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The social media privacy debate

In a recent article "[Facebook Sued Over Claims it Tracks Users' Activity](#)" it states that Facebook is being sued by a group of users over claims that once they logged off, Facebook tracked their online activity. This has to do with whether or not Facebook deletes tracking 'cookies' once users log off their site. If 'cookies' are not deleted, users' activities can be tracked as they surf the Internet, which [poses an interesting scenario in relation to privacy and social media](#).

It doesn't matter whether you are a business or an individual. Although the issues and consequences may be different, the plethora of privacy and security issues apply to both. The recent hackings of [Sony](#) show that any organisation can be vulnerable and even encrypted information can be exposed.

There is a belief by most that privacy online should be the same as the offline world. Current laws though are not keeping pace with technological advancements, and are failing to protect to the degree that people expect (whether laws can protect online is another issue). The Internet is also an open space increased more so in social media where personal details are there for everyone to see. [As increasing numbers of people worldwide are embracing and using social media networks, privacy and security issues are gaining more attention](#).

The core values of social media are openness, connecting, and sharing, which is considered the positive side of social media. On the negative side is the potential for lack of privacy and security – think cyber criminals, malware and identity fraud. Some of these issues have been around since the Internet became accessible to the public, although, the amount of information we share in the social media space intensifies the issues.

There doesn't seem to be any slow down of social media use so we need to ask, are we sharing too much private information? Most people want privacy and control over their own data. However, with every update, blog post and tweet a chapter of your public profile is created that is accessible by any one even those outside your network. What you disclose online is public information even if you don't consider it to be.

Although the following information is no silver bullet, here are 5 ways to manage your privacy on social media sites:

1. Use Strong Passwords

Complex passwords can be annoying, however, passwords that are long, mixed with letters, symbols and numbers make it more solid.

2. Use Advanced Privacy Options

When you sign up to a social media site check the privacy options available and adjust to the advanced account settings.

3. Understand What is Sensitive Information

Have boundaries in respect to what information you will share. Limit the very personal information about yourself. For example, full name, full date of birth, home address, details of holidays is all information that should be considered 'sensitive' and not shared.

4. Don't Connect With Strangers

It is always recommended that you connect with people you know in real life. Unfortunately most people don't stick with these rules as social networks encourage connections. It is obviously an individual decision whom to connect with but you don't have to accept every invitation. Due diligence is recommended as some accounts may be fake.

5. Security Software

[Make sure your PC is up to date with anti-virus, anti-spyware and a firewall.](#) Most Internet Service Providers offer this service and the price is usually small and should be considered essential on top of your own software.

The key point with social media is that once you disclose information it is always there. Even if you delete it from your social media site, it still exists. Social networks have a vested interest in making information public. So before you tweet, share or like, think seriously about how much data you want to share because once online, the information in reality is no longer private.

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Anna Cairo is the founder of a boutique business (Anna Cairo Consulting) which focuses solely in the online communications domain. She specialises in online copywriting and social media for small business working with clients to increase their social media presence and tailoring services to suit their business needs. Having recently completed her Master of Arts (Media & Communications) which was entirely focused on the online environment, her research and knowledge leaves her well qualified and equipped to deal with the ever changing social media space. She is a writer, researcher and author writing for diverse audiences on a range of topics and you can follow her blog at: <http://www.annacairo.com/blog.html>

Anna Cairo has written 9 articles for us.