



Privacy Considerations When Posting Content Online



The Internet is full of opportunities for us to share things about ourselves, whether it's a blog entry, updating our *Facebook* or *MySpace* status, or posting videos on sites like *YouTube* or *Vimeo*. We post information to share our lives with our friends and family, but this information also becomes viewable by millions of other people as well. Some people may not care that the things they share about themselves can be viewed by anyone, but other people may be more concerned.

For those who want to be more protective of their online information, here are some questions to consider when posting content online.

Who Will See This Information?

Sometimes we don't realise how far and wide our information is shared; especially when we think we're just posting updates about ourselves to our friends. With the Internet and search engines (like *Google*, *Yahoo!*, *Bing* and others), everything online is indexed and searchable. Even sites where you think only members can see the content could be public or seen by others who aren't members, anywhere in the world.

What Are You Sharing?

From a privacy perspective, the kind of information you share can reveal a lot or very little about you. Sometimes we share personal information about ourselves without even realising it. Landmarks in a picture or even blogging about a great restaurant can indicate where you are or have been. Consider if what you are sharing is okay for others to know. Are you sharing information about others, and if so, do you have their permission? Be careful when sharing information about your friends and family because you may reveal something that they don't wish others to know.

What Is the Site's Privacy Policy?

Do you know what the owners of the website do with the information you give them? Even if the information you share isn't posted online, it may be shared with advertisers or third-parties. Many sites

have privacy policies that spell out what they do with the information you give them.

Is the Information You Share Illegal or Against the Content Policies of the Site?

If you want to share information online, make sure you comply with laws (such as copyright and fair use, etc.) and with site policies. Many sites don't allow violent or discriminatory content; some sites will remove "banned" content or even close the related account. Sometimes, posting false information, harassing or harmful content can even result in civil or criminal legal action. If you aren't sure, find out about the relevant laws and policies first, before you post.

How Much Control Do You Have Over The Information That You Share?

Some people believe that because it's content you posted, you own it and can control it. However, you really don't have much control because once it's out there, others can share it, talk about it, and even change it. If you originally posted it on your personal website, blog, or social network page, you could take down the original post. However, it will likely be difficult for you to have it removed once it's on someone else's website.

What can I do to increase my privacy?

- Be thoughtful about what you share online.
- Be careful about what you post about other people.
- When creating online accounts read the instructions carefully. Oftentimes this is when you can opt out of the site owners collecting and sharing your information.
- Browse the web more safely by running antivirus and antispyware software on your computer.

For more tips, check out WESNET's handout on: *Online Privacy & Safety Tips*.