

Ethics in Information Technology, Fourth Edition

Chapter 9 *Social Networking*

Objectives

- As you read this chapter, consider the following questions:
 - What are social networks, how do people use them, and what are some of their practical business uses?
 - What are some of the key ethical issues associated with the use of social networking Web sites?
 - What is a virtual life community, and what are some of the ethical issues associated with such a community?

What Is a Social Networking Web Site?

- Creates an online community of Internet users that eliminates barriers created by time, distance, and cultural differences
- Allows people to interact with others online by sharing opinions, insights, information, interests, and experiences
- Members may use the site to interact with friends, family members, and colleagues they already know
- Members may also wish to develop new personal and professional relationships

TABLE 9-1 Popular social networking Web sites

Social networking Web site	Description	Estimated unique monthly visitors
Facebook	Social networking site for keeping up with friends, uploading photos, sharing links and videos, and meeting new people online	700 million
Twitter	A real-time information service for friends, family members, and coworkers looking to stay connected through the exchange of messages that are a maximum of 140 characters	200 million
LinkedIn	Business-oriented social networking site used for professional networking; users create a network made up of people they know and trust in business.	100 million
MySpace	General social networking Web site used by teenagers and adults worldwide; allows members to communicate with friends via personal profiles, blogs, and groups, as well as to post photos, music, and videos to their personal pages	80.5 million

(Continued)

Social networking Web site	Description	Estimated unique monthly visitors
Ning	Platform that enables users to create their own social network following a simple process to name the network, choose a color scheme, and allow for unique profile questions; serves as a portal to access tens of thousands of user-created social networks	60 million
Tagged	Social network with a focus on helping members meet new people; suggests new friends based on shared interests; allows members to browse people, share tags and virtual gifts, and play games	25 million
Google Plus ¹³	Social network operated by Google that integrates social services such as Google Profiles and Google Buzz, and introduces new services such as Circles (enables users to organize contacts into groups for sharing), Hangouts (URLs used to facilitate group video chat), Sparks (enables users to identify topics in which they are interested), and Huddles (allows instant messaging within Circles)	25 million

Source Line: “Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Websites/July 2011,” eBiz/MBA, www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites. “Google Plus Reaches 25 Million Users, Activity Declines,” Search Engine Journal, © August 3, 2011, www.searchenginejournal.com/google-plus-reaches-25-million-users-activity-declines/31500.

What Is a Social Networking Web Site? (cont'd.)

- Endless range of interests and a wide range of social networking Web sites catering to those interests
- Over 314.5 million social network users worldwide
- Average visitor spends almost six hours per month
- Popularity increasing mostly rapidly among those aged 50 and older

Business Applications of Online Social Networking

- Social network advertising
 - Uses social networks to communicate and promote the benefits of products and services
- Social network advertising strategies
 - Direct advertising
 - Banner ads on social networking Web site
 - Advertising using an individual's network of friends
 - People frequently make decisions based on input from their close group of friends
 - Ethical issues with exploiting an individual's personal relationships for the financial benefit of a company

Business Applications of Online Social Networking (cont'd.)

- Social network advertising strategies (cont'd.)
 - Indirect advertising through groups
 - Interested users can join by becoming “fans”
 - Fans gained in this manner may not remain loyal
 - Company-owned social networking Web site
 - Users can talk about what new products, services, or improvements they would like to see
 - Viral marketing
 - Users pass along marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth

The Use of Social Networks in the Hiring Process

- 89% of recruiters use some form of social media in the recruiting process
- Employers can and do look at the social networking profiles of job candidates when hiring
- Companies may reject candidates who post:
 - Information about their drinking or drug use
 - Provocative or inappropriate photos
 - Discriminatory remarks relating to race, gender, or religion
 - Confidential information

The Use of Social Networks in the Hiring Process (cont'd.)

- Employer cannot legally screen applicants based on race or ethnicity, but:
 - Members of social networking Web sites frequently provide sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, and political affiliation data
 - Personal photos may reveal a disability or user's race or ethnicity
 - Individuals may reveal data that are protected by civil rights legislation

Use of Social Media to Improve Customer Service

- Consumers use social networks to share their experiences, both good and bad, with others
- Also seek help and advice on how to use products more effectively and how to deal with special situations
- Unless organizations monitor social networks, customers are left to resolve questions and issues on their own, risking loss of customers and future sales

Social Shopping Web Sites

- Combine two highly popular online activities: shopping and social networking
- Shoppers and sellers can share information and make recommendations while shopping online
- Revenue is generated through retailer advertising or by sharing with retailers data about their members' likes and dislikes
- Retailers can design product improvements based on input and get ideas for new product lines
- Great way for small businesses to boost sales

TABLE 9-3 Sample of social shopping Web sites

Social shopping site	Description
Buzzillions	Product review Web site with over 15 million reviews across a wide range of products, with product rankings based on feedback from customers
Crowdstorm	Price comparison shopping resource that aggregates product information from various online buyers guides, reviews, and blog postings
JustBoughtIT!	Facebook and Twitter app for capturing product recommendations from the online community; users can post a photo or screenshot online, share their purchases, and comment on what others are buying.
Kaboodle	Social shopping site where members can discover, recommend and share new products, provide advice, share feedback, get discounts, and locate bargains
MyDeco	Site with a focus on interior design and home décor; users can mock up virtual rooms using their favorite products
OSOYOU	UK-based social shopping site for women with an interest in fashion and beauty products

Source Line: Course Technology/Cengage Learning.

Social Networking Ethical Issues

- Ethical issues for social networking Web sites are:
 - Cyberbullying
 - Cyberstalking
 - Sexual predators
 - Uploading inappropriate material
- Cyberbullying
 - Harassment, torment, humiliation, or threatening of one minor by another minor or group of minors via the Internet or cell phone
 - Cyberbullying can become so intense, child commits suicide



FIGURE 9-2 Cyberbullying is more common among teenage females
Credit: Image copyright Ana Blazic, 2009. Used under license from Shutterstock.com.

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Numerous forms of cyberbullying
 - Sending mean-spirited or threatening messages
 - Sending thousands of text messages to victim's cell phone and running up a huge cell phone bill
 - Impersonating victim and sending inappropriate messages to others
 - Stealing victim's password and modifying his or her profile to include racist, homophobic, sexual, or other inappropriate data that offends others or attracts the attention of undesirable people

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Numerous forms of cyberbullying (cont'd.)
 - Posting mean, personal, or false information about the victim in the cyberbully's blog
 - Creating a Web site whose purpose is to humiliate or threaten the victim
 - Taking inappropriate photos of the victim and either posting online or sending to others via cell phone
 - Setting up an Internet poll to elicit responses to embarrassing questions regarding victim
 - Sending inappropriate messages while playing interactive games

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Cyberstalking
 - Threatening behavior or unwanted advances using the Internet or online and electronic communications
 - Adult version of cyberbullying
 - Can escalate into:
 - Abusive or excessive phone calls
 - Threatening or obscene mail
 - Trespassing
 - Vandalism
 - Physical stalking
 - Physical assault

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Cyberstalking (cont'd.)
 - Over three dozen states have laws prohibiting cyberstalking
 - Current federal statutes address some forms of cyberstalking, but there are large gaps in federal and state law

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Encounters with sexual predators
 - Some social networking Web sites are criticized for not protecting minors from sexual predators
 - MySpace banned 90,000 registered sex offenders from its site
 - Legislators are pushing social networking Web sites to adopt stronger safety measures

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Uploading of inappropriate material
 - Social networking Web sites have policies against uploading videos depicting violence or obscenity
 - Most social networking Web sites have terms of use agreements that give the sites the right to delete material and terminate users accounts that violate their policy
 - Most Web sites do not have sufficient resources to review all material posted

Online Virtual Worlds

- Virtual world is a shared multimedia, computer-generated environment in which users represented by avatars can act, communicate, create, retain ownership of what they create, and exchange assets with each other
 - Massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) is multiplayer video game capable of supporting hundreds or even thousands of concurrent players
 - Massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) provides huge online world in which players take on the role of a character and control that character's action

Online Virtual Worlds (cont'd.)

- Avatars can do everything one can do in real life
 - Shop, hold jobs, run for political office
 - Develop relationships with other avatars
 - Start up new businesses
 - Engage in criminal activities

Crime in Virtual Worlds

- Should law enforcement—real or virtual—get involved in acts that occur in virtual worlds?
- Criminal acts in a virtual world:
 - Can be clearly illegal, such as trafficking in actual drugs or stolen credit cards
 - May not be real-life crime, such as virtual muggings and sex crimes that can cause real life anguish
 - May be in the gray area, for example, unfair operation of virtual casinos

Crime in Virtual Worlds (cont'd)

- Virtual worlds have rules against offensive behavior in public, such as using racial slurs or performing overtly sexual actions, but:
 - Consenting adults can travel to private areas and engage in socially unacceptable behavior
 - Bad deeds done online can often be mediated by game administrators based on rules of the game

Educational and Business Uses of Virtual Worlds

- New Media Consortium (NMC)
 - International consortium of hundreds of organizations
 - Explores new media and technologies to improve teaching, learning, and creative expression
 - Also builds custom virtual learning worlds, simulations, and learning games

Educational and Business Uses of Virtual Worlds

- Second Life Work Microsites
 - Enable businesses and government agencies to use Second Life for virtual meetings, events, training, and simulations
 - Stimulates engaged, collaborative learning to augment their traditional curriculum

Summary

- Social networking Web sites
 - Create an online community of Internet users
 - Break down barriers created by time, distance, and cultural differences
 - Allow people to interact with others online by sharing opinions, insights, information, interests, and experiences
- Social network advertising uses social networks to inform, promote, and communicate the benefits of products and services

Summary (cont'd.)

- Social network advertising strategies
 - Direct advertising
 - Advertising using network of friends
 - Indirect advertising through groups
 - Advertising via company-owned Web sites
 - Viral marketing
- Employers look at the social network profiles of job candidates when hiring

Summary (cont'd)

- Consumers use social networks to share their experiences and seek help and advice
- Unless organizations monitor social networks, customers are left to resolve questions and issues on their own, risking loss of customers and future sales
- Ethical issues for social networking Web sites are:
 - Cyberbullying
 - Cyberstalking
 - Sexual predators
 - Uploading inappropriate material

Summary (cont'd.)

- Online virtual world is a computer-simulated world
 - Visitor can move in three-dimensional space
 - Visitor can communicate and interact with other visitors
 - Visitor can manipulate elements of the simulated world