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What is Social Networking?

This chapter outlines what social networking is all about, introduces the main concepts, and explodes some of the popular myths.

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Why this book?

Social networking has become a phrase widely used in the media and, at one time, it used to refer to social gatherings where you might meet like-minded people. You had to be in the same place at the same time in order to take part.

In recent years, the development of services on the Internet has meant that the term 'social networking' now has a completely new connotation. It's all about connecting with people via the computer and the Internet, wherever those people may be, to share a common interest or purpose.

Hot tip



Start off with one site to explore, so you don't get overwhelmed with new friends and data.



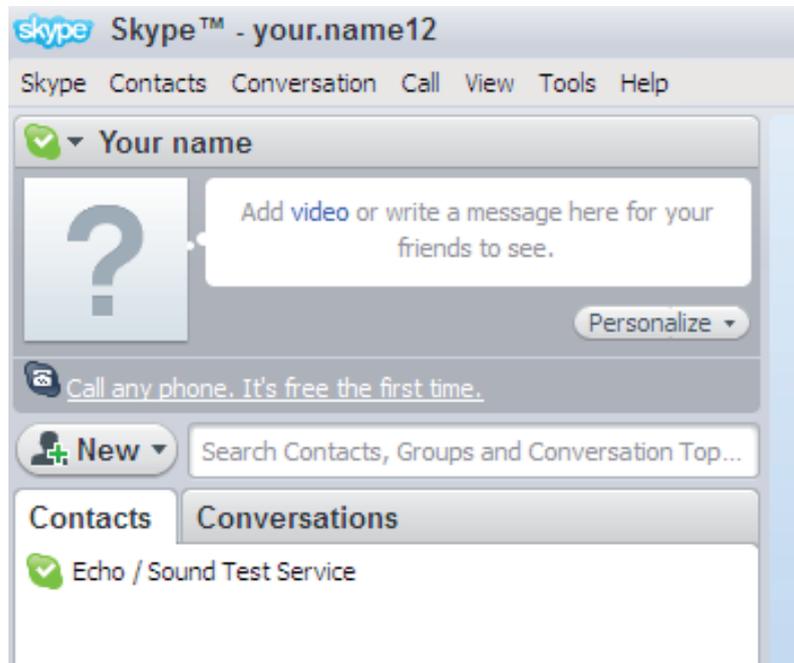
Social networking has certainly had a major impact on the younger generation. The growth of sites like MySpace and Facebook has been extremely rapid, and the vast majority of students under the age of 25 are likely to be active users.

This book is designed to help those of us who are past the first flush of youth to understand what the hype is all about.

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In particular, this book will help you to:

- choose the social network or networks that you can engage with
- understand the processes you will need to follow
- walk through the joining and publishing processes
- understand the terminology
- dispel some of the myths about social networking
- understand the implications of some of the steps you are invited to take
- manage your accounts so that you can control your own data
- use social networking sites to enhance your life, not have them control you!



Hot tip



If you have friends or relatives on a site, asking them what they use it for might give you a helpful starting point.

Beware

Start slowly – don't expect to be running groups using a site too quickly!

What is social networking for?

The main purpose of social networking sites is to give you tools that make it possible for you to communicate effectively with different groups of people in your social circle. You can choose what types of communication you want to make, and with whom.

Who do you want to communicate with?

- You can keep in contact with family members on a gap year, or away at university
- You could use a network to run a sports team, a book group or an association, so all the members can find out what is planned
- You can find new people to communicate with about an interest you share
- You can find people you have lost touch with
- You can set up your own community and run projects, or activities, using it
- You can use the network to find out what's going on - this might be on your favorite celebrities' website, or in the area of a particular hobby or industry



What form will the communication take?

How you interact with other people varies from site to site. In many cases, the communications made are very quick and easy to carry out.

- They might be comments about how you are feeling, what you are doing, or where you are

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- They might be longer pieces of writing, thoughts, or ideas
- Some sites offer very specific formats for the information they are looking for, and support you in writing a book or film review, or comments on restaurants or hotels visited



- Give information about the work you do and have done in the past
- Some sites specifically support pictures or video, allowing you to load them into a site and let other people view and comment on them

Hot tip



Keep the information you put on work sites very factual and professional.

A screenshot of a Flickr photostream page. At the top is the Flickr logo with "from YAHOO!" and navigation links: Home, You, Organize & Create, Contacts, Groups, Explore. Below is the user's profile "Your photostream" with "44 items / 27 views" and navigation links: Sets, Galleries, Tags, People, Archives, Favorites, Popular, Profile. Two photos are displayed side-by-side. The left photo is by "NanaGodfredArhin" and the right photo is by "RockyAcquah". Both photos show a young man in a green shirt. Below each photo is a link "click here to add a description" and a copyright notice "© Only friends can see this photo (edit)".

Beware

Try not to listen to those people who want to put you off because they don't use social networking sites themselves.

Social networking myths

“Once you're on a social networking site, you'll spend all your time doing it.”

Well, this is up to you! Some people have said the same about email, and perhaps you now know that's not true. Of course, there's not much point in going to all the trouble of setting up an account if you are only going to use it very occasionally. It will require some of your time, but how much definitely depends on yourself.

“I won't understand what's going on.”

That's why you're reading this book! If you can access the Internet and find websites you want to visit, you can certainly use a social networking site. There are different cultures associated with different sites, but, once you become familiar with them, you will not find it difficult.

“I'll lose my privacy.”

Every social networking site has ways of making sure you share personal data, like your email address, age, telephone number and so on, **ONLY** with the people you choose to share it with. Taking time to understand how the profile system works will make sure that this is the case.

“When I've got a social network profile everyone will contact me.”

It all depends how you use the site, and how your friends use it too. You can decide who you link to, and who you allow to link to you, so how big your network of friends becomes is entirely up to you.

“I don't have the computer skills to use social networking sites.”

As long as you can access the Internet and use email you will be technically able to use a social networking site. It really is not difficult.

Who is really there?

As you will see as you work through this book, I have created a number of different alter egos as accounts, to use as illustrations. Other people can do that too - so it is appropriate to be aware that people may not always be who they say they are!

Usually, when you set up your site, you will be asked to give an email address that the site 'belongs' to. This provides some security, as there is a notifiable person behind the content, though, of course, this is not a great level of accountability.

Personalize Skype



Identity is central to some sites – Friends Reunited, where you are trying to contact people from your past, or Skype, where you want to talk to particular people. It would be pointless to represent yourself as someone different on those sites. However, it is sometimes sensible to use two different identities to distinguish between yourself at work and at leisure – you might not want work colleagues to share your list of friends or your personal interests, so creating two different profiles within one network might be a way around that.

You would not give your phone number to any casual acquaintance you meet in the street or the mall. You should be no more or less cautious with interactions on social network sites.

Beware



It is true that not everyone will be who they say they are. Read contributions with a sensible amount of skepticism – and don't take everything too seriously.

Don't forget

Write down your user name and password somewhere and keep it safe. You will want to check it at some time in the future.

Sharing information

There's a range of different information that you can share when you join a social networking site.

Factual information about you

- This is the personal information about yourself - your profile or homepage. It often includes your birthday
- A photograph of yourself - some sites encourage users to use a cartoon or animated character to represent themselves. This is particularly the case if the site supports children
- Most sites have a format that includes your personal profile, sometimes called your Account, Home, Profile. The personal information you put here will be shared widely with people accessing the site.

Information that is the focus of the site

- This might be where you are, what you are doing, what you think, how you feel, where you are going next. It might be a range of photographs, or something specific about an event or activity
- The site will offer you a text space to write in, or might offer a range of choices for you to select one or more. The site handles all the formatting, so the information is well-presented when it appears on-screen

Readers of the site can comment or give feedback about the information you have supplied. If it concerns them - for example, if it identifies them as a family member - they will be asked to confirm the relationship, sometimes before it appears on the site.



Jonathan Moller accepted your family request.
on Tuesday

Keeping safe

Some media sources make a lot about the dangers of social networking sites, but, provided you are sensible, it is most unlikely that your information will be compromised. There are a few simple rules to follow - and to make sure the young people you know also follow.

- Be very cautious about giving your phone number and address to anyone, especially by publishing it to your profile
- Don't ever give away your logon details and password - even to a friendly colleague
- Consider carefully the pictures you use for your profile and in other contexts on the site. Could they be misused?

	Everyone	Friends of friends	Friends only
My status, photos, and posts			•
Bio and favorite quotations	•		
Family and relationships			•
Photos and videos I'm tagged in			•
Religious and political views			•
Birthday			•

- Make sure you set the security options on the site, and start them at the most secure settings. It's easier to take some filters off than to put them back on
- If you access your site at a computer used by others, make sure you log out of any social networking site you have been using properly (and email sites too)
- Once something has been published on one of these sites, it's difficult to remove it. Make sure you have followed the advice in this book, and have also used your common sense before publishing sensitive pictures and information online.

Beware



Photos that show people in compromising situations might be used against them, and you too.

Beware



If other people have copied material that you regret placing on the site, those copies will still exist even if you remove your original.

Don't forget

Nobody keeps a check on how often you use a site just to explore what's there. You won't be asked to stop using it if you just read and explore.

'Lurking' and taking part

There's a vast amount of material to read and explore on networking sites. A good way to find out what it's all about, and to work out how you want to use the site, is to spend a bit of time having a look around. You might want to read what people are saying, look at some pages, find people you know, identify some games or activities that you want to join. When you do all of these things without writing anything, it's called 'lurking'. It's completely fine to do that, and, in fact, it's the best way of getting to understand how a range of other people use the site.

Some sites offer a number of approaches for exploring. For example, this is a starting page from Flickr.

Explore [interesting photos on Flickr](#) by choosing a point in time...

Select a month

Choose

More places to explore:

- [Interesting photos from the last 7 days](#)
- [Calendar view of this month](#)
- [A map of the world](#)
- [Camera Finder](#)
- [Most recent uploads](#)
- [Video on Flickr](#)
- [Galleries](#)
- [The App Garden](#)
- [The Flickr Blog](#)

When you do start taking part, you will find that you start to get messages back from people you have interacted with. They may be agreeing to link to you, or telling you that they have left you a message. You will often get an email to tell

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you that a message has been received. This will be found in the email box you had used as a reference when you signed up for the site.

Once you have joined up and started to take part, the contributions you make will start to build up somewhere.



Anne Sparrowhawk Photographs from a fantastic week on the Shetland Islands and especially Unst with Jonathan | 17th and 20th August 2007.
Tagged: Jonathan Moller



Anne Sparrowhawk
44 new photos
21 August 2007 at 19:01 · Comment · Like · Share

 **Ebenezer Amoh** there is very nice place
11 March at 17:13 · Like · Delete

Write a comment...

This is an example of an entry into my Facebook page dating back several years, and you can see how comments from a reader have also been saved.

Don't forget



You can usually remove materials you have put up on the site.

Copyright issues

Once your writing, pictures, photographs and so on are posted onto a website, they are very easy to copy. But just because something is copiable, it does not mean that it is copyright free. This is a complex legal area. Make sure you are legal by posting pictures on sites that are your own. Sites often have comments in the ‘fine print’, such as:

“you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any IP content that you post on or in connection with” Facebook.

That specifically means that Facebook can hold the image referred to, and other people that you have allowed to go to your Facebook page can see it. They can also copy it if they choose to and use it on their page. This is the area in which control can potentially slip away if you do not have your privacy settings tight enough.

Once images have appeared on the Internet it can be difficult to control them, so it’s important to consider whether you want your pictures to be shared with such a wide audience. Each site has its own rules, and these are discussed in the chapters that follow.

Don't forget



You will not have a record of who has seen your page and copied your images.



What you need to start

The basic tools for social networking are:

- A computer or a Smartphone
- An Internet connection
- An email address

The computer

Social networking sites are all online, so they are available to you from whichever computer you happen to be using. All the information you enter when you set up your account for a site is kept in some computer somewhere, but you do not have to know exactly where. When you log in to the site, it will know about you, and allow you to access your materials from wherever you happen to be. If you are at home, at work, in the library, visiting another country, your social network can be accessed by you from any computer linked to the Internet.

When you connect to the Internet, you view sites through a browser - a piece of software that sits on your computer and interprets websites so that you can see them. There are a number of different browsers; Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, and Google Chrome are the most common ones on the PC platform, with Apple's Safari being most widespread on the Apple. The browsers are updated from time to time, and, if your computer is using an old browser, you might consider downloading a more recent version to get a better experience of social networking.

Smartphones can also access social networking sites, and this will be discussed in some of the following chapters.

The Internet connection

The Internet connection might be a dial-up or on broadband. You cannot tell the difference by looking at the computer or the telephone socket, but the speed of response will make that very clear! If it takes a very long time for pages to load from the Internet, then the chances are you are using a dial-up connection rather than broadband. This will also be very tedious when you are uploading pictures.

Beware



A dial up connection ties up the phone line as long as you are online. Charges may increase after you have been online for 60 minutes, too.

Don't forget



You will need to know your user name and password when you access a site from a computer you have not logged on from before.

Hot tip

Check that the computer is linked to the Internet by trying to look at www.bbc.co.uk or www.nytimes.com

Hot tip

There are new, clever ways of uploading information to all your sites at once. It can be really helpful to have a separate email address to do this from.

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An email account

You've probably got an email address already. Social networking sites usually require you to have one, so that they can authorise your account. They often send information about updates to their software, or send you messages to let you know that someone has contacted you. If you don't have an email address, then some sites won't let you join at all.

You can create a new email address and link all your new social networks to it. This can be useful, especially if you want to keep work and social life separate. You can register to have an email with many different organizations. Here's a few of the most common ones.

www.googlemail.com

www.yahoo.com

www.msn.com

www.hotmail.com

All of these offer free email accounts, and a certain amount of webspace too. They all rely on a browser as the way to access the account, but will generally operate on a wide range of browsers, even quite old ones.

So now you are ready!

So, with a computer, Internet connection and email account prepared, you are ready to join a network. The next section discusses some of the ways you can choose which one to join.