



Facebook, MySpace, and More!

Making connections with online social networks



In just a matter of years, social networking sites have become the target destination for millions of Web surfers. Facebook and MySpace, the two most popular sites, reach nearly one-fifth of all Internet users worldwide. These and other sites have become legitimate meeting grounds for many. It's easier than ever to create an online profile, and express yourself on the Web. Now's your chance! Use this guide to create your account and start connecting with friends and family.

1. Choosing the right social network

With dozens of sites to choose from, deciding which site to join initially can be daunting. Here are a few suggestions:

Facebook (www.facebook.com): Now the most popular site, features a clean, customizable look and a variety of plug-ins. Originally designed for college students, is now for all ages.

MySpace (www.myspace.com): The former lead dog still commands a sizable audience. Offers blog features, music and more. Largely used by teens and twentysomethings, and particularly popular among bands.

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com): Designed as a networking resource for professionals, LinkedIn is all business - literally. While not nearly as customizable as the others, it can be a valuable tool both for job-seekers and those looking to make a bigger splash in their field.

Eons (www.eons.com): A social network specifically designed for those over fifty. Offers blogging features, activity sharing, and other customizations offered by Facebook and MySpace.

As you choose a network, you may want to consider whether you have any friends or family members that favor one site over another. You can't have a social network without people to socialize with!

2. Setting up an account

Registering a profile on each of the above sites is completely free. Visit the site of your choosing, select "Sign Up" and fill out the required fields—typically name, birthdate, and location. You will also need a valid email address.

(One example—LinkedIn—is posted at right.)



3. Creating a profile

Now's your chance to really let be yourself! Facebook, MySpace, and Eons all give you the opportunity to share some interesting facts about yourself. Not sure where to start? Jot down a few things here to get started:

Describe yourself in a few words: _____

Hobbies/Activities: _____

Favorite Things (Books/Movies/etc.): _____

For LinkedIn, you may want to add some information about your career interests, and relevant skills. Write down a few ideas to get things rolling:

Career Goals: _____

Job Skills: _____

4. Building your network

Now, to build your social network! Each site has several ways to search for friends and family.

By Name: Look for your long-lost school chums using the search engine.

By School: Look for people from your high school or college classes

By Interest: Search for people with similar interests, or have similar tastes in books, film, or music.

By Email: You can elect to import your address book, and the site will search based on those contacts. You can also send invites to those who don't yet have a profile.



Once you've found a friend, ask if you can join their network. Once they've accepted, you can view their friends, and see who you know from their network. This lends itself to a "snowball effect" once you've made a few friends. Who knows—maybe you have friends from different circles who know each other!

5. Having fun

Facebook, MySpace, and Eons each offer ways to customize your profile, making your personal space more inviting and fun for you and your network. Here are a few suggestions for sprucing up your page:

Profile layouts: Myspace and Eons allow you to add background images and graphical tweaks that change the overall look of your profile. There are a number of sites (such as www.myspacemaster.net) that offer custom backgrounds for MySpace profile, and Eons has a group (visit <http://tinyurl.com/4ctdnw>) where layout designers can go to for help and ideas.

Music: MySpace has a music player with which you can embed your favorite songs on your profile. Go to music.myspace.com to search from thousands of available artists.

Games: Facebook has a variety of games for both solo and online play. Scramble is an extremely popular twist of the classic Boggle formula.

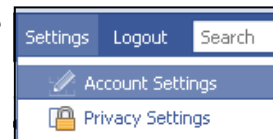
Feeds: Do you have a profile from another site, like Flickr or GoodReads? Many of these sites have ways to import your content into your Facebook page, turning your profile into a one-stop information portal.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. MySpace, Facebook, and Eons each have other ways for you to express yourself. Browse through the Applications (or "Apps," on MySpace) menus to find other items tailored to your interests.

6. Online safety

Despite rumors to the contrary, having an online social life and protecting your identity/well-being are not mutually exclusive. **You have full control over your own profile, and how much personal information you choose to give out is up to you.** With that in mind, here are a few suggestions for keeping your social network information safe:

Use the Privacy settings on your account. Each site gives the ability to render your profile invisible to those outside your chosen network.



Be wary of oversharing. Because what you put online has a tendency to stay online, make sure you're not making any information available that you wouldn't be comfortable telling a complete stranger. The same goes for comments and Wall postings left by your friends.

Develop a "radar" for suspicious activity. If someone starts commenting or sending messages in a way that makes you uncomfortable, don't hesitate to delete them from your network. The same goes for comments and Wall postings. If you notice strange messages being sent out by someone you know, you may want to double-check with in person to make sure their profile hasn't been hijacked.

Don't give out your login information to anyone! The only time you should have to enter a password is when you perform the initial login. If someone asks for your info in an email, use the Report Abuse link.

Don't let these risks deter you from participating in an online social network. While it pays to be prepared, the number of "troublemakers" out there tends to be somewhat exaggerated.

7. Deleting your profile

Facebook not the right site for you? Do you want to reduce your digital footprint? Fear not! It's easy to cancel your account at any of these sites. Just log in and follow the corresponding steps:

Facebook: Click on the Settings link at the top of the page. Select "Deactivate Account" from the list of options.

LinkedIn: Select Account & Settings from the top of the page. Click on "Close Your Account" under the Personal Information heading.

Eons: Click on Settings, on the top-right side of the page. Scroll to the bottom, and select "Deactivate Account."

MySpace: Click My Account, located in the top-right corner. Select Account. "Cancel Account" is at the bottom. (see image at right)

