

Understanding Social Networking

Social networking has been around for only a few years, but it is already the most popular and the most talked about Web pastime. Before you take the social networking plunge, you should understand what social networking is all about.

For example, you should understand the point of social networking, the role of friends in social networks, the types of information and data that people share with those friends, and the privacy and security issues that are related to sharing your data online.

Purpose

There are two main reasons why people use social networking sites. First, social networking sites are an easy and convenient way to keep track of what is going on in the lives of friends, family, and colleagues, particularly people that you do not see regularly. Second, social networking sites are a great way to expand your circle of friends, acquaintances, and business contacts because you can usually see and connect with the friends of your existing friends.

Join MySpace Here!

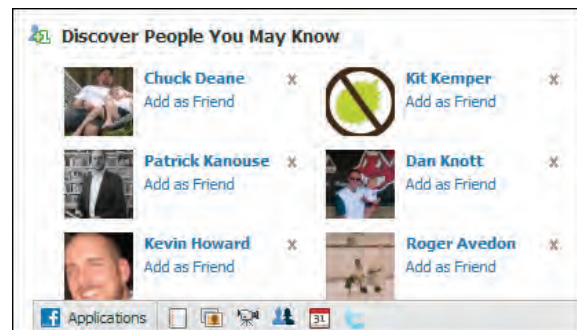
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Signing Up

All social networking sites give everyone limited access to the site's features and members. However, if you want to access all the site's features, and in particular if you want to connect with the site's members, then you must sign up for an account. All social networking sites offer free membership, and the sign-up process usually requests a limited amount of personal data, including your name, a display name that others see, your e-mail address, and your location.

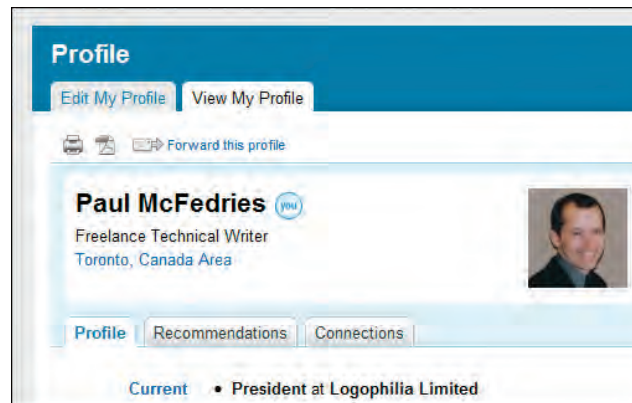
Friends

All social networks revolve around the concept of *friends* (sometimes called *connections* or *contacts*). A friend is another member of the same social network that you have established a relationship with. In most cases, you establish this relationship by sending the person a *friend request*. If the other person accepts the request, he or she is added to your list of friends. This enables you to send messages to that person, view that person's profile, and see status updates from that person.



Personal Profile

When you become a member of a social networking site, one of the first things you usually do is fill in your personal profile. The information in this profile varies from site to site, but the data usually includes your interests and hobbies, your current and past jobs, your education, your birthday, your relationship status, and a photo.



Sharing

Making friends is the “networking” part of social networking, and the “social” part involves sharing information and data with your friends. What and how you share information depends on the site, but in most cases you can share things like updates on your current status or activities, photos, groups on the site that you have joined, blog posts, and links to interesting sites on the Web.

Mobile Updates

If your status changes while you are away from your computer, or if you take an interesting photo when you are traveling, you do not have to wait until you return to your PC to update your social networking account with the new data. Most social networks offer a mobile feature that enables you to send text or photos via your cell phone.



Privacy and Security

If you are concerned about making so much personal information available online, remember that in most cases you can add to your profile only the information that you are comfortable sharing with others. Also, all social networks come with privacy features that enable you to control who gets to see your personal profile.