Introduction to social media

What is social media?

Social networking on social media websites involves the use of the internet to connect users with their friends, family and acquaintances. Social media websites are not necessarily about meeting new people online, although this does happen. Instead, they are primarily about connecting with friends, family and acquaintances you already have. The most well-known social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. These websites allow you to share photos, videos and information, organise events, chat, and play online games.

Often, each of your "friends" (Facebook) or "followers" (Twitter) will be connected to each other. Just like in real life, the connections between people are not just one-on-one, but a network of connections. This online social network is useful for spreading information, pictures and videos and generally staying in touch with people you would not normally get to interact with all the time. For example, you can easily set up a Facebook page with details and pictures of an event you might be planning, such as a school fete. The page allows you to easily send out invitations to other users of the social media platform.

Just like other technology, for example smartphones, social media is a very effective tool for connecting with people. However, there are a few privacy and security issues worth keeping in mind.

Getting started

If you are thinking about joining a social media platform, ask a friend or family member who is familiar with the website to help set you up and show you some of the basics. It can seem a bit complex when you are getting started but once you get used to it you will find it easier to navigate.

Your profile page

When you sign up to a social media website you need to provide your email address to verify your identity. This will automatically create your profile page. Depending on which one you are using, a profile page usually allows you to post a picture and a few details about you and your interests. Your friends will be able to see your profile page and the information that you share. They will also be able to leave comments or share information with you on your profile page. When signing up you do not have to fill all the fields in your profile. Think carefully about what you want people to know about you before you fill it in. You can usually adjust this information later on if you need to.

Privacy

Social media websites have a variety of privacy settings you can adjust. This means you can control who sees your profile page and other information you share. Some people do not mind having their personal information available for anyone to view online. However, we strongly recommend that you do not publish your home address and be mindful of posting other personal information about yourself (including your birthday) or others, especially if you do not have their permission.

It is worth keeping in mind that if malicious parties have access to your full name and date of birth and other available information – for example which suburb you live in – it is possible that you could

fall victim to identity theft. Just as you would not give your mobile number or bank details to anyone who asked, you should guard access to all the details of your social media accounts. For more on this issue, visit the SCAMwatch website.

Some people who use social media prefer only to allow people they have officially become friends with to see their profile and other information. It is important to note that for most social media websites (including Facebook) the default privacy setting is *not* to hide your information when you sign up. If you do not want your profile and other information to be seen by people who are not a "friend" or "follower," you will have to check these settings and adjust them accordingly after you sign up. You can usually do this on the website. Look for a link to "Settings" to adjust this.

Friends and "friends"

The whole point of joining social media is to be in touch with your friends and family. "Friends" in the context of social media, and Facebook in particular, has a specific meaning. For example, for you to interact online with a friend, family member or acquaintance either one of you must first send a "friend request" to the other and then have that request accepted. Once accepted, the technology recognises you as "friends" and you can interact with each other online, so you can view the other person's profile page, see their pictures, and send them messages.

Safety

On the whole, nearly all the interactions that occur on social media are safe. However, you need to be conscious of your safety and the information you share. Everyone using social media should remember these safety tips:

1. You are not obliged to accept a friend request from someone you do not know or do not want to be in contact with.
2. Be respectful of the privacy of others when posting photos or videos of them, or mentioning them where others might read about it.
3. Be aware that you can remove someone as a friend and block them from interacting with you even after you have accepted their friend request.
4. Change your privacy settings so that only your friends can see your profile page and interact with you.

Children and parents

Parents should encourage an open dialogue with children and teenagers about what they are doing online by asking them which social media platforms they use. Parents signing up and creating their own profile is a good way to get to know how social media works. Stay Smart Online has some tips on how to use social media safely. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner also has some great resources for parents. The eSafety Commissioner has the power to remove cyberbullying content from social media.