Your Birthdays Happy

If you must share your birthday, never put down the year in which you were born. Using the month and day are acceptable, but adding the year provides an opportunity for identity theft.

Take Responsibility for Your Privacy

Keep track of your privacy settings and check them at least monthly. Do not assume that the default setting will keep you safe. Many social networking sites frequently update and change settings, and often the defaults tend to make public more information than you may be willing to share.

Give it Your Stamp of Approval, FIRST

Make sure your privacy settings enable you to review content where you've been tagged by friends before they appear publicly on your page. This should include posts, notes, and photos. It may seem tedious. However, it's much easier to deal with a small amount each day than to go back weeks, months and even years to ensure that any and all content related to you puts forth an image you're comfortable living with.

Grandma, I Can't Believe Your Post!

Tell friends and family that the best way of communicate is through private messaging or email, not posting on your page. Often, social media newbies don't understand the difference between public and private conversation. Don't hesitate to delete something too personal.

It's All Fun and Games Until...

Online games, quizzes, and other entertainment apps are fun, but they often pull information from your page and post it without your knowledge. Make sure that you know the guidelines of any app, game or service and do not allow it unrestricted access to your information.



TWO STRONG BRANDS, ONE GREAT COMPANY.



10 Things You Didn't Know About Me

Be cautious about responding to notes shared by friends that ask a series of questions. When you answer these and post them, you're revealing personal details about yourself that may enable others to figure out your address, your workplace, the name of your pet or your mother's maiden name (often used as an online security question). Do enough of these over time and someone who is determined can read the answers, cross-reference information, and glean a great deal of info in a seemingly innocent way.

Friend or Foe?

Never accept a friend request from someone you don't know. Even when someone appears as a mutual friend of a friend or several friends, think twice about accepting unless you can concretely identify who they are and how they're connected to you. In many professional circles involving large organizations, all an "outsider" has to do is obtain one friend on the inside and it snowballs from there.

