Facebook.com could pose dangers to users' safety

The private information that you put on your facebook.com account could be inviting unwanted attention. Users should be cautious when creating a profile because you never know who could be looking at it.

By Dani Hurst (Contact)

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Facebook.com has reached a plateau few other Web sites have. It reached the popularity point to where its name has been turned into a pseudo-verb.

It is common to hear students say, “Let’s facebook it.”

As last year’s seventh most-visited Web site, it serves as a networking, communication and entertainment resource for college, and, most recently, high school students. It has the ability to help students kill hours of boredom. However, it also poses threats to a student’s privacy and could bring trouble with the law.

Facebook.com is fun, but there are some precautions to take, as is true with most Web sites.

The only thing a student needs to access facebook.com through the University of Kansas is a valid KU e-mail address. From there they can create a profile. This profile can list everything from their sexual orientation to their birthday to their favorite movies. Not to mention members can have countless pictures of them and their friends in photo albums.

Some students choose to put their address, phone number, class schedule, workplace and e-mail address on their profile. The backlash is obvious. Any person with a computer can get a hold of someone at any hour of the day.

Kyle Shook, Coffeyville sophomore, said he did not put his address on his profile in order to avoid solicitors or anyone wanting to play a prank on him.

“That way no one will come banging on my door,” Shook said.

One thing to note is that only students from the same school can view each other’s profile, unless they are “friends” with someone at another school.

In these cases, the easy way to avoid stalking and to maintain one’s privacy is to not include this type of information. This is the same advice students have heard for years. Facebook.com also provides an option to block all non-friends from viewing your profile.
Sarah Hogan, Eagan, Minn., junior, has been on facebook.com for two years. She used to have her phone number listed on her profile. One night a random guy called her and wanted to meet up with her. She took her phone number off the Web site after the incident. She said women needed to be careful when it came to disclosing information that could draw predators.

“You don’t know what creepy people are looking at your profile,” Hogan said.

However, with facebook.com, there is one more thing to consider. As The University Daily Kansan reported two semesters ago, employers are looking at facebook.com, too. Some employers look at a student’s profile to gather information as to what type of person they think the student is. They read the “about me,” and other sections to try to determine if the student has a party lifestyle and drinks excessively or uses drugs.

Shook said if he ever applied for an on-campus job, he would take down all his incriminating photos and anything vulgar in his profile.

It was also reported that police were looking at pictures on facebook.com and searching for underage students who were drinking. They also were reportedly going into the “events” portion of the Web site to look for upcoming parties. From there they would look for minors who had RSVP’d to the party. Then, the police would supposedly go to these parties with heavy underage attendance.

Student athletes also should closely monitor what they include in their profiles. Two semesters ago, the Kansas Athletics Department started looking at its athletes’ profiles. Officials looked for anything defaming toward the athlete or the department. Whether it was a picture of an athlete drinking or negative remarks about a coach or trainer, the department told the athlete to remove it.

Current student athletes advised future athletes to be careful with what they uploaded onto the Web site. Some recommended not joining at all, saying soon they thought the department would not allow athletes to have them.

If you want to join facebook.com at the University, then go for it. However, take precautions in what you put in your profile. You never know who might see it.

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