

Netflix unveils new way to share recommendations

September 2 2014, by Michael Liedtke



This screen shot provided by Netflix shows what the viewer will see when subscribers recommend movies and TV shows to their Facebook friends. Netflix is giving its Internet video subscribers a more discreet way to recommend movies and TV shows to their Facebook friends after realizing most people don't want to share their viewing habits with large audiences. Until now, Netflix subscribers linking the service to their Facebook accounts automatically disclosed everything they were watching with a potentially wide-reaching range of people. The automatic disclosures will end Tuesday, Sept. 2, 2014. A menu of friends culled from Facebook will appear after Netflix subscribers finish watching a video if they have turned on the sharing feature. (AP Photo/Netflix)

Netflix is giving its Internet video subscribers a more discreet way to recommend movies and TV shows to their Facebook friends after realizing most people don't want to share their viewing habits with large audiences.

Until now, Netflix subscribers linking the service to their Facebook accounts automatically disclosed everything they were watching with a potentially wide-reaching range of people. The company believes the open-ended approach discouraged most Netflix subscribers from connecting their accounts with their Facebook profiles.

The automatic disclosures will end Tuesday as Netflix Inc. embraces a new system that empowers subscribers to select which friends will receive their video recommendations. A menu of friends culled from Facebook will appear after Netflix subscribers finish watching a video if they have turned on the sharing feature.

The move reflects Facebook's evolution into a service where people have allowed passing acquaintances into their networks, along with close friends and family.

"There are a lot of people on Facebook that you don't really know that well," said Cameron Johnson, Netflix's director of product development.

Netflix believes people will share their viewing experiences if they are given more control over who sees what they've been watching. The Los Gatos, California, company, in turn, hopes the recommendations will deepen subscriber loyalty and attract new customers.

"If you are really moved by a piece of content and you know someone in your life that would like it, you are going to want them to watch it too, so you can talk about it and get excited about it together," Johnson said.



In this Friday, Jan. 17, 2014 file photo, a person displays Netflix on a tablet in North Andover, Mass. Netflix is giving its Internet video subscribers a more discreet way to recommend movies and TV shows to their Facebook friends after realizing most people don't want to share their viewing habits with large audiences. Until now, Netflix subscribers linking the service to their Facebook accounts automatically disclosed everything they were watching with a potentially wide-reaching range of people. The automatic disclosures will end Tuesday, Sept. 2, 2014, as Netflix Inc. embraces a new system that empowers subscribers to select which friends will receive their video recommendations. (AP Photo/Elise Amendola, File)

Netflix began offering the Facebook sharing option to subscribers outside the U.S. in 2011. U.S. subscribers got that option 18 months ago.

The Facebook recommendations are limited to subscribers of Netflix'

video-streaming service, which costs \$8 or \$9 per month in the U.S. The streaming service has 50 million subscribers worldwide. There are no plans to extend the Facebook recommendations to the DVD-by-mail service, which is steadily shrinking. Netflix ended June with 6.3 million DVD subscribers, less than half the number it had three years ago.

The recommendations made under the new sharing system will appear in a few ways.

If both people are Netflix subscribers who have connected to Facebook, the recommendation will appear as a marquee attraction at the top of the recipient's Netflix page. The Facebook profile picture of the person touting the video also will appear alongside the recommendation.

A subscriber's recommendation will be sent as a Facebook message if the recipient isn't a Netflix subscriber or hasn't connected a Netflix account to Facebook.

The recommendations will no longer appear on the customers' Facebook profile page or the news feeds that their friends see.

To make it possible for its U.S. subscribers to share what they're watching, Netflix had to persuade lawmakers last year to revise a 1988 law that banned the disclosure of video rental records without a customer's written consent.

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