Ethics in Information Technology, Third Edition

Chapter 9
Social Networking

Objectives

- As you read this chapter, consider the following questions:

    - What are social networks, how do people use them, and what are some of their practical business uses?

    - What are some of the key ethical issues associated with the use of social networking Web sites?

    - What is a virtual life community, and what are some of the ethical issues associated with such a community?

What Is a Social Networking Web Site?

- Creates an online community of Internet users that eliminates barriers created by time, distance, and cultural differences

- Allows people to interact with others online by sharing opinions, insights, information, interests, and experiences

- Members may use the site to interact with friends, family members, and colleagues they already know

- Members may also wish to develop new personal and professional relationships

TABLE 9-1   Popular social networking Web sites

Social networking Web site	Description	Number of unique visitors in January 2009
Facebook.com	Largest social networking Web site based on the number of unique visitors per month; used by members to keep up with friends, upload photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet	69 million
MySpace.com	General social networking Web site used by teenagers and adults worldwide; designed to allow members to communicate with friends via personal profiles, blogs, and groups, as well as post photos, music, and videos to their personal pages	59 million
Classmates.com	Networking site designed to help members find and keep in touch with people they knew in grade school, high school, college, and the military	17 million
Reunion.com	Site that helps members find and keep in touch with old friends, relatives, and loved ones	14 million
LinkedIn.com	Business-oriented Web site used for professional networking; users create a network made up of people they know and trust in business	11 million
imeem.com	Music sharing site that enables members to watch video clips, stream music, view photos, post to blogs and forums, join groups, and browse profiles	9 million

TABLE 9-1 Popular social networking Web sites (*continued*)

Social networking Web site	Description	Number of unique visitors in January 2009
Flixster	Networking site geared toward people interested in discussing movies and actors with other members; the site has an extensive database of information about movies and actors, and recommends new friends based on similar tastes in movies	8 million
Twitter.com	Service for friends, family members, and coworkers looking to stay connected through the frequent, quick exchange of messages that are a maximum of 140 characters	6 million

Source: Andy Kazeniac, "Social Networks: Facebook Takes Over Top Spot, Twitter Climbs," *Compete,* February 9, 2009, http://blog.compete.com/2009/02/09/facebook-myspace-twitter-social-network.

What Is a Social Networking Web Site? (cont'd.)

- Endless range of interests and a wide range of social networking Web sites catering to interests

- 35 percent of U.S. adult Internet users have a profile on an online social networking Web site

- 65 percent of teenagers use social networking sites

Business Applications of Online Social Networking

- Social network advertising
  - Uses social networks to inform, promote, and communicate the benefits of products and services
- Social network advertising strategies
  - Direct advertising
    - Banner ads on social networking Web site
  - Advertising using an individual's network of friends
    - People frequently make decisions based on input from their close group of friends
    - Ethical issues with exploiting an individual's personal relationships for the financial benefit of a company

Business Applications of Online Social Networking (cont'd.)

- Social network advertising strategies
  - Indirect advertising through groups
    - Interested users can join by becoming "fans"
  - Company-owned social networking Web site
    - Users can talk about what new products, services, or improvements they would like to see
  - Viral marketing
    - Users pass along marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth

The Use of Social Networks in the Hiring Process

- Employers can and do look at the social networking profiles of job candidates when hiring

- Companies may reject candidates who post:
  - Information about their drinking or drug use
  - Provocative or inappropriate photos
  - Discriminatory remarks relating to race, gender, or religion
  - Confidential information

The Use of Social Networks in the Hiring Process (cont'd.)

- Employer cannot legally screen applicants based on race or ethnicity, but:
  - Members of social networking Web sites frequently provide sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, and political affiliation data
  - Personal photos may reveal a disability or user's race or ethnicity
  - Individuals may reveal data that are protected by civil rights legislation

Social Shopping Web Sites

- Combine two highly popular online activities—shopping and social networking
- Shoppers and sellers can share information and make recommendations while shopping online
- Revenue is generated through retailer advertising
- Retailers can design product improvements based on input and get ideas for new product lines
- Great way for small businesses to boost sales

TABLE 9-3 Sample of social shopping Web sites

Social shopping site	Brief description
Buzzillions	Product review Web site that collects thousands of product reviews from the Web sites of various retailers
Crowdstorm	Shopping resource that aggregates product information from various online buyers guides, reviews, and blog postings
Kaboodle	Site where members can discover and recommend new products; get discounts; and locate bargains
OSOYOU	UK-based social shopping site for women with an interest in fashion and beauty products
ZEBO	Site that allows members to create a personal profile about what they own, want, and love to shop for; members can check out one another's profiles, provide shopping tips, and chat online to ask questions and get advice

Social Networking Ethical Issues

- Ethical issues for social networking Web sites are:
  - Cyberbullying
  - Cyberstalking
  - Sexual predators
  - Uploading inappropriate material
- Cyberbullying
  - Harassment, torment, humiliation, or threatening of one minor by another minor or group of minors via the Internet or cell phone
  - 43% of teens have experienced cyberbullying

FIGURE 9-2   Cyberbullying is more common among teenage females

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Numerous forms of cyberbullying
  - Sending mean-spirited or threatening messages
  - Sending thousands of text messages to victim's cell phone and running up a huge cell phone bill
  - Impersonating victim and sending inappropriate messages to others
  - Stealing victim's password and modifying his or her profile to include racist, homophobic, sexual, or other inappropriate data that offends others or attracts the attention of undesirable people

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Numerous forms of cyberbullying (cont'd.)
  - Posting mean, personal, or false information about the victim in the cyberbully's blog
  - Creating a Web site whose purpose is to humiliate or threaten the victim
  - Taking inappropriate photos of the victim and either posting online or sending to others via cell phone
  - Setting up an Internet poll to elicit responses to embarrassing questions regarding victim
  - Sending inappropriate messages while playing interactive games

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Cyberstalking
  - Threatening behavior or unwanted advances using the Internet or online and electronic communications
  - Adult version of cyberbullying
  - Can escalate into:
    - Abusive or excessive phone calls
    - Threatening or obscene mail
    - Trespassing
    - Vandalism
    - Physical stalking
    - Physical assault

Social Networking Ethical Issues (cont'd.)

- Encounters with sexual predators
  - Some social networking Web sites criticized for not protecting minors from sexual predators
  - Legislators pushing social networking Web sites to adopt stronger safety measures
- Uploading of inappropriate material
  - Social networking Web sites have policies against uploading videos depicting violence or obscenity
  - Most Web sites do not have sufficient resources to review all material posted

Online Virtual Worlds

- Computer-simulated world in which visitor can:
  - Move in three-dimensional space
  - Communicate and interact with other visitors
  - Manipulate elements of the simulated world
- Alternative worlds where visitors go to entertain themselves and interact with others
- Visitor represents self through an avatar
  - Character usually in the form of a human but sometimes in some other form

Online Virtual Worlds (cont'd.)

- Avatars can do everything one can do in real life
  - Shop, hold jobs, run for political office
  - Develop relationships with other avatars
  - Start up new businesses
  - Engage in criminal activities
- Virtual worlds have rules against offensive behavior in public, such as using racial slurs or performing overtly sexual actions, but:
  - Consenting adults can travel to private areas and engage in socially unacceptable behavior

TABLE 9-4 Popular virtual worlds

Virtual world	Description
Coke Studios	Virtual world in which teens and young adults can create customized music mixes in a virtual music studio, play them for other members, and receive ratings for each mix; favorable ratings allow members to earn points that can be used to purchase virtual furnishings for their personal studio areas
Disney's Toontown Online	Disney's virtual world, designed for children as young as seven years old; visitors cans play games, dress their cartoon avatars, and communicate with other visitors through a drop-down menu of phrases
Habbo Hotel	Virtual world for teens, built around a hotel theme; visitors can purchase furniture to decorate their guest rooms or mingle in the lobby
Second Life	Highly imaginative three-dimensional world that is appealing to young adults; avatars are very customizable, and users can change every micro-pixel of their avatar's shape, size, and color
The Sims Online	A networked version of the Sims computer game, targeted at teens and young adults; the object of the game is to earn as much currency as possible to furnish one's virtual home with beautifully rendered household objects

Source: Virtual Worlds Review, www.virtualworldsreview.com/index.shtml.

Crime in Virtual Worlds

- Criminal acts in a virtual world can be:
  - Clearly illegal, such as trafficking in actual drugs or stolen credit cards
  - Online muggings and sex crimes that can cause real life anguish but may not be real life crime
- Should law enforcement—real or virtual—get involved in acts that occur in virtual worlds?
- Bad deeds done online can often be mediated by game administrators
- When harm reaches the real world, victims should look to criminal law for protection

Ethics in Information Technology, Third Edition

Educational and Business Uses of Virtual Worlds

- New Media Consortium (NMC)
  - International consortium of almost 300 organizations
  - Explore new media and technologies to improve teaching, learning, and creative expression
- Media Grid's Immersive Education Initiative
  - International collaboration of universities, research institutes, and companies
  - Define and develop open standards, best practices, platforms, and game-based learning and training systems

Summary

- Social networking Web sites
  - Create an online community of Internet users
  - Break down barriers created by time, distance, and cultural differences
  - Allow people to interact with others online by sharing opinions, insights, information, interests, and experiences
- Social network advertising uses social networks to inform, promote, and communicate the benefits of products and services

Summary (cont'd.)

- Social network advertising strategies
  - Direct advertising
  - Advertising using network of friends
  - Indirect advertising through groups
  - Advertising via company-owned Web sites
  - Viral marketing
- Employers look at the social network profiles of job candidates when hiring

Summary (cont'd.)

- Ethical issues for social networking Web sites are:
  - Cyberbullying
  - Cyberstalking
  - Sexual predators
  - Uploading inappropriate material
- Online virtual world is a computer-simulated world
  - Visitor can move in three-dimensional space
  - Visitor can communicate and interact with other visitors
  - Visitor can manipulate elements of the simulated world