

User privacy key as Facebook goes public

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"We might see a public [Facebook](#) that's now facing more scrutiny being more careful about things like changing [privacy settings](#)," said [Gartner technology analyst](#) Michael Gartenberg.

"Stuff that it's come under fire for in the past it's going to have to pay a lot more attention to in the future," Gartenberg said.

Facebook, which filed paperwork for an [initial public offering](#)

Wednesday seeking to raise \$5 billion, has been bedeviled by [privacy complaints](#) and had its knuckles rapped over the issue by both US and European authorities.

Facebook co-founder [Mark Zuckerberg](#) has repeatedly apologized for [privacy](#) lapses amid outrage from users over revelations their online activities were visible to a wide audience of advertisers and other users.

Late last year, in a settlement with the US [Federal Trade Commission](#), the [social networking](#) giant promised to honor users' privacy preferences and to stop making claims about the security of personal information that are untrue.

That deal settled two-year-old accusations that Facebook, which has over 800 million users, had allowed advertisers access to the community's [personal data](#) when users were told it was being kept private.

"I'm the first to admit that we've made a bunch of mistakes," Zuckerberg said in a blog post responding to the FTC settlement.

"We're making a clear and formal long-term commitment to do the things we've always tried to do and planned to keep doing -- giving you tools to control who can see your information and then making sure only those people you intend can see it," he said.

Back in December 2007, when Facebook had some 55 million users, Zuckerberg apologized for a feature called Beacon that alerted the whole community when a user made purchases online.

The aim, he said, was to "try to help people share information with their friends about things they do on the Web" but "we simply did a bad job with this release, and I apologize for it."

Facebook has faced recurring privacy issues since then including a bug that allowed the viewing of some private photographs of other members.

The wrath of Internet users gelled over privacy issues in 2010 in a "Quit Facebook Day" movement, which claimed over 30,000 Internet users had responded to an effort urging people to leave the site.

Such efforts have done little, however, to halt Facebook's expansion, which has seen the network soar to the top of the social media tree.

Jeff Chester, executive director of the Center for Digital Democracy, said the problem was so few of Facebook's users "understand, let alone can control, the vast amounts of data mining used to propel its advertising business," -- a critical aspect of the network's market worth.

In the FTC settlement, Facebook agreed to ensure users are consulted before allowing them to provide additional information, and to submit to independent privacy audits for 20 years.

Facebook did not admit guilt and was not fined in the case, which arose from an investigation by privacy groups in December 2009 that it had deceived users over the protection of their personal data -- such as their name, age, location, gender and friends -- when it changed its privacy settings.

"As hard as it is for [users](#) to understand one set of privacy controls on Facebook, it's even harder when those controls keep changing," the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said at the time.

"That's why we're happy that the FTC has stepped in and put an end to Facebook's practice of 'begging forgiveness rather than asking permission' when it comes to your personal information," said the group.

While apologizing repeatedly for lapses, Zuckerberg, in an interview with the New Yorker in September, said Facebook's critics "take any minor misstep... and turn it into as big a deal as possible."

The "general trend" in society was "being more open, and I think that's good," he said.

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