

Online Security and Privacy

A Social Networking Safety Quiz

Q: What are social networking sites?

A: Social networking sites are websites that allow users to establish a personal webpage and link that webpage to the webpages for individual friends, social groups, and others. Examples of social networking sites are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Pinterest, and Tagged.

Q: When you apply for a job, can an employer look at your social networking webpage (such as on Facebook or Pinterest) to help form an impression about you?

A: Yes, employers can and do use a variety of online technologies to learn more about their potential employees. As a consequence, you should be careful about what you place online for others to see. Avoid pictures that may lead others to draw unfavorable opinions about you, watch your language and don't say anything that could be misinterpreted, and never provide personal contact information like addresses or phone numbers in these public websites.

Q: If I don't make my blog, Facebook, Twitter, or Xanga page available to the public, doesn't this mean that I'm safe to say anything I want and post any pictures that I please?

A: No, there are many ways for people to find the information you post online. For instance, a friend may not know that your blog is private and may post a link to it directly from their public blog, thus making your blog public as well. Unlike email, which is stored on your computer, webpages are stored on servers owned and operated by other people. As a result, you should be very careful in selecting what you post online.

Q: Aren't all online predators going after young children?

A: No, college students and adults are also susceptible to a variety of online crimes. From date rape to theft, people can use information that they find online to commit a variety of crimes. The best way to protect yourself is to keep personal information like phone numbers, addresses, and class schedules private.

Q: Since so many couples meet online, don't I have to share my private information with someone to arrange a first date?

A: No, you should not share personal information online. If you decide that you would like to set up a date with someone that you meet online, always be sure to pick a public location (such as a restaurant) to meet him or her. It is a good idea to take a friend along to meet him or her as well. If the person really is someone that you would like to date, there will be plenty of opportunities to do that after you have arranged for a safe meeting the first time.

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Q: As long as I don't meet up with the person, isn't the Internet a safe place to explore sexual issues?

A: This is not recommended. While the Internet can provide a level of anonymity, it is typically not safe to explore sexual issues with strangers. You may think of the online discussions as "innocent chats," but they could mean much more to the stranger on the other computer. Online predators and criminals can often find personal information (such as phone numbers and dorm addresses) online using a variety of search engines and databases. As a result, it is rarely safe to have sexually explicit conversations with online strangers.

Q: If I am underage and my friend posts a picture of me drinking a beer to their blog, Xanga, MySpace, or Facebook page, what should I do?

A: Ask the friend to remove the picture as soon as possible. In the future you will most likely not want to have this picture available online for potential employers or others to view. The longer the picture is available online, the more likely it is that someone else will also save a copy of the picture, so asking your friend to remove it soon is your best bet.

Q: If I post a picture of myself to my blog, Friendster, or Facebook page, no one else will have a copy of it...can't I remove it before I start looking for a job?

A: You can remove your copy of that picture, but online pictures are simply files that can be copied, saved, or linked to by others. As a result, other people can save a copy of your picture to their computer or post a copy of your picture to their blog, Habbo, MySpace, or Facebook page as well. To be safe, keep your pictures on your computer or send them via email to friends that you know.

Summary

If you want to keep your private information private, don't share it on the Internet. Any personal information shared on the Internet could end up becoming public information quicker than you think possible. Not only could this be embarrassing, it could also be dangerous.