



I can build a secure online identity

You think social networking sites are great – we think so too. We know how fun it is to post pictures and comments that friends can see immediately, and to check out profiles and send messages to new people. The good news is you can do all this while building and maintaining a secure online identity.

This whole web site has details about how you can protect your information, but you can print this page to keep as a cheat sheet – reminders of what you can do to keep your online identity safe.

Pay attention to privacy settings

Privacy settings control what people can see about you. Some sites automatically set them to the strictest settings, while others let anyone see all of your information unless you restrict the settings.

When you're signing up for a new site, only allow your friends and classmates to see your page, your posts, your photos and your applications.

It's best to choose the strictest privacy level because you can't take back information from people once they've seen it. And if you don't want to keep the settings strict, relax them once you are more familiar with a site, the people who hang out there and the people who want to see your information.

Think before you post

Would you say the same things, and show the same pictures, to a teacher or your parents that you would to a friend? Would you want people to see those comments and pictures five or ten years from now? What would this information look like attached to your resume when you go apply for your first job?

A profile that you create on a social networking site will link to your friends' online profiles. The people who are allowed to see your friends' profiles may be able to see your profile as well. Everything in your profile – comments, photos and information you post – can potentially be seen by thousands of people and will never be completely erased. You need to think about the impression you are creating and about whether anything you post would embarrass you in real life.

Important tips to remember:

Check out the privacy settings and set them to the strictest option

Keep your password safe and change it regularly

Protect your personal details – don't post information like your home address, phone number and birth date

Think before you post – would you want your parents and teachers to see the information you are posting?

Only accept your actual friends as "friends" on social networking sites – you can't control what other people post about you so you need to know who people are before you give them access to your information

Remember: what you post online can affect your personal safety – especially if you tell people where you are going to be at specific times

Remember this: years from now, you will have to explain the information and photos that you are posting today.

Protect your personal details

Be careful with your personal information. There is no need to post your home address, telephone number, date of birth or where you go to school. Your friends already know all that information, or can ask you in the school hallway. Why do you need to share this information with strangers?

Also, be careful about the seemingly innocent information you post. Posting attractive photos of yourself, along with information about where you are going to be at specific times, is not information you want strangers to have. Protect yourself online the same way you would out in the real world.

Protect your password and choose one that no one can guess.

