

Facebook lets users track posts from strangers (Update)

September 14 2011



Facebook on Wednesday said it is adding "Subscribe" buttons that will let members of the world's largest online social network follow public comments from strangers Twitter-style.

Facebook is letting members follow strangers Twitter-style in the latest of a barrage of data maelstrom-taming moves since rival social network Google+ launched in June.

"Google+ was a major wake-up call for Facebook," said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group in Silicon Valley.

"They were awakened to the fact that they could be another MySpace; so they suddenly got very aggressive on moving the ball forward so they couldn't get caught," he added.

MySpace was the dominant online social network until it was eclipsed by Facebook.U

Google+ combined aspects of Facebook and microblogging sensation Twitter, and promised users that sharing aspects of their lives at the social network would reflect levels of confidentiality granted in real life.

A criticism of Facebook has been that updates are shared with all of one's friends unless a user has gone through a relatively complicated process to create separate Facebook Groups.

In recent weeks, Facebook has focused intently on ways for members to better control what information gets shared with whom.

"Until now, it hasn't been easy to choose exactly what you see in your News Feed," Facebook developer Zach Rait said Wednesday in a blog post introducing Subscribe buttons on profile pages.

"You also couldn't hear directly from people you're interested in but don't know personally -- like journalists, artists and political figures," he said. "With the Subscribe button, we're making it easier to do both."

Subscribe buttons let people tailor what they see in news feeds; hear from people who aren't friends at the network, and share insights with strangers.

"If you'd like to share your public updates with more than just friends, you can get a Subscribe button on your profile," Rait said.

Facebook also began letting members be more selective about what kinds of updates from friends make it into their personal news feeds at the website.

People can select an "all updates" setting or opt to be shown "most updates" or "important updates only," such as marriages or job changes.

"For example, you could see just photos from one friend, no stories about games from another, and nothing at all from someone else," Rait said.

Facebook on Tuesday introduced "smart lists" that automatically sort friends into categories and prioritize news from those dearest to members of the world's largest online social network.

"This is really something we have been working on for four years," Facebook director of product management Blake Ross said of smart lists.

"We think this is the way people will make lists going forward," he continued.

Facebook began in 2007 letting members individually sort friends into lists for targeted sharing of comments, photos and other digitized snippets of life.

The smart lists feature spares Facebook users the tedium of creating lists by automatically putting friends into groups, with the first four categories being work, school, family and city.

Smart lists are created and updated based on information people consent to share with friends on Facebook, according to Ross.

"Smart lists take all the pain out of organizing friends on Facebook," Ross said.

Facebook will also let each member create a list of high-priority people

who are "closer to them than anyone else in the world" or "acquaintances" whose posts they don't want to see very often.

"Facebook is used by more than 750 million people worldwide, and just like in the real world you are friends with a diverse group of people," Blake said.

"We heard from users that it is hard to talk to all these people at one time, and maybe harder to hear from them at one time," he added.

Google+ stressed the ability it gives users to separate online friends and family into different "Circles," or networks, and to share information only with members of a particular circle.

Google has a billion users worldwide that could be drawn into the California-based Internet giant's social network.

"I think you are going to see Facebook be much more aggressive," Enderle said. "They are focused on maintaining a competitive edge right now."

(c) 2011 AFP

Citation: Facebook lets users track posts from strangers (Update) (2011, September 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-09-facebook-users-track-strangers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.