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Facebook CEO: Less Privacy Is Social Norm

Mark Zuckerberg says the social network's approach to privacy reflects the comfort people have with sharing personal information online.

Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive of Facebook, has defended the social network's approach to user privacy as keeping up with the "social norm" of sharing an increasing amount of personal information on the Web.

Zuckerberg's comments during an interview with TechCrunch's Michael Arrington followed about a month after Facebook [drew criticism](#) for making changes that opened users' status updates to the entire Web, unless the user proactively changed the default setting.

While not discussing the criticisms directly, Zuckerberg explained that Facebook was driven by evolving social norms in determining how to handle privacy on the site.

"People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people," [Zuckerberg said](#) during the interview at last week's Crunchie awards presentation. "And that social norm is just something that has evolved over time, and we view it as our role in the system to constantly be innovating and updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norms are."

Facebook's reading of the social norms of the day has not been met favorably with at least one Internet privacy group. The Electronic Privacy Information Center last month filed a [formal complaint](#) with the Federal Trade Commission, saying Facebook shouldn't be allowed to "turn down the privacy dial" on its site. Facebook has more than 350 million users worldwide, including more than 100 million in the United States.

Facebook has taken the opposite view of its recent changes, saying they make it easier for members to control who can see which pieces of information. Indeed, Facebook added a tool that lets users select privacy settings for each post they place on the site. They can choose whether to make the information available to the general public, all their Facebook friends, or a list of particular friends, family members, or work colleagues.

But some users complained that setting privacy wasn't easy. "I have spent the last 20 minutes trying to find the option to not allow this (making posts generally available), what a joke," Haem Guy said on the unofficial blog AllFacebook.com. "I thought the new privacy settings were to make it stricter not more open."

Facebook walks a fine line with privacy on the site. The company's value as a business lies in the data it stores on user activity and making it available to others, including advertisers. The more willing users are to share information, then the more valuable the data Facebook holds.

Therefore, Zuckerberg's comments could be viewed as self-serving, particularly in arguing that people are getting used to sharing more information on the Web.

"In the last five or six years, blogging has taken off in a huge way and all these different services that have people sharing more information," he said. "People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people."

However, Internet privacy and the protection of personal information is a growing concern among advocacy groups. In September, a coalition of 10 consumer and privacy groups [urged Congress](#) to draft legislation to preserve consumer privacy online by limiting behavioral advertising and establishing new ground rules for information collection and use.

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