

Face it, even on the Web we want privacy

January 13 2009, By Jenee Osterheldt

For most teenagers, privacy is important. They want to be able to go in their rooms, shut the door and close the world out. It's their safe place, a haven for them and their friends.

In a lot of ways, that's what MySpace and Facebook did for the world. It gave users virtual bedrooms, a place to escape from the office, the classroom and home. Sure, it's the Internet. And it's there for anyone to see. But on social networking sites, users can control who has access to their pages.

So if you want a private page, just for you and a select few to swap party pictures, vent or act silly, it's just that easy.

Or just that hard.

These used to be sites for young people - digital places parents just didn't understand. Those days are over.

Moms and pops and bosses and teachers are among the more than 100 million people navigating the social networking sites. And it's stirring up some drama. I mean, how do you reject a friend request from your mom, your boss or a student?

I have teacher friends who have canceled their pages because their students "discovered" them.

"You don't want them to see you in an unprofessional manner," one of

my friends said. "It changes how they see things."

My friend in Atlanta says he feels like friend requests from his workplace colleagues are an invasion of his personal life. I have a co-worker who, like so many moms, taunts her son about being his Facebook friend.

I thought it was all pretty risk-free. I get friend requests from friends of friends, random strangers, readers, that guy I didn't give my number to, my friend's daughter and co-workers, too.

Then I found out part of my cousin's job is to peek at the pages of potential hires.

It started to make me think about how my page might look to someone who doesn't really know me. Would they want to hire the girl in the video singing off-key to a Beyonce song?

What about that picture of me after one too many shots on my 28th birthday? It's funny to me and my friends, because it's rare to see me like that. But to people who don't know me, I might look like a wild child.

Suddenly, I felt like my bedroom door had been opened. I wondered if my safe little page for me and my friends to share jokes and memories was being judged.

Still, I accept most of the friend requests I get.

How else would I stay in touch with readers like Tom Rambo or Michael Cummings? How else would people I knew more than 10 years ago, people like Jeremiah Munden and Nakia Madison, find me?

I mean, really, it's just a Facebook page. What possibly could you be

doing that you don't want someone to see. Oh, besides taking one too many shots, dancing hard or venting.

So I figured out a way to lock the door, or as Facebook puts it, "limit your profile." So parents, aunties, bosses and strangers, don't get offended if your child or niece or employee doesn't accept your friend request. Or you can't see their entire page.

It's not that they are doing anything crazy. It might just be the kind of stuff they don't want their mamas to see. Or the those who signs their checks. And definitely not the kids they teach.

Go figure, people want a little privacy on the World Wide Web.

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