

Facebook poised to roll out more privacy controls

December 12 2012, by Michael Liedtke

Facebook is trying to make its privacy controls easier to find and understand in an effort to turn the world's largest social network in to a more discreet place.

The fine-tuning announced Wednesday will include several [revisions](#) that will start rolling out to Facebook's more than 1 billion [users](#) during the next few weeks and continue into early next year.

The most visible, and perhaps most appreciated, change will be a new "privacy shortcuts" section that appears as a tiny lock on the right-hand side at the top of people's news feeds. This feature offers a drop-down box where users can get answers to common questions such as "Who can see my stuff?" and "How do I stop someone from bothering me?"

Other updates will include a tool that enables individuals to review all the publicly available pictures identifying them on Facebook and suggestions on how to request that an embarrassing or unflattering [photograph](#) be removed. Facebook also plans to plant a privacy education page at the top of its users' news feeds within the next month or so to help them better manage their online identities.

This marks the most extensive overhaul of Facebook's [privacy controls](#) in about 15 months.

The new controls are an implicit acknowledgement by Facebook that the nearly 9-year-old service hasn't always done the best job providing its

users with easily accessible ways to corral the information and [photos](#) being posted on the website.

Facebook's critics suspect the social network deliberately obfuscated its privacy controls as part of a scheme to expose as much personal information as possible to help the company attract more advertisers.

But that has never been the case, according to Samuel Lessin, Facebook's director of product management. "Our number one priority is to not surprise users with our controls," he said.

Facebook Inc., which is based in Menlo Park, California, began paying more attention to its privacy controls and [reputation](#) as it matured into one of the world's best-known companies. The scrutiny has intensified since Facebook became a publicly traded company seven months ago.

Some of the upcoming changes reflect Facebook's ambition to establish its website as a digital scrapbook that will contain key moments spanning many decades of its users' lives.

The new photo-reviewing tool is designed to make it easier for someone to flag old pictures that might not seem as cool as they once did. For instance, a Facebook user who didn't mind being shown quaffing beer from a keg as an 18-year-old in college might not feel comfortable having that image publicly available as a 30-year-old looking for a job or starting a family.

Facebook rarely will remove a photo on its own, but one of its new features helps users ask a friend who posted the image to take it down.

[Facebook](#) is reshuffling its privacy controls the same week that it revoked its users' right to vote on changes to the social network's privacy policies. Lessin said the timing is purely coincidental.

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