

Privacy a Facebook priority, says director Randi Zuckerberg

17 October 2010, by W.G. Dunlop



Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg speaks during a news conference at Facebook headquarters on October 6, in Palo Alto, California. User privacy is the priority of Internet social networking site Facebook, which has come under fire from users for its privacy settings, the company's director of market development said on Sunday in Dubai.

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"Privacy, I would say, is the number one most important thing for our company, and we're always listening to feedback," Randi Zuckerberg, the sister of Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, said on the first day of the GITEX information and communication technology exhibition.

"We've recently rolled out a lot of new updates and controls to privacy. You can now, every single time you post something, you can control who sees that. You can even pick certain people in your network, you can create lists," she said.

"We're always trying to listen to feedback and giving people more and more controls."

While Facebook has become the world's most popular social network with more than 500 million users, it has also been criticized for complex privacy controls and for requiring users to opt out of features that allowed access to their information.

Earlier this year, 14 privacy and consumer protection groups sent a letter to the US Congress saying "Facebook continues to manipulate the privacy settings of users and its own privacy policy so that it can take personal information provided by users for a limited purpose and make it widely available for commercial purposes."

In September, four New York University students launched a social networking site called "Diaspora," which is billed as the "privacy aware, personally controlled, do-it-all, open source social network," in an apparent bid to draw discontented Facebook users.

Complaints have led Facebook to modify its privacy controls.

Asked about whether the site has faced pressure to share information with governments, Zuckerberg said: "The only way that we would share any information is if there was an inquiry into criminal activity on Facebook" such as if "someone ... is behaving inappropriately to minors" on the site.

"Otherwise we are definitely not in any way passing information to any governments," she said.

The Middle East is home to about 15 percent of Facebook users, Zuckerberg said, with about two million in the United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is a regional IT hub.

The site's users from around the world spend a total of about 500 billion minutes on the site per

month, with half of users logging on each day, she said.

Facebook's origins have been the subject of two recent books and a hit Hollywood movie, "The Social Network."

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