Navigating the Privacy Maze: Are You Disclosing Too Much Online?

Do's and Don't of Online Networking

Are You Divulging Too Much Information Online?

by Kelly, Smile.ly Community Manager

With so many ways to share information about your life, and as the lines between our online and offline networks continue to blur, it can be hard to distinguish how much is too much to reveal about yourself on your favorite social media sites. Here are some suggestions of what info NOT to include on your blog and online profiles to better protect your privacy online:

1) Address:

Telling people which city or state you live in on your Facebook profile or blog is okay, but publishing your specific home address is risky. We ask for your home address when you sign up for Smile.ly just so we can ship you packages for missions, but we would never post that information anywhere online. Making that kind of personal information available to everyone on the Web opens up the possibility of uninvited guests showing up at your home -- a risk you're probably not willing to take. Protect your privacy online by keeping your location information general and non-specific.

2) Phone Number:

The people you want to talk to on the phone have your number already, and if they don't, they'll ask you for it personally. Sending your phone number to a friend in a direct message or e-mail is okay, just be careful not to broadcast it on your profile for the entire social media universe to see. If you do, you never know who might end up calling your house!

3) Racy Photos:

This is where a lot of social media users get in to trouble. Once you add a photo to Facebook or other social media sites, it no longer belongs to you. Anyone, anywhere, could save it to their computer and upload it on other sites with or without your knowledge. Although some photos may seem "decent" to you, they may be offensive to others. Ask yourself, "Would I mind if my boss (or parents, grandparents...) saw this photo?" If the pic isn't one you'd bring in for show-and-tell, you probably shouldn't post it for all the world to see.

4) Work Issues:

We all know that sometimes your job is downright frustrating. While it's okay to vent, you should keep your workplace commentary off of your social media sites. There's a good chance your employer will see your Facebook page or your blog, even if you're not connected with them online, and they will not be happy if they catch you bad-mouthing them or the company to all your friends. Don't believe us? In 2009, a 16-year-old girl in the UK posted on her Facebook page about her boring job. The next day, she was fired. A good rule of thumb is not to post anything online that you wouldn't tell your boss to his or her face.

5) In-depth Information About Your Personal Life:

Sharing family photos and stories with your friends online is okay, but be sure you don't take it too far. Do you want a complete stranger knowing your kids' names, birthdays and favorite type of candy? Probably not. Use common sense, and just be sure that every detail of your day-to-day life is not accessible via the Internet. Think about the people who read your posts -- would what you're posting make them uncomfortable? Would the people you mention in your posts be embarrassed or offended about the information that you're sharing about their lives?

Are you putting anyone you know at risk by sharing the information? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you probably should keep the information to yourself.

Hope this helps! Happy networking! :)

Have any other online privacy tips to share? Leave your helpful hints in the comments section below - we'd love to hear how you protect your information online!

Kelly *is a Community Manager at Smile.ly. Her hobbies include eating, shower singing, watching far too much 30 Rock, and attending as many Broadway shows as possible. She also tends to talk too much about her (adorable) dogs and plan events that never actually happen.*