

Social networking—A guide for adults

Social networking sites allow users to create, contribute and exchange information in a variety of forms—including video, images, music and text—with family, friends or anyone from around the world. Australians are keen social networkers with more than 75 per cent of the online population accessing these sites in 2009.¹

Social networking sites allow users to establish an online profile, upload and organise information, and communicate with others.

Services like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Bebo enable users to set up profiles, join groups, and share news and information. Services like YouTube and Flickr are image based and allow users to upload, share and comment on photographs and video footage. Other sites provide users with services and connections to help further careers and relationships. These include sites like LinkedIn, RSVP and eHarmony.

Current issues

Social networking sites can be a great way to keep in touch, share stories and information and to connect with others.

As with off-line communities, some social networking service users act inappropriately or disrespectfully online. Issues like bullying and harassment, unwanted or inappropriate contact, inappropriate or offensive content and identity theft occur in social networking services, everyday. Some users choose to post offensive, prejudiced or defamatory views with little consideration of the implications for other users, and, potentially, themselves. The implications may be social or, in some cases, criminal.

Some users pretend to be someone else, while others think they are anonymous online and will not be called to account for online actions. Some users vandalise and deface other sites with offensive content. In other examples, users have noted bullying or harassment, inappropriate contact and other issues.

Rights and responsibilities

As a participant on social networking sites, you have both rights and responsibilities. Becoming familiar with

how sites operate, and their terms and conditions, will ensure you both behave appropriately and make sound choices online.

What you can do to keep yourself safe

On social networking sites, you can control how much information you share or conceal. Most sites allow users to establish privacy settings which restrict who can access their information. Review these carefully, and set them prior to adding friends or joining external networks.

Most social networking sites have detailed conditions of use and operate a complaints system to address concerns, including the ability to contact site administrators to take down offensive materials. Information about reporting is outlined in the 'Service support—Report abuse' section, noted below. That said, many social networking sites are based overseas so there are limits to what can be achieved under Australian laws and regulations.

It is important that all users have a shared understanding of how online communities operate and work together to create safe and respectful communities with minimal potential for harm.

For safe and enjoyable use of social networking sites, think about the following when setting up your online profile:

- > *Understand and apply the privacy settings*—limit who can access your profile or join any groups that you set up.
- > *Keep personal information private*. Think carefully before disclosing personal details—even if only friends can access your profile.
- > *Use commonsense when posting any content, including video, images or text, online*. If you put it up, it may be online forever.
- > *Project an appropriate self-image*. Post appropriate images than you will be comfortable with over time. As online content may not be possible to remove, the content you post now may still be online in five years. Any content you post will form part of your digital reputation that could be used against you now or later.

¹ ACMA Communications report 2008–09, p 92

Inappropriate images may also invite unwanted contact.

- > *Choose online friends wisely.* Others' inappropriate views and behaviours can reflect badly on you.

What you can do to help others

If you are adding to a friend or online acquaintance's community, think about the following:

- > *Ask before posting images or stories about them.* What you see as harmless may be embarrassing or humiliating for them.
- > *Communicate with others as you would do offline— with courtesy and respect.* If you think another user is being bullied or harassed online, speak out. Let others know if their behaviour isn't appropriate.

Service support—Report abuse

You can further safeguard yourself when using social networking services by seeking information and support provided by industry, government and community-based groups. These include options to complain about inappropriate content or contact.

As an example, members of Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, MSN Messenger can report harassment and inappropriate content by using a 'Report abuse' link that appears on each site.

Twitter users can report behaviours including unlawful use, impersonations and violent threats by filing a 'Support request ticket'.

On YouTube, users have the option to 'Flag' content, which reports the content to YouTube staff.

In addition to this support, non-members can also report issues and concerns. Check each site for details.

The ACMA can investigate complaints about prohibited online content. If you have come across material online that you think may be prohibited under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* you can report it to the ACMA's online complaints hotline.

Keeping young people safe online

Parents and teachers have an important role to play in supporting young people and promoting the safe and thoughtful use of social networking sites.

The ACMA's Cybersmart program provides comprehensive educational programs and resources to help teachers and parents understand what young people are doing online and how to help them act safely. This program includes training and education for

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teachers, students and parents. Following are links to Cybersmart information on safe social networking and related issues.

Children and young people should be made aware that in emergency situations they should contact Triple Zero, or speak with a trusted adult.

Outreach programs

[Professional Development for Educators](#)

[Internet Safety Awareness presentations \(for parents, teachers and students\)](#)

Resources and information

[The Smart Guide to Socialising on the Internet](#)

[Unwanted contact](#) (includes cyberbullying)

[Common cybersafety issues: Cyberbullying](#)

[Common cybersafety issues: Protecting personal information](#)

[Common cybersafety issues: Inappropriate content](#)

Videos

[Let's Fight It Together](#)

[Social networking services](#)

[What are children doing online?](#) (By age group)

For more information

Three reports were prepared by the ACMA for the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy: 2008 and 2009 reports titled [Developments in the internet filtering technologies and other measures for promoting online safety](#) and the 2010 [Online risk and safety in the digital economy](#)

Further publications and research from the ACMA, including [Click and Connect: Young Australian's use of online social media](#) are also available online

Cybersafety and related contacts

Cybersmart program

Visit: www.cybersmart.gov.au

Tel: Cybersafety Contact Centre 1800 880 176

Email: cybersafety@acma.gov.au

The ACMA's Complaints hotline

Visit: www.acma.gov.au/hotline

Email: online@acma.gov.au

Australian Federal Police

Visit: www.afp.gov.au/online_forms/ocset_form

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Kids Helpline

Tel: 1800 55 1800

Visit: www.kidshelp.com.au

Australian Human Rights Commission

Tel: 1300 656 419 (local call)

Visit: www.humanrights.gov.au

Email: complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

Federal Privacy Commissioner

Tel: 1300 363 992

Visit: www.privacy.gov.au

Crime Stoppers

Tel: 1800 333 000

Bullying No Way

Visit: www.bullyingnoway.com.au

Reach Out

Visit: www.reachout.com.au

Email: info@reachout.com.au

FACTsheet



Please note: this document is intended to be a guide only and should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.

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