Social Media Safe!

Imagine you woke up one morning and found that your mobile phone is not where you left it, in fact it isn’t anywhere. You also discover you have no laptop, or tablet and when you get to University/work you notice there are no PC’s and no one seems to understand when you ask how can I get onto the internet?! Unimaginable. But don’t worry, this is only a bad dream!

We all have a highly dependent relationship with social media spending hours catching up with friends news, groups we belong to and communicating with others who are important to us. There are so many benefits to using it to communicate with others but let’s think for a moment about both sides of the story.

Benefits to using Social Media

- A great way to make and keep in contact with new friends, especially when you first get to University and don’t know many people. This can be true especially in the early days of the term when old friends are far away and newer friendships are developing.
- Great for creating and joining groups where there is a shared common interest and for keeping updated on the news.
- An easy and cheap way to keep in touch visually with friends and family worldwide whilst you are at University.
- Finding out about employment options and getting yourself known workwise in the marketplace in preparation for leaving University or finding a placement or summer job.

The ideal is to find balance between having fun keeping in contact with others whilst also ensuring your safety online at the same time. Think of logging onto the internet as similar to opening the front door to your home. Would you let just anyone into your home who asked you? How well would you want to know someone before you gave them their own key to let themselves in? Once someone is in your home what can they find out about you that you hadn’t considered would be shared? If things got difficult how would you ask them to leave your home? Thinking about a few simple ideas can make all the difference between a safe and positive experience and finding yourself wishing you had thought about the use of the “front door” a bit more carefully.
Cautions to consider when using Social Media

- **Establishing trust** - When using sites designed to meet potential friends or partners how will you decide whether the other person is someone you can trust? You may want to take your time before agreeing to meet up with someone and then when you do let one of your friends know of your plans?

- **Using Caution** - The nature of IM and online chats can lead to an increased *sense* of getting to know someone a lot quicker than in the real world. Remember someone can be presenting differently online and of course it’s possible that they are not who they say they are or that some of what they say is not true.

- **To share or not to share** - Be very careful of what you share, this relates to both your physical safety as well as possible identity theft. Do not respond to online requests for personal information from someone you don’t know, such as bank details or your home address. Your digital footprint will remain into the future and what looks like fun on a night out this week may look a bit different to a potential employer making background checks on you in two years’ time. Most employers will make background checks and some research indicates that over 50% of rejected candidates are due to employers seeing something that puts them off online. Remember also that many of the Social media sites link back to other sites that are more employment based which you may not be aware of.

- **Online bullying** - The imagined sense of anonymity that the internet can provide sometimes makes it more likely that people will say things to others that they would not say directly in their company. Don’t use a site to say difficult or aggressive things to someone if you would not say this to their face. This can lead you into a situation which quickly escalates and where you regret what you said but it’s out there for all to see. A good idea may be not to post either when you have been drinking as things can look very different when using alcohol or when you feel very emotional about something. If you are in any doubt about what you feel like writing maybe get one of your friends to read it first before posting/sending.

**Helpful tips**

- **Limiting time spent online** - Some people find it helpful to limit the amount of time they spend on talking to people virtually and try and focus on making friends in the real world. Maybe setting specific times during the day when you will check and answer messages and go online to keep up to date. Surfing the net and procrastination regarding your work can become particularly problematic during periods of high academic stress such as revision and exams. There are several free website-blocking applications that you can download to help you manage the amount of time each day you spend online. You can choose for how long and which sites you block. See LeechBlock: [http://www.proginosko.com/leechblock/](http://www.proginosko.com/leechblock/).
ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

- **You have how many friends?!** Online it is possible to think that others have 100’s of friends but take a moment to think about the depth of those potential friendships. Try not to dwell on what it looks like other people are doing but focus on making new friends for yourself. If you do receive a friend request from someone you don’t know at all then either check them out first or try and find out the reason for their request before deciding whether to add them.

- **Pins and passwords** - Change passwords to mobile phones and laptops regularly to ensure that others can’t get into your accounts and pretend they are you. DO NOT give out personal or financial information in online conversations.

- **Who can see me now?** - When creating a new Social Media account ensure that only friends and family can automatically see your profile and pictures. There will be several privacy settings to choose from, you don’t have to accept the default settings the site suggests. You may want to choose a fairly neutral alias that does not reveal too much about you in the beginning such as the town you live in or your surname. Remember the front door of your house and who you let enter the house!

- **Geographical location** - When sharing photos remember that most mobile phones and digital cameras show your geographical location data when posted online. Ok if it’s to your friends who can see but maybe a bit risky if it’s someone you are getting to know. You can check to see if this geographical data is switched on in “settings/location” on your phone.

The following links provide further really helpful information to help you think about what you can do to remain safe online, think about the benefits of taking a Social Media “break” and enjoy your Social Media use without the worry.


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