

Staying safe in the age of the Internet

By AUBREY CLARK
STAFF WRITER
ARC5229@PSU.EDU

In the past few years, social-networking sites (SNS's) have become a cultural phenomenon. Networks like Facebook and MySpace have spawned a new type of virtual interaction between people that goes beyond e-mailing and instant messaging. Using a more personal way to connect with others on the Internet, SNS's display pictures and personal information, like the user's name, age, sex, hometown, and e-mail address. Due to the exploitation of such private information, plenty of dangers and concerns follow SNS's. Members of such sites should be aware of a social network's implications and what actions can be taken to minimize risk. By utilizing safety tools and techniques, the world of SNS's

to twelve, are illicitly using the sites - which are supposed to be limited to teenagers and adults - potentially exposing them to risky communications with strangers." With so many people connected to SNS's, including children, problems with Facebook and MySpace surface as social threats like stalking, Internet bullying, and corporate espionage. Although new legislation to give law enforcement the tools to better protect children from online predators, sexual

account deletion difficulty. Plenty of privacy breaches occur to social networking site users with users believing the sites are safe and secure with photos of themselves and other private information. The European Network and Information Security Agency booklet, *Security Issues and Recommendations for Online Social Networks*, touches down on such issues by discussing the evolving risks of social networking sites and recommends tips

well as their business models." Another statute, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, protects an SNS from any liability regarding defamatory material posted by a user about another user. Since an SNS member's information is not

Although East Pennsboro Area School District does not condone the use of SNS's, the schools take preventative measures in teaching area families about the dangers of social networking. Recently, the East Pennsboro School Administration invited Attorney



Photo courtesy of myspace.com



Photo courtesy of facebook.com



Photo courtesy of twitter.com

can be safer and easier to use. Although the negative effects and applications of social-networking sites are highly publicized, there are positive functions that stem from SNS's, too. Whether it is connecting with distant friends and relatives, learning more about schools, promoting a business, or advertising, SNS's are outlets for millions of people to share information quickly and easily. Sites like MySpace and Facebook have become mass mediums that cater to the millions of people who use SNS's to share information. MySpace and Facebook registrants are all over globe, warranting the use of the world's newest shared arena.

Keeping Things Private

According to Forrester Research, Facebook and MySpace house over 170 million American users alone. 85% of MySpace users are 18 years of age and older, while Facebook hosts 70% of such adults. While it seems the bulk of members are adults, children also use social-networking sites as well. According to a recent article by John Carvel, the social affairs editor of *The Guardian*, "more than 750,000 children, ages eight

solicitation, online harassment, and bullying, and exposure to problematic and illegal content.

Pennsylvania's Attorney General Tom Corbett started the Attorney General's Child Sexual Exploitation Task Force to "aggressively pursue anyone who used a computer and the Internet to prey on our children," as stated on his website. Corbett, as well as 49 other state attorney generals, and the District of Columbia removed the accounts of 29,000 registered sex offenders from MySpace in 2007. As of April 2, 2009, the AGCSET has arrested over 200 Internet predators in Pennsylvania's Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Chambersburg, and Altoona. Because of Corbett, Pennsylvania has become a catalyst of change in the battle with online predators.

Other SNS problems occur with privacy threats. Digital Dossier Aggregation is a way for third parties to infiltrate a profile and use information about a person for an outside network. Other privacy threats include secondary data collection, face recognition, content-based image retrieval, photo tagging, and complete

and tools for clients to use as preventative measures. Security threats including spam, cross-site scripting, viruses, worms, and social networking site aggregators also have a huge impact on SNS's. Common viruses and spam are used to infiltrate a personal computer system of a SNS member, allowing a hacker easy access to any personal information a client includes posts on Facebook or MySpace. By using spam and other viruses, identity related threats from phishing, information leakage, and profile squatting (which is using slander through identity theft) happen through information leakage and phishing. Social-networking sites have proven to cater to the masses with high user capacity and popularity, but the implications involved with the sites are highly dangerous. Over 125 billion page views a month allow these SNS's to be two of the top 10 most trafficked sites in the US.

There are no set laws that govern the user's rights clearance or ownership of shared content on any social-networking site, but there are two statutes that protect the legal liabilities of a SNS itself. According to FindLaw.com's Kevin Fayle, "Section 512 (c) of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act removes liability for copyright infringement from websites that allow users to post content, as long as the site has a mechanism in place whereby the copyright owner can request the removal of infringing content. This greatly impacts the services that social networks offer, as

legally protected, a user should carefully post information that is shared with others and avoid revealing private material. By utilizing suggested guidelines like the *Security Issues and Recommendations for Online Social Networks* booklet have to offer, a user can greatly reduce his or her potential Internet risk.

Uses of Social Networking Sites

With over 170 million American users, it is safe to say that everybody knows somebody with a MySpace or Facebook account. Penn State Harrisburg student Andy Conley stated every member of his family has a MySpace, FaceBook, or both. "I am pretty sure even my grandma is on Facebook," he said. "She lives in New Hampshire, so it is an easy way for her to know what we are up to and see pictures of me and my brother and cousins." Penn State Harrisburg, located in Middletown, even has its own Facebook site, promoting the school's Admissions and recruiting prospective students. The familiarity and user friendliness of Facebook allows users and students alike to gather information on schools and businesses while staying logged in to their own social networking page.

Colleges and Universities thrive on MySpace and Facebook, but elementary, middle, and high schools are totally against them. Craig Robbins, principal of East Pennsboro High School in Enola, said that the district blocks all social-networking sites through the filter housed at the Intermediate Unit. The filter stops students from connecting to SNS's during school hours. "I can honestly say that these sites are nothing but headaches," Robbins said. "The animosity that is created by students toward other students is a real cause for concern."

General Tom Corbett to present an assembly program, mainly focused on Internet safety, to the district's students and parents.

High user capacities of SNS's allocate schools, businesses, and the media to advertise to the likes of millions of viewers who connect to MySpace and Facebook. *USA Today's* Jon Swartz reported that online ad spending is catering to a \$50 billion dollar market for the 2009 year, meaning advertising will litter websites, especially popular SNS's. "Big-name advertisers are drooling over millions of young, affluent consumers who are spending more time on their online profiles than in front of TV and movie screens," said Swartz. Advertisements on TV and in movies cater to certain audience tastes, depending on what type of programming a person watches. By putting advertisements on universal media formats, like SNS's, the ads reach more people, thus creating higher revenue for advertisers and the companies behind them. Media agencies also utilize social-networking sites to distribute news to users. Local news teams like WGAL 8 and WHTM ABC 27 have MySpace and Facebook accounts that are used to post the latest headlines, weather forecasts, and news features. Users can select the report they want to view, read it, and even post/share the information with others. When Al Gnoza, ABC 27's 11 o'clock news anchor, was asked why the station uses SNS's, he said, "it gives us an idea of what people are thinking about us and the issues that are active... and it really does promote our product." Gnoza also commented

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