

Facebook tuning privacy controls to appease critics

May 23 2010, by Glenn Chapman



The Internet homepage of the community website Facebook. Facebook on Saturday said it plans to simplify privacy controls at the popular social-networking service to appease critics.

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"We've spent the last couple of weeks listening to users and consulting with experts in California; Washington, DC, and around the world," Facebook spokesman Andrew Noyes said in response to an AFP inquiry.

"The messages we've received are pretty clear. Users appreciate having precise and comprehensive controls, but want them to be simpler and easier to use."

Facebook contended that members like new programs rolled out at the California-based Internet hotspot but want easy ways to opt out of sharing personal information with third-party applications or websites.

"We're listening to this input and incorporating it into innovations we hope to announce shortly," Noyes said.

Facebook has been under fire from US privacy and consumer groups, US lawmakers and the European Union over new features that critics claim compromise the privacy of its more than 400 million members.

The features introduced last month include the ability for partner websites to incorporate Facebook data, a move that would further expand the social network's presence on the Internet.

Four US senators, in a letter to Facebook co-founder [Mark Zuckerberg](#), said they were worried that personal information about Facebook users is being made available to third party websites.

The senators also expressed concerns that "Facebook now obligates users to make publicly available certain parts of their profile that were previously private."

Sharing [personal information](#) should be an "opt-in" procedure in which a user specifically gives permission for data to be shared, [privacy advocates](#) argue.

Coming Facebook refinements are not expected to include a shift to an opt-in model.

Facebook vice president of global communications Elliot Schrage has been adamant that online privacy is taken very seriously at the company.

"These new products and features are designed to enhance personalization and promote social activity across the Internet while continuing to give users unprecedented control over what information they share, when they want to share it, and with whom," Schrage said.

MySpace on May 17 announced plans to simplify its privacy settings as it seeks to differentiate itself from social network rival Facebook, which has eclipsed the News Corp-owned [social networking service](#).

"The last few weeks have been fraught with discussion around user privacy on social networks," MySpace co-president Mike Jones said in a blog post without directly mentioning Facebook by name.

"While MySpace at its core is about discovery, self expression and sharing, we understand people might want the option of limiting the sharing of their information to a select group of friends," Jones said.

Jones said MySpace, which was bought by News Corp. in 2005 for 580 million dollars, is "planning the launch of a simplified privacy setting for our user profiles.

"While we've had these plans in the works for some time, given the recent outcry over [privacy](#) concerns in the media, we felt it was important to unveil those plans to our users now," he said.

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