



THINK PRIVACY

Monthly Privacy Advice from the NYS Consumer Protection Board

10 Tips for Using Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are exploding in popularity. Facebook now has over 175 million users worldwide and MySpace has 130 million.¹ Recently, Facebook posted a controversial policy change to its terms of service. The new policy would have given the company complete control over user's information. The controversial change sparked such outrage by users that Facebook did an about-face within (24) hours. However, the issue of terms and services on social networking sites is unlikely to go away. As a result, consumers should be aware of the privacy implications of using these sites and be prepared to take action to help protect their privacy. Here are ten simple tips to use when utilizing social networking sites.

1. Carefully read the privacy policy and terms of usage so that you fully understand what will happen to information that you disclose on the site.
2. Set privacy and security settings. Review carefully the privacy and security settings that are offered and use them accordingly.
3. Select a unique password. Ensure that only you know the password and do not share it with anyone.
4. Only accept friends that you *really* know and trust. Once you open yourself up to a "friendship" on the site, you need to understand that they, as well as their friends, will have access to what you post.
5. Understand that the information you post will be in the public domain. This includes random musings about family, work and pictures of friends and loved ones.
6. Limit personal information. You should understand that the more information you share on the site creates a virtual picture of who you are. You want to limit personal information to avoid becoming a victim of identity theft.
7. Be careful installing 3rd party applications that are on the sites. Make sure you trust the source before you download it.
8. Be aware of phishing and other Internet scams. Scams can take the shape of messages from "friends" and lead you to disclose or download sensitive information.
9. Stay vigilant about protecting your privacy. Regularly check your privacy and security settings and monitor any policy changes to user terms and usages by the site.
10. Have fun. These sites can be rewarding, but understand that they do contain privacy concerns.

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¹ The Great Debate: Ad strategy at root of privacy row of facebook privacy row, by Eric Auchard, last viewed 2-24-09 <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2009/02/24/ad-strategy-at-root-of-facebook-privacy-row/> The popularity of these sites is exemplified by 1 billion in revenue for MySpace and 300 million for Facebook.