

Link to: A Guide to Facebook for School Faculty, Administration and Staff

http://swiftkick.typepad.com/activities_technology/2007/04/facebook_guide_.html

Copy from another Facebook Blog.

The utter cretin's guide to privacy on Facebook

I thought I'd write a little guide to privacy on Facebook because clearly it is sorely needed.

Facebook is a social network. Essentially, it's designed to connect friends together. Facebook is quite an exclusive place. The only way you can sign up is if you are in a supported network (usually a university — for instance, my network is Edinburgh (University)), and you must sign up using your university email address.

By default your profile is hidden from people outside your network. Nobody who isn't also in Edinburgh can see my profile, unless they're a friend from another network. But you can choose for your profile to be yet more private. See the 'My Privacy' button? Anybody can set their profile up so that only approved friends can see it.

Recently there was a lot of controversy when Facebook launched new features: news feed and mini feed. These features essentially provided a list of actions that people have done on Facebook such as groups you've joined, new interests and so on.

None of this changed the privacy settings. Your actions were still only visible to your network, or just your friends if you wished. All of the information provided in the news feed and the mini feed were already available anyway: the new features merely aggregated it all into one convenient space.

But the new features were massively unpopular, with many users howling that their privacy was being invaded and that the new features were too "stalker-esque". But the privacy settings hadn't changed — all of the information could be hidden from everybody but your friends if you wished. What kind of person [adds stalkers to their friends list](#)?

Part of the problem seems to be the fact that the new feeds listed postings to The Wall (a kind of message board attached to each person's profile, and one of Facebook's most popular features). For instance, one person left a comment on my last post about Facebook:

I might have just broken up with my girlfriend. I might also have just posted a kinda flirty message on someone else's message board [Wall] soon after. If you know both these things, you might reasonably infer that I fancy this other person, or even that I broke up with my gf to pursue this other person.

Neither of these actions would have been private in the first place on Facebook. If you change your relationship status, that change is visible to everybody who has access to your profile. If you post on somebody's Wall, that message is visible to everybody who has access to that Wall. Okay, so maybe with the new features these facts were more obvious with the feeds 'pushing' the new data to you. But essentially your information was as private with the feeds as it was without.

One of the most intriguing things about the Facebook furore is the revelation that many, many people appear to use The Wall as a kind of quasi-private messaging centre. This is pretty reckless behaviour on the user's part. There are a few pretty big clues that The Wall is not the place to be writing messages designed to be private.

Firstly, the name. It's called The *Wall* for crying out loud! How private does that sound?! Not very. The analogy it draws is very clear: treat this space like a wall in the street. On this wall you can write whatever you would be prepared to write on a physical, real-life wall.

Another pretty massive clue is the fact that *there is a separate private messaging feature!* Private messages are not advertised in the new feeds. That's because they are, unlike The Wall, private. So — get this — if you want to write something private on somebody's Wall, why not think twice and private message them instead? What a novel thought!

Why not go a step further and use email? I like to use Walls and the like, but when I have something important or private to say to somebody, I always use email. We all have email addresses, so why would anybody consider writing something private on a whimsical social networking feature called 'The Wall'?!

Did you notice those words I used in that last sentence? *Social. Network.* A website designed to connect friends. Because Facebook is a social network, its main function is to keep friends in touch. Obviously I will take an interest if one of my friends changes something in their profile or writes something on a Wall. Do you know why? Because they're my *friends*. I'm *supposed* to take an interest in them!

And yes, I do go around reading other people's Walls. That might sound "stalkerish" to you, so shoot me. I have sometimes been surprised at what I have read on Walls. But I had always assumed that everybody who wrote on a Wall was prepared for that message to be available to be read in a semi-public environment, because that is what the Wall is designed to be.

There is a golden rule that everybody that writes anything on the web will inevitably learn sooner or later. The rule is: write on the web, and people will read it. Don't expect people not to find something you've written, even if you think it's in a relatively private corner. Google is more powerful than you think.

Anybody who thought that the Wall was a private place was kidding themselves on. And if you don't want certain "friends" reading your profile, why on earth did you add them

as friends? Presumably to keep that friends counter high. Well, serves you right for being such a shameless narcissist.

And now, in yet another “doh, those users of Facebook really are dim” moment, *it was actually possible to remove everything from your feeds anyway!*



See that ‘X’? That’s not a multiplication sign. *It’s only a bloody delete button! Next to every single entry in your feed!*

Yesterday, Facebook had to add a whole lot of features that dilute the usefulness of the feeds just to get those maniacs that were setting up e-riots to shut up. A set of new privacy options means that you can now decide what does and doesn’t make it to your feed — or you can just disable the feed completely.

So what has happened? All of my friends have disabled the feed! At least I assume that’s what’s happened, because the feed updates have come to a crunching halt from some point last night. And I know that my friends have updated their profiles. You know how I know? Because it says so in the ‘My Friends’ section. You see? I can still “stalk” my “friends” easily. And that feature has been there ever since I started using Facebook. It’s just one click more difficult, that’s all.

I actually find it quite offensive that somebody would list me as a “friend”, yet feel the need to attempt to hide their activity from me.

So there you have it. A potentially useful new Facebook feature has become almost useless. It could have greased the wheels of the social network, but the site’s users seemed to balk at the realisation that they were using a *social* network and not some kind of private zone.

This whole furore is not Facebook’s fault. It’s the fault of those dunces who joined groups because they weren’t responsible enough to think through the security implications of:

1. Adding stalkers as “friends”
2. Writing private messages on The Wall

If you were stupid enough to do either of those things, it was *you* — not Facebook — that endangered your privacy.

