



**Who's
Watching?**

Social Networking Sites Safety Tipsheet

from "Who's Watching Charlottesville?"

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Tips on Using Facebook, MySpace, etc.

Quick Tips

- Think of social networking sites as an opportunity to promote yourself for free. If employers and school admissions officials are going to search for you and find you online, they might as well see something that makes a really great impression. So, post content showing areas in which you have expertise; share photos of yourself getting involved in your community or travelling the world; and join groups that reveal your personal interests and passions!
- Make your friend list online reflect your friend and acquaintance list in the real world. Don't accept an online friendship from someone you don't know offline.

Learn More

Social Networking Websites
whoswatching
charlottesville.com/
social.html

- **Never forget: the words and pictures you post on the Internet may be available to many more people than you realize.** Your profile may be viewed not only by your friends, but also by identity thieves and stalkers—as well as future employers, long lost pals, and school admissions counselors. So, figure out how to maximize your presence on these sites to your advantage so you make a positive impression while protecting your identity.
- **Be cautious about revealing contact information, habits, and routine.** Consequences of sharing this seemingly inconsequential information online can range from the relatively harmless but annoying—such as an increase in spam—to the potentially deadly, such as stalking. When deciding whether to post something, remember that the more information malicious people have about you, the easier it is for them to take advantage of you. Criminals can use information provided about a person's location, hobbies, interests, and friends to impersonate a trusted friend or entity, or convince the unsuspecting that they have the authority to access personal or financial data.
- **Limit who can see what you post.** If you don't want random users to see your profile, you can limit the publication of that data. Just change your settings. You can also block users from having any contact with you should the need arise. One simple and quick setting you can change to increase privacy is to restrict the viewing of your profile only to users at your own network or to only your "friend" list. But don't count on this too much. Even if you limit who can see what you post, there are ways others can get around it to view your profile anyway.
- **Use an avatar or nickname for added protection.** These days, lots of folks post profile pictures that aren't really photographs of themselves. You can use a cartoonized version of yourself (called an "avatar"), or post a photo of your pet or a recent trip, and use that as your profile picture instead. Similarly, you may want to use an abbreviated version of your name like Jane D. or J.D. Smith instead of your full name.
- **Not sure whether to post something? Your guiding principle is the "grandmother test."**

If you wouldn't want her to see it, then don't share it! Pictures and content that might be amusing and harmless to you and your friends may not be seen in the same light by an admissions officer, school official, or future employer.

- **Remember that once it's up, it's up; or said another way, *What happens on the Web, stays on the Web.*** After you publish something online, it is available to other people and to search engines. Even if you go back and remove the information from a site later, it's always possible that someone has already seen it. And they may have saved a copy. In addition, some search engines "cache" copies of Web pages so that they open faster; these cached copies may be available a long time after a Web page has been deleted or altered. Some Web browsers, also, maintain a cache of the Web pages a user has visited, so the original version of your posting may be stored in someone else's machine. The bottom line? You can't retract it.