

What Parents and Facebook Users Need to Know To Protect Their Privacy

Oct 6, 2011 - Over the past couple of years, it seems like Facebook has been making regular changes to their service that impact user privacy. Although the company has allowed users to opt out of many of the changes that involve user tracking, in my opinion they have not made accessing these settings very easy. But with the introduction of their new Timeline feature, Facebook now poses a real privacy threat to those that are only casual users of the service. It may actually be time to rethink whether or not you really need to have a Facebook account.

Tweet

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
```

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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
```

Simply put, Timeline makes all of your Facebook activity available from viewing, regardless of when that activity actually took place. If you have been using Facebook for a few years, that may create some issues for you. For instance, let's say that you are now an office manager and nothing but professional. But maybe a few years ago you were a college student and you posted some pictures that you thought had disappeared from Facebook. In fact, you were hopeful that they had disappeared from Facebook because they might make your current set of friends and colleagues think less of you. With Timeline, just as with a poltergeist, they're baaaaack!

Facebook has built in settings that allow you to manage individual posts in Timeline. You can make them accessible to all of your friends, make them public or make them private – meaning that only you can see them. Unfortunately, most users don't adjust these settings on a regular basis. And casual users may not even realize that these options are available to them.

If you are a parent, you also need to watch what your kids are doing on Facebook. With timeline, whatever they post could actually come back to haunt them for the rest of their lives. And let's face it, we all made decisions when we were 15 that may have seemed like a good idea at the time but which we now realize were stupid. Fortunately, many of us are old enough that Facebook didn't exist when we were at the height of our stupidity. Today's kids don't have that luxury.

There is a good post on Digital Life, an Australian publication, which gives good information about how to change your Timeline settings and protecting your privacy. If you are going to have a Facebook account, then you really need to learn how to manage this feature responsibly. Not doing so could be embarrassing or worse. A lot of employers are now searching Facebook and other social networks prior to hiring. I can say without a doubt that having the wrong post in your timeline could easily cost you a job.

by Jim Malmberg

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