



In this third issue of the ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter we take a look at social networking.

Social Networking

Although social networking (SN) has taken on many forms in the past, today we refer to the online communities which allow users to develop their own space on the internet and to interact with others.

These SN sites are popular with young people as they are given the freedom to express themselves and to engage with a much wider audience than their own neighbourhood. They can also create an alter-ego of themselves online. Most SN sites incorporate three elements: a user-created profile, an internal email system, and a mechanism to search for other users.

The three most popular SN sites in Australia, Facebook, MySpace and Bebo, all have a minimum joining age of thirteen. The age verification controls are, however, circumvented by some youths who simply lie about their age.

Upon signing up to a SN service, the user supplies information about them which is then used to populate their profile. This information might include:

- Name and age;
- Hobbies/interests;
- Relationship status;
- Likes/dislikes;
- Favourite films, books, TV shows;
- About me – where the user is given free range to express themselves.

They also provide a photo, usually of themselves, which is then used as their profile picture. This image is seen every time the user posts a message on a profile and also during searches. Depending on the SN site, the user might also be able to customise their profile with wallpaper, music, video clips, photos and add-on applications such as polls and games.

The profile also allows for other users to post messages or comments. This is one of the more dynamic elements of the profile and the main way in which users interact. Some profiles also incorporate a blog function and an instant messaging (IM) application.

The internal mail system is a more private means of sending messages between users than posting on a profile. These messages can only be seen by the people they are addressed to and are similar to other web-hosted email accounts.

The search function in SN sites allows users to find their friends or to locate new ones.

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their internet use.

Do you have a profile on such sites as Facebook, MySpace or Bebo?

Is your profile set to private?

How many friends are on your contact list? Do you know all of them in person?

What do you enjoy most about having a profile?

Has anyone ever upset you while using social networking?

Can I see your profile?

Safe Social Networking

Social networking (SN) is a lot of fun and is only growing in popularity amongst internet users of all ages. We want to encourage young people to continue to participate in SN, and to do so safely.

Here is some useful advice for young people using these sites:

- Never share your full name, address, phone number, or your school.
- Make sure your profile is set to private.
- Don't share personal information about yourself, family or friends.
- Think before you post - if you wouldn't say it to someone's face, don't say it online.
- Don't upload inappropriate images - if you wouldn't pass it around the dinner table, don't share it online.
- Ask that your friends don't post photos of you without your permission and show them the same courtesy.
- Don't post photos of yourself in your school or sporting uniform - this can make it easy for someone to identify you.
- If someone makes you feel uncomfortable online, tell someone - a parent, teacher or trusted adult you know in the real world.
- Learn how to block communications from

cyberbullies.

Public vs Private

Most SN sites allow users to choose the privacy settings of their profiles. A public profile can be viewed by anyone whereas a private profile can only be viewed by those that the user has selected. Users can choose to limit access to their profile to only their "friends", the users they have added to their friend/contact list.

As a default setting on MySpace and Bebo, users under the age of eighteen have their profiles set to private. However, if young people are lying about their age, this default does not apply.

We encourage young people to ensure that their profile is set to private so that they can control who sees their information and prevent unwanted attention from others.

New features of the ThinkUKnow Australia Website

We are constantly updating the ThinkUKnow Australia website to help parents, carers and teachers ensure that young people have a safe online experience.

This month, we've added a page that details how to block cyber-bullies on the popular online applications used by young people. [Visit our new page on how to block cyber-bullies here.](#)

If there is anything you would like to know more about or want to see added to the ThinkUKnow website, please [contact us.](#)