

Young People and Social Networking Services: A Childnet International Research Report

Childnet International's mission is to work in partnership with others around the world to help make the Internet a great and safe place for children. In all its work, Childnet (<http://childnet.com>) seeks to take a balanced approach, promoting the positive and highlighting the creative and inspiring ways in which children and young people use the Internet for good, as well as taking a practical response to potential risks.

Digizen's first research programme similarly aims to support the modelling of good practice by young people online, focusing on the use of social networking services and tools to develop and demonstrate voice, engagement and positive change. This project focuses on how social networking services can be used within formal and informal learning contexts. This report is designed to support teachers and lecturers with an interest in using social networking services and innovative curriculum approaches, as well as those with a responsibility for e-safety, cyberbullying awareness and digital literacy of both staff and students.

This project has been generously funded by Becta (<http://becta.org.uk>), the UK Government's key partner in the strategic development and delivery of its ICT and e-learning strategy. The project has been led by Josie Fraser, Social and Educational Technologist, on behalf of Childnet International.

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The online version of this work is available at Childnet's Digizen website (<http://www.digizen.org>).

"Digizen" is a composite of the words "digital" and "citizen". In keeping with both Childnet International's ethos and the approach outlined in the UK's cyberbullying advice and guidance for schools (work led by Childnet International on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families; <http://www.dfes.gov.uk>), the Digizen project:

- looks at how children and young people can use the Internet safely to change the world for the better
- recognises the huge positive potential young people have and the vital role they have to play in shaping the world



- seeks to celebrate the unprecedented opportunities the Internet affords children and young people: to develop a voice, to collaborate, to organise, to debate, to create, to share, to learn, to develop essential skills and, above all, to participate.

Childnet has designed the Digizen site and its resources to provide practical support to young people in making their impact on the world a positive one.

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1. Introduction

The project is designed to investigate how social networking services can and are being used to support personalised formal and informal learning by young people in schools and colleges.

The work opens by asking “**What are social networking services?**” This section investigates current definitions of social networking services and provides a comprehensive review of current social networking service types and activities.

In **Evaluating social networking services**, this report then describes how to use a toolkit – a social networking evaluation chart covering six different social networking services, and an accompanying checklist, which are available to download from the Digizen website (<http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/checklist.aspx>) – to evaluate services. The chart is not definitive, but provides a comprehensive framework covering significant relevant issues such as site age restrictions, the presence of adverts, collaborative tools, security issues and data management restrictions.

Benefits and opportunities evaluates the potential educational benefits to individual users, as well as outlining some of the opportunities that educators and schools using social networking services might take advantage of. This section looks at issues around digital literacy and social engagement, skills and identity development, and opportunities for better understanding e-safety and data management issues.

Barriers and risks looks at current barriers to using social networking services within education, including staff development and support issues, and risk evaluation and management approaches. Risk areas that educators should be aware of are outlined, and approaches to manage these are addressed. Issues include users’ perceptions of the environment they are posting in, personal data management, and cyberbullying and potentially illegal behaviours.

Ideas and examples showcases innovative practice, providing links to a range of projects and examples where social networking services have been successfully used to support both teachers and students. Links to current debates around specific services are also included.

Finally, the **Glossary** describes some terms that readers may be unfamiliar with.

2. Methodology and thanks

The quality of work has been dependent on the engagement and insight of the advisory team, to whom recognition and huge thanks are due.

The project methodology drew heavily on the SOLSTICE model¹, in particular the concept of new academic teams. The approach focuses on intelligence-informed dialogue across multi-professional expert teams, in order to influence change.

The advisory team, a multi-disciplinary group of internationally respected experts, provided valuable input into the research and writing of this report. This input was provided online through a project wiki. The research was iterative, with advisory board members commenting on and reviewing the research findings, which were drawn from a range of sources. The work of educational technologists and educators, who described their experiences, concerns and successes in their blogs, was particularly useful. The emerging and fast changing field of this research is not yet well represented in more traditional forms of scholarship.

The project advisory team were:

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¹ Roberts, S., Schofield, M. & Wilson R. (2005) New academic teams. In Levy, P. & Roberts, S. (eds) (2005) Developing the New Learning Environment: the changing role of the academic librarian. London: Facet Publishing. 111–132.



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Extensive consultation about, and practical exploration of, the social networking services cited in the social networking services evaluation toolkit was also carried out to ensure that the information in the comparison chart was accurate at the time of publishing. In this respect, Childnet would also like to thank Bebo, Facebook, Google, Ning, TakingITGlobal and Yahoo! for their valuable input and comments on the evaluation chart.

In addition, the author would particularly like to thank Stephen Carrick-Davis and Will Gardner of Childnet International for their vision and support in delivering the work.



3. What are social networking services?

A changing landscape

“...technology has not only mediated communication in countless ways, but ... the very ways we communicate – and even the ways we talk and think about communication – are changing as a result.”²

Social networking services are changing the ways in which people use and engage with the Internet and with each other. Young people, particularly, are quick to use the new technology in ways that increasingly blur the boundaries between online and offline activities.

Social networking services are also developing rapidly as technology changes with new mobile dimensions and features. Children and young people within the UK, who have grown up taking the Internet and mobile technologies for granted, make up a significant segment of the “beta generation” – the first to exploit the positive opportunities and benefits of new and emerging services, but also the first to have to negotiate appropriate behaviours within the new communities, and to have to identify and manage risk.

Social networking services are on the rise globally, and this change is also evident in increased UK engagement with sites. Ofcom’s recent International Communications Market 07 report³ found evidence that more adults use social networking sites in the UK than in any other of the European countries included in the survey. ComScore data from August 2007⁴ suggest that UK Internet users clock up an average of 23 visits and 5.3 hours on social networking sites each month. Ofcom reported that 39% of all UK Internet users use social networking services, while the ComScore figures show 24.9 million individual social networking service visitors in August 2007.

According to recent Hitwise figures, the most popular dedicated social networking sites in the UK are MySpace, Facebook and Bebo⁵. These types of social networking services are **profile focused** – activity centres around web pages that contain information about the activities, interests and likes (and dislikes) of each member.

While the number of visitors to social networking sites is increasing, so too are the numbers of new services being launched, along with the number of longstanding (within the relatively brief lifespan of the Internet) websites that are adding, developing or refining social networking service features or tools.

² New Media Consortium (2007) Social networking, the “third place,” and the evolution of communication. 10 October. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.nmc.org/evolution-communication>

³ Ofcom (2007) The international communications market 2007 (December). Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/icmr07>

⁴ ComScore (2007) U.K. Social Networking Site Usage Highest in Europe. Press release, 10 October. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=1801>

⁵ Previously, Facebook membership had been restricted to people with email accounts at recognised academic institutions. According to Internet measurement company Hitwise, Facebook jumped from the 126th most-visited URL in the UK in September 2006 to the fifth most-visited URL in the UK in September 2007, with “Facebook” being the third most-searched term in the UK. (Hitwise (2007) Hitwise UK retail and social networking update. 22 October. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.hitwise.co.uk/press-center/hitwiseHS2004/retail.php>)

The ways in which we connect to social networking services are expanding too. Games-based and mobile-phone-based social networking services that interact with existing web-based platforms or new mobile-focused communities are rapidly developing areas.

Definitions

“Social networking services” refers here to a wide-range of rapidly developing services tools and practices. **Social networking services can be broadly defined as Internet- or mobile-device-based social spaces designed to facilitate communication, collaboration and content sharing across networks of contacts.**

Social networking services allow users to manage, build and represent their social networks online. Services usually (but not always) include other individuals; they might also include the profiles of events, companies, even political parties. They may let you add anyone in the network as your friend or contact, or they might ask both parties to agree all connections.

Social networking services typically support the public display of networks, although they may offer privacy restrictions or facilitate closed communities. Permissions are a very important feature of most social networking services. They allow members and groups to control who can access their profiles, information, connections and spaces, as well as determining degrees of access. The level of granularity and control varies from service to service, but typically settings allow you to:

- **keep your information private** (i.e. be seen by only those to whom you give permission) or
- **restrict the visibility of your information to:**
 - signed-in service members only
 - people on your contacts list
 - particular groups of service users
- **make your information public** so that even people who are not members or are not signed in as members of the service can see it.

Through these combinations of privacy settings, users can manage a range of different relationships online, as well as manage their online presence – how they appear to friends, acquaintances or the general public.

Managing relationships online and managing your online presence are key to having fun with and using social networks safely. However, the speed of the development of social networking services may mean that young people are more likely to have developed personal strategies or learnt from peers than from formal instruction and support from adults.

Social networking sites vary in the types of tools and functionality they provide (Boyd & Ellison⁶ define social networking sites as having three common elements: a member profile (in their definition this is always a web page), the ability to add other members to a contact list, and

⁶ Boyd, d. m. & Ellison, N.B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), article 11. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>



supported interaction between members of contact lists (interaction varies greatly, and there will typically be some degree of interaction facilitated between people who are not on each other's contacts lists)⁷.

Social networking sites are often perceived by their users as closed environments, where members talk to other members⁸. This impression of social networking services as providing a private space is likely to account for behaviour, language and postings that do not translate well outside their intended closed context. While it is important that children and young people understand the public nature of much of their activity within social networking services (and can use permissions and privacy controls to manage personal information and communications), we also need to ensure that online activity is understood holistically – i.e. as the sum of activity of all the online sites and networks that an individual belongs to.

Types of social networking service

This section attempts to order the current range of social networking services available, and outlines two main formats: sites that are primarily organised around users' profiles, and those that are organised around collections of content⁹. However, it is important to remember that services differ and may be characterised by more than one category.

Users may also tailor the intended use of platforms to suit their own interests. For instance, sites that are primarily profile focused may be used by individuals to showcase media collections or be used as a work space for particular topics or events. Educators setting up private groups to collaborate and use tools are a great example of how social networking services can be tailored for users' own ends.

⁷ Danah Boyd has written at length on definitions of social networking sites, focusing on characteristics she has identified as their unique, key service features. The approach taken here in the Digizen report is a far broader one, and includes a wider subset of social media, which are organised around networking practices within the label "social networking services". This definition takes in the range of activity that takes place across sites for educators – for example, the use of collaborative and other tools which may not be unique to social networking sites but nevertheless make up an important part of the user's experience.

Boyd, D.M. (2006) Social networking sites: my definition. apophenia :: making connections where none previously existed. 10 November. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from http://www.zephorias.org/thoughts/archives/2006/11/10/social_network_1.html

Boyd, D.M. (2008) Let's define our terms: what is a "social networking technology"? apophenia :: making connections where none previously existed. 18 January. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from http://zephorias.org/thoughts/archives/2008/01/08/lets_define_our.html

⁸ Alessandro Acquisti and Ralph Gross's research on Facebook found significant misconceptions in members' perceptions and awareness of the scope and openness of the network and the visibility and public availability of their profiles. Members in the study thought their information was far more private than it actually was, and misjudged the numbers of people they were making personal information available to.

Acquisti, A. & Gross, R. (2006) Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from [2006.http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/~acquisti/papers/acquisti-gross-facebook-privacy-PET-final.pdf](http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/~acquisti/papers/acquisti-gross-facebook-privacy-PET-final.pdf)

⁹ Fred Stutzman describes these as consisting of ego-centric and object-centric networks. These are interesting but limited distinctions – profiles may not be about individuals or self-representation, they may be about services, organisations, causes or imaginary people, or they may be fakester profiles – profiles of people pretending to be famous or historical figures, for example. Additionally, the profile is itself an object or an artefact.

Stutzman, F. (2007) Unit structures. Social Network Transitions, 5 November. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://chimprawk.blogspot.com/2007/11/social-network-transitions.html>



Profile-based social networking services

Profile-based services are primarily organised around members' profile pages – pages that mainly consist of information about an individual member, including the person's picture and details of interests, likes and dislikes. Bebo, Facebook and MySpace are all good examples of profile-based services.

Users develop their spaces in various ways, and can often contribute to each other's spaces, typically leaving text, embedded content or links to external content through message walls, comment or evaluation tools. Users often include third-party content (in the form of widgets) to enhance their profiles or as a way of including information from other web services and social networking services.

Content-based social networking services

In these services, the user's profile remains an important way of organising connections, but plays a secondary role to the posting of content. Photo-sharing site Flickr is an example of this type of service, one in which groups and comments are based around pictures. Many people have empty Flickr accounts and signed up to the service to view their friends' or family's permission-protected pictures.

Shelfari is one of the current crop of book-focused sites, with the member's "bookshelf" being a focal point of each member's profile.

Other examples of content-based communities include YouTube.com for video sharing and last.fm, in which the content is arranged by software that monitors and represents the music that users listen to. In last.fm, content is generated by the user's activity. The act of listening to audio files creates and updates profile information ("recently listened to"). This in turn generates data about an individual user's "neighbours" – people who have recently listened to the same kind of music.

White-label social networking services

Most social networking services offer some group-building functionality, which allows users to form mini-communities within sites.

Platforms such as PeopleAggregator and Ning, which launched in 2004, offer members a different model. These sites offer members the opportunity to create and join communities. Users can create their own "mini-MySpaces"¹⁰ – small-scale social networking sites that support specific interests, events or activities. Setting up and running a social networking service also means increased responsibility and liability of the creator or host for on-site activity.

Multi-user virtual environments

¹⁰ Anne Collier describes these as grassroots niche social networking sites.
Collier, A. (2007) Mini-MySpaces: Social web's new phase. Net Family News, 9 March. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.netfamilynews.org/n1070309.html#1>



Sites such as Second Life and World of Warcraft – online virtual environments – allow users to interact with each other’s avatars. (An avatar is a virtual representation of the site member.) Although the users have profile cards, their functional profiles are the characters they customise or build and control. Friends lists are usually private and not publicly shared or displayed.



Mobile social networking services

Many social networking sites, for example MySpace and Twitter, offer mobile phone versions of their services, allowing members to interact with their friends via their phones. Increasingly, too, there are mobile-led and mobile-only communities, which include profiles and media-sharing just as with web-based social networking services. MYUBO, for example, allows users to share and view video over mobile networks¹¹¹².

Micro-blogging/presence updates

Micro-blogging services such as Twitter and Jaiku allow you to publish short (140 characters, including spaces) messages publicly or within contact groups. These services are designed to work as mobile services, but are popularly used on the web as well.

Many services offer status updates – short messages that can be updated to let people know what mood you are in or what you are doing. These can be checked within the site, read as text messages on phones, or exported to be read or displayed elsewhere¹³. They engage users in constantly updated conversation and contact with their online networks.

Social search

Social search engines are an important web development which utilise the popularity of social networking services. There are various kinds of social search engine, but sites like Wink and Spokeo generate results by searching across the public profiles of multiple social networking sites, allowing the creation of web-based dossiers on individuals. This type of people search cuts across the traditional boundaries of social networking site membership, although any data retrieved should already be in the public domain.

What do people do on social networking services?

People use social networking services for countless activities. Among the most common uses, however, are:

- **Connecting with existing networks, making and developing friendships/contacts¹⁴**

¹¹ Collier, A. (2007) Mobile socializing: Accelerating change. Net Family News, 2 February. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.netfamilynews.org/nl070202.html#1>

¹² Tropea, J. (2007) A list of SMS services and groups and mobile social networks. Library Clips, 9 March. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://libraryclips.blogsome.com/2007/03/09/a-list-of-sms-groups-and-services-and-mobile-social-networks>

¹³ Lew, A.A. (2007) Twitter tweets for higher education. Web 2.0 Teaching Tools, 19 August. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://web20teach.blogspot.com/2007/08/twitter-tweets-for-higher-education.html>

¹⁴ Boyd and Ellison (2007) write: "What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between 'latent ties' (Haythornthwaite, 2005) who share some offline connection. On many of the large social networking services, participants are not necessarily 'networking' or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, we label them 'social network sites'."

Boyd, D.M. & Ellison, N.B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), article 11. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>

Young people tend to use social networking services to communicate and socialise with their contacts and consolidate their existing friendship networks. However, in the same way that some children and young people collect trading cards or kinds of toy, some young people use social networks to collect contacts to display their popularity.

- **Represent themselves online and create and develop an online presence**

Social networking services provide purpose-built spaces for members to create and present an online representation of themselves, either within friendship or wider networks

- **Viewing content and/or finding information**

As well as keeping up to date with what other people are doing, you can use social networking services to generate recommendations based on likes and activities. Social networking services are awash with content – pictures, music, video, as well as event, organisation and topic information.

- **Creating and customising profiles**

There are many different kinds of profiles, although they typically consist of a web page supported by a range of tools. Profile pages are not just lists of information – they allow members to develop and present an image of themselves to the world, and to establish and project their online identities. Displays of preferences (favourite music, books and films, for example) allow members to share information about themselves.

Most social networking sites also allow members to customise the look and feel of their pages to a greater or lesser extent, through page templates or content, including video, widgets, music and images.

- **Authoring and uploading your own content**

Content might be in the form of messages or blog posts – it might also be photos, video or music.

- **Adding and sharing third-party content**

Third-party content might be in the form of links or embedded content hosted somewhere else – for example, a video hosted at YouTube or another video-hosting service, but playable on a member's profile page.

Content may be added in widget form – widgets can be simple badges (pictures with links back to other sites) or dynamic content, for example, a slide show or the last songs catalogued by a last.fm account. This type of dynamic content makes it easy to move information, content and links from one social networking service to another.

Quizzes and polls are also very popular. Some services allow you to create quizzes or compare yourself with other people on your contacts list who have also answered questions or added a particular application.

- **Posting messages – public and private**

Many services support public and private messaging through message boards or in-service email. MySpace and Facebook offer members an instant messaging system.

- **Collaborating with other people**

By using service tools to create groups, users can, for example, collectively create profiles, hold discussions, and store, share and comment on objects. In-service messaging can be a rich source of informal collaboration.

Young people and social networking services

Many mainstream social networking services are aimed at teenagers and young adults. Most services have a minimum membership age of 13 or 14, and many explicitly state that they are designed for over-18s. There may be safety restrictions on the accounts of 14- to 17-year-olds; for example, regarding whether their profiles appear in public or off-site searches.

Some sites are specifically designed for young people; for example, both Teen Second Life and Habbo Hotel are aimed at teens. Imbee.com is primarily a blogging service for tweens (children aged 9–13), requiring a parent's permission to sign up. Both Disney and Nick.Com have dedicated services for children – Disney acquired ClubPenguin, a virtual world social networking service aimed at 6- to 14-year-olds, in August 2007. Children and tweens can create penguin avatars, for which they can “buy” (with virtual money earned in in-world games) clothes, accessories, pets, homes, furniture, etc.

Services aimed at younger children typically have stricter privacy settings, greater levels of moderation and more limited user interactions. Some require parental permissions – for example, sign up, usually with a credit card – and set preferences, such as the level of in-world communication allowed. As opportunities for contact are limited by safety settings, such child-focused sites may be less suitable for collaborative educational practices and projects than mainstream sites, which make collaboration and contact far easier – factors which bring their own challenges.

The National School Boards Association (in the USA) recently released research findings of an exploration into the online behaviours of 9- to 17-year-olds in the USA¹⁵. The sample included 2,300 children, young people and parents. Nine- to 17-year-olds reported spending almost as much time on social networking sites and other websites as they do watching television – around nine hours online, compared with 10 hours of TV. Ninety-six per cent of the young people surveyed reported using some form of social networking technology; the findings indicate that education-related topics are the most commonly discussed, with 60% talking about education-related topics and 50% discussing their schoolwork.

It is clear that young people regard social networking services as just another part of their social and often school-related activities.

Educators, parents and carers increasingly recognise the importance of understanding the appeal and use of social networking services among young people. This may be to prevent or respond to a negative incident: cyberbullying or inappropriate content or activities. However, adults should also recognise the benefits of young people's use of technology to support their media literacy

¹⁵ National School Boards Association (2007) Creating and connecting: Research and guidelines on online social – and educational – networking. July. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.nsba.org/SecondaryMenu/TLN/CreatingandConnecting.aspx>

skills and social participation, and explore the potential educational benefits of social networking services.

4. Evaluating social networking services

The following guide is designed to accompany the social networking services evaluation chart, which can be downloaded from Childnet's Digizen website (<http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/checklist.aspx>).

There are many social networking services. New sites appear daily and existing sites update their services all the time in what is still a rapidly developing area. Most services are profile or content focused, and although they may seem to offer similar services, there are significant differences between sites, tools and services.

This checklist is designed to help you review sites to see whether they meet your needs as an educator (perhaps with a specific learning and teaching aim or project in mind), parent, or even as a potential site member. Currently, most UK school networks block access to many social networking services. However, there are many reasons why educators may explore social networking sites. Educators may be interested in:

- staff development and digital literacy – for example, to better understand sites that are popular with learners, or to be able to deliver e-safety information
- engaging with students and other members of the school, college or organisational community who are using services – for example, by setting up a school profile to provide information about the institution
- using social networking services for e-learning – for example, working with learners or supporting their collaboration on a particular class, topic or project
- ICT provision planning – for example, exploring services because they are considering hosting or running services for their communities
- personal learning environment planning – for example, seeing how particular services can be incorporated into institutional service provision, and how learners might use social network services as hub sites, exporting and importing resources created in other locations.

The evaluation chart that accompanies this checklist outlines a framework of things to look out for, and covers basic questions in a range of categories.

These reviews are current at the time of publication. The chart is, however, likely to date quickly.

The listing of information about these services by Childnet does not imply an endorsement of these services. The services are examples of a range of services, and are provided only to demonstrate the evaluation process and the social networking services evaluation checklist. If you want to explore or use one of these services, or any other, you should carry out your own review.

The comparison chart looks at several existing services: Bebo, EducatorCentral, Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, Ning, TakingITGlobal and YouTube. These services were chosen to illustrate a reasonable range of the different types of service available.

Bebo, Facebook and MySpace are among the most popular social networking sites in the UK.

EducatorCentral and TakingITGlobal are designed to support learning and teaching. Both are free services provided by TakingITGlobal, a not-for-profit organisation. Educator Central is also run on the open source platform Elgg, and several UK universities host their own versions.

Ning has a lively educator community exploring how the platform can be used to create web-based mini-communities.

Flickr and YouTube are examples of services that concentrate on media resources.

Social networking evaluation checklist

General info

About

This section provides a brief overview of the services. If you are planning a project around, for example, particular media, it may be worth checking sites that specialise in those media, since they may include a broader selection of supplementary tools.

Membership types

Check what account types are on offer. If you are likely to need additional storage space, do you have to pay for it? Are there advert-free options? Many commercial sites make their money through advertising and by selling or renting types of user data. Check whether there are ad-free or premium services available.

Age restrictions

Most sites, but not all, specify that users need to be 13 or over. MySpace requires users to be over 14. Flickr has no age restrictions for its free service, but requires verified parent/guardian consent. Ning allows members of any age, but setting up communities specifically for people under the age of 13 is not allowed.

Most sites assume or request parental consent – schools and colleges need to consider how this can effectively be obtained.

Profile privacy and moderation settings

Many social networking services are profile-centric – activity takes place around content and information displayed on a member's profile page. Profile fields can sometimes be extensive, allowing (and sometimes requiring) users to supply private contact details like their addresses as well as details of their interests and activities. What level of privacy is available to site members? Can they keep their profiles private from people who they don't know? Can they select who gets to see different parts of their profile pages? Are they allowed to use pseudonyms or do they have to use their real names? How easy will it be to delete their accounts and data should they want to?

Another important area to look at is the degree of control that users have over contact on the site. The degree of control a young person needs will depend on a variety of factors, but might also change over time. Can people befriend them without permission? Most profiles include a comment wall – how can they moderate this? Can they control who can message them through the site? It's important that all site members take the time to familiarise themselves with privacy controls, so they are confident about how they can control their information.

Members' toolkit

Most sites offer members a range of tools; for example, most provide a blog. As with stand-alone blogging tools, these vary from service to service. In addition to tools for each individual member, there will be group tools (often the same as or similar to the tools available to individuals, but able to be used by several members collaboratively) and a range of site-wide public tools – for example, message forums.

File upload

What types of file can you upload to the site? What are file storage limits? How can content be displayed? How can content be shared or made available for collaborative work?

Groups

Social networking services provide members (and sometimes non-members) with a range of collaborative spaces and tools.

Group settings

Consider how private or public you can make your group. Can you control who joins?

Group tools

What does your group let members to do? What controls do you have over tools? What restrictions are there on members? Can you give different members different permissions and roles?

Mobile

Services increasingly provide mobile versions of their sites and ways for members to interact with and contribute to sites using mobile phones. It's important to be aware of the charges that members might incur, and it may be useful to know what network or handset restrictions there are on mobile services.

Other collaborative tools

What other tools are available to users?

Search

How can users find each other or be found? How much information is available to people who users don't know, either through on-site or off-site search engines?

Design and customisation

Templates

Can users change the look and feel of their sites?

Content and/or design customisable

How much choice do members have over the content they can include in their spaces? Can they display content they create or upload it to other sites? Can they embed useful tools they use elsewhere, like calendars or bookmarks? Can they control who gets to see this content? If they are using third-party widgets to add content to their profiles or pages, they should ensure that they understand what they are agreeing to by using additional services, for instance what they are allowing third-party companies to do with their information.

Adverts

Most web-based services have adverts. How intrusive are these? Are they appropriate for children and young people?

Security and access

Content ownership

Who can do what with the content that members produce or upload on site? When you sign up to a site, you agree to licensing conditions. These can be found in the terms of service.

How easy are the terms and conditions to understand?

Agreements vary drastically. MySpace users, for example, only grant MySpace a functional licence – that is, a licence that allows the service to display the users’ content on site. MySpace will not sell or distribute members’ content. Members of TakingITGlobal maintain ownership of their content, but give permission for TakingITGlobal to distribute and modify any publicly posted content within or outside their site. Members should understand how their public profile pictures, conversations and content could be used by their social networking services.

Adult content

Most services don’t permit adult content, although some do, and some services contain material that while not explicit, might be regarded as inappropriate. How easy is it for members to access adult material? Are there age-related restrictions?

Managing inappropriate content

What can users do if they come across inappropriate content, particularly content that transgresses the social networking service’s terms of use, is illegal or is copyright protected?

Age-specific functions

Some services control aspects of user activity according to the age submitted to the member’s profile.

Some services have permissions that can be applied to age groups. For example, Bebo lets users set age ranges for other members to be able to view their profiles and contact them.

Safety information

What safety information does the site provide? In addition to generic information, does the site warn or remind users about safety when they are on the site?

Viewing and moving content

All social networking services should have a terms of use agreement and a privacy statement. Additionally, sites may provide safety information, user guides or site overviews.

Getting external content in

How easy is it for users to personalise their spaces or make them more useful by importing content and tools from other services? It is important that users understand that they must have permission to upload content to the site – i.e. users must have created the content or have permission from the person who created it.

Content out

Can users export content from sites? Can they export calendar information or feed information produced on the site to another location, for example to an e-portfolio or blog?

Privacy policy

Most commercial sites only allow users over the age of 13. This is because they collect and may sell or rent user data, and in the USA, where most services originate, it is illegal to collect this kind of information about people under the age of 13 without parental consent. Members need to read the privacy policy and understand how their information will be used.

Terms of use

All members need to read and understand the terms of use. A lot of the information will refer to commercial issues (most services do not allow commercial activity), passing on or collecting other members' information, and use of malicious software. The terms will also cover what content and activity is allowed on site, and specify age-related conditions of membership.

Community guidelines

Community guidelines are often user-friendly versions of the terms and conditions. Social networking services generally do not moderate or check all members' content or behaviour centrally; they rely on the good conduct of members of the community and on members reporting unacceptable behaviour and content.

5. Benefits and opportunities

Benefits for learners

What are the potential formal or informal educational benefits to individual users of using social networking services?

- **Young people as social participants and active citizens**

Social networking services can provide an accessible and powerful toolkit for highlighting and acting on issues and causes that affect and interest young people. Social networking services can be used for organising activities, events, or groups to showcase issues and opinions and make a wider audience aware of them.

- **Young people developing a voice and building trust**

Social networking services could be used to hone debating and discussion skills in a local, national or international context. This helps users develop public ways of presenting themselves. Personal skills are very important in this context: to make, develop and keep friendships, and to be regarded as a trusted connection within a network.

Social networking services can provide young people with opportunities to learn how to function successfully in a community, navigating a public social space and developing social norms and skills as participants in peer groups.

- **Young people as content creators, managers and distributors**

Social networking services rely on active participation: users take part in activities and discussions on a site, and upload, modify or create content. This supports creativity and can support discussion about ownership of content and data management.

Young people who use social networking services to showcase content – music, film, photography or writing – need to know what permissions they are giving the host service, so that they can make informed decisions about how and what they place on the site.

Users might also want to explore additional licensing options that may be available to them within services – for example Creative Commons licensing – to allow them to share their work with other people in a range of ways.

- **Young people as collaborators and team players**

Social networking services are designed to support users working, thinking and acting together. They also require listening and compromising skills. Young people may need to ask others for help and advice in using services, or understand how platforms work by observing others, particularly in complex gaming or virtual environments. Once users have developed confidence in a new environment, they will also have gained the experience to help others.

- **Young people as explorers and learners**

Social networks encourage discovery. If someone is interested in certain books, bands, recipes or ideas, it's likely that their interest will be catered for by a social networking service or group within a service. If users are looking for something more specific or unusual then they could create their own groups or social networking sites. Social networking services can help young people develop their interests and find other people who share the same interests. They can help introduce young people to new things and ideas, and deepen appreciation of existing interests. They can also help broaden users' horizons by helping them discover how other people live and think in all parts of the world.

- **Young people becoming independent and building resilience**

Online spaces are social spaces, and social networking services offer similar opportunities to those of offline social spaces: places for young people to be with friends or to explore alone, building independence and developing the skills they need to recognise and manage risk, to learn to judge and evaluate situations, and to deal effectively with a world that can sometimes be dangerous or hostile. However, such skills can't be built in isolation, and are more likely to develop if supported. Going to a social networking service for the first time as a young person alone can be compared to a young person's first solo trip to a city centre, and thus is important for a young person to know how to stay safe in this new environment.

- **Young people developing key and real-world skills**

Managing an online presence and being able to interact effectively online is becoming an increasingly important skill in the workplace. Being able to quickly adapt to new technologies, services and environments is already regarded as a highly valuable skill by employers, and can facilitate both formal and informal learning. Most services are text based, which encourages literacy skills, including interpretation, evaluation and contextualisation.

Opportunities for education

What are some of the potential uses of social networking services for schools and educators?

- **Developing e-portfolios**

E-portfolios are an online space where learners can record their achievements and collect examples of their work. E-portfolios don't have to be restricted to institutional provision. Learners can be encouraged to think about setting up "professional personal" sites for exploring and promoting their talents and interests. Or they might want to save or export social networking services activity as evidence of their skills; for example, a forum thread which demonstrates their negotiation skills, or a personal site or post which acts as a great example of their self-motivation and passion.

- **Literacy and communication skills**

Using sites to communicate, collaborate and create means learners use and can develop a wide range of literacy skills.

- **Collaboration and group work**

Young people already use a host of technologies – for instance, instant messaging programs such as MSN – to work together on an anytime, anywhere basis. By using social networking services'

collaborative tools or setting up groups, young people can semi-formalise their efforts and document discussions and milestones as they go.

- **Learning about data protection and copyright issues**

Data protection is an important issue for anyone who creates, uploads or downloads content online. Young people should consider who has permission to use online content. Considering the benefits of making it easier for others to use or reuse content, looking at the commercial implications of licensing, and understanding what kinds of permissions service providers request, is a compelling way to start investigating differences in licensing agreements (for example, Creative Commons licensing) and the terms of service agreements. Equipping young people to fully understand what permissions they can choose or agree to is an important digital literacy skill which can help develop creative, social or entrepreneurial skills.

- **Learning about self-representation and presentation - thinking about how you might be viewed across different contexts**

An important part of digital literacy is understanding how distributed activity - the things that we do across a wide range of different websites - affects the impression we make on other people. Managing our web presence - understanding how to use permissions to keep information private or share it with specific individuals - is essential for getting the most out of communications platforms and for keeping control of any personal information that we choose to share. Thinking through personal rules for sharing or making information public is a useful strategy.

- **Learning about e-safety issues**

E-safety covers a range of online issues but ties in firmly to the real world: staying safe, keeping personal information safe, protecting yourself and your belongings. Making sure that we don't participate in bullying or other anti-social behaviour, and helping out other people who might be affected by these issues, is a key part of digital citizenship.

- **Producing public showcases for work, events or organisations**

Social networking services can be a great way to quickly create websites to advertise or showcase events or groups, or to present work.

- **Forming communities of practice**

Educators have long recognised the value of using blogs as a way of creating, making visible and fostering networks around particular topics or interests. More recently, educators have been exploring the range of Web 2.0 tools: wikis, virtual worlds and social networking services, including video- and photo-management sites. Educators and other professionals are increasingly using social networking services to form communities and connect to others who share their interests. Ning in Education (<http://education.ning.com>) and Second Life Grid (<http://secondlifegrid.net/programs/education>) are examples of umbrella groups that support educators using or wanting to use Web 2.0 tools for education.

- **Organising and scheduling work (time management)**

Most social networking services have calendar tools that learners can use to schedule their personal and educational timetables. Some can export or import events from other web-based

calendars, or third-party applications may exist that can help with this. Working publicly or in groups where others share your calendar or events can be a great motivator.

- **Being where learners are**

In addition to providing a whole community with useful information about a school, college, organisation or event, a profile on a social network sends a clear message to learners that you are aware of the types of spaces they enjoy online. This is a good reminder that these spaces are public and inhabited by people who may not necessarily be within their friendship networks, encouraging them to look at issues around permissions and sharing personal information. During Childnet's research into cyberbullying, children and young people said that one of the reasons they wouldn't tell their teachers about being bullied online was that they didn't think staff understood the types of services they used. Asserting a presence online sends a clear message that you know what services that are popular with your learners and understand the usefulness of these services to them, and that you would understand if they had a problem and wanted to come and talk to you about it.

6. Barriers and risks

Barriers to exploiting social networking services within education

What prevents educators from exploring and, where appropriate, using social networking services?

- **Educators' confidence and experience**

Educators' enthusiasm for social networking services varies, but the UK, along with other countries, is still in the process of embedding technology within education to support personalised learning, engagement, inclusion, creativity and innovation¹⁶. However, much is being done to support the widespread adoption of mobile and Internet technologies to support effective blended learning delivery and equip educators to evaluate which technologies might best support specific learning and teaching objectives. Some uses of ICT are now commonplace within schools and colleges¹⁷.

Professional development programmes, advice and information for teachers have not necessarily kept pace with the emergence of new technologies and practices, particularly those that have become widespread and commonplace among learners¹⁸. Educators may well be using social networking services themselves, but may not recognise the educational potential and opportunities for their learners, or understand the potential risks, both for themselves and their learners. Many educators do not use the Internet in the same way as many young people – as a ubiquitous, always-on extension of their physical space which, for young people, has always been around¹⁹.

- **Negative views of social networking services**

Parents and educators alike are understandably concerned about illegal and anti-social behaviour online. Recent media coverage of social networking services has tended to focus on the negative aspects of services, for example the presence of predatory adults who want to use services to contact and groom young people²⁰. Illegal and inappropriate behaviour is an unfortunate fact of human societies, whether it takes place online or offline. However, over-emphasising these types of activity is not useful in supporting young people to recognise, manage and negotiate risk for themselves. Just as in the real world, we need to approach risk in an even-handed and realistic way in order to best manage it. Most responsible social networking services employ people to post-moderate anti-social activity, although it should be noted that the amount of information published means that services are reliant on users making reports.

¹⁶ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2005) Harnessing technology: Transforming learning and children's services. March. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy>

¹⁷ Becta (2007) Harnessing technology review 2007. September. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from http://partners.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=rh&catcode=re_rp_02&rid=14409

¹⁸ Becta (2006) Emergent technologies for learning. January. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=25940&page=1835>

¹⁹ Prensky, M. (2001) Digital natives, digital immigrants. On the Horizon, 9(5), October. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

²⁰ Bahney, A. (2006) Don't talk to invisible strangers. The New York Times, 9 March. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/09/fashion/thursdaystyles/09parents.html>

This year the British monarchy launched its own YouTube channel, and the Queen broadcast her Christmas message online²¹, which might suggest that social networking services are regarded by the establishment as a legitimate and effective way to reach a national and international audience, as television was when the Queen's speech was first broadcast in 1957.

- **Blocking and filtering procedures within UK education**

Almost all state schools within the UK subscribe to a broadband connection and services through their local regional broadband consortia (RBC)²². Filtering and blocking policies are determined and varied by the RBC in consultation with their partner local authorities; educators and institutions can request that sites should be blocked or unblocked.

Colleges and some schools may also have internal procedures for requesting site blocking or unblocking. Many schools block social networking services, viewing them as either housing inappropriate content or being a waste of time, not recognising the ways in which social networking services can be valuable to students. This can make it difficult for staff to explore or experiment with sites, or to respond to reports of cyberbullying or other inappropriate activity by their learners taking place on such services.

Young people visit social networking services from home and other out-of-school locations. Many young people are also adept at finding ways around blocking and filtering software in order to visit the sites they find meaningful and useful.

- **Digital media literacy policy**

Digital media literacy is not taught across all UK schools. While the new QCA secondary curriculum introduces e-safety as a compulsory topic in Key Stages 3 and 4²³, many other aspects of media literacy which cover issues of relevance to current uses of mobile and Internet technologies are absent or taught according to the interest of the individual teacher. In particular, there is currently no UK-wide agenda for technology, citizenship and social participation, or around data protection and data management issues, including those relating to copyright and file sharing.

- **Lack of straightforward risk evaluation and management tools**

Many schools understand the value of activities that take place outside the classroom. Taking learners outside the school premises requires risk evaluation and management. In a similar way, teachers and schools need straightforward risk-evaluation tools that they can apply to social networking sites and web-based services if they plan to use them with learners.

UKOLN's Risk Assessment For Use Of Third Party Web 2.0 Services briefing document (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/qa-focus/documents/briefings/briefing-98>) highlights some of the technical issues which need to be addressed, but the issues are not contextualised for use in a teaching environment.

²¹ The Royal Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/theroyalchannel>

²² The National Education Network: <http://www.nen.gov.uk>

²³ National Curriculum: <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

As well as issues relating to data management and backup, a risk assessment could, for example, include students' understanding and management of permission settings, their understanding of site terms of use and any agreed behavioural guidelines, and rights management of the materials they use and create.

Using social networking services – the risks

The following list of risks is not exhaustive. The risks of using social networking services often overlap with issues that have been well addressed by existing e-safety advice and guidance, for example Childnet's award-winning Know IT All series of resources (<http://www.childnet.com/kia>). This list looks at risks that are specific or pertinent to social networking services. Educators should, however, have a general understanding of the benefits and risks of using technology.

- **Misunderstanding the nature of the environment**

Many users believe that they are writing for a closed group of friends, unaware that the information they have posted may be publicly available and able to be searched for and read by a much wider audience. Acquisti & Gross (2006) characterise social networking services as “imagined communities” in recognition of the gap between users' perceptions of a private, closed network and the reality of who can access their information²⁴.

Additionally, it may not occur to young people that their public arguments or “flame wars”, their overly enthusiastic critiques of their teachers, or the risqué pictures of themselves that seemed quite funny at the time may still be around in a few years when they are applying for a job or trying to get into university, for example.

We don't yet know the full consequences for a generation that has grown up online, or the future implications of new types of search, for example social searches, which aggregate information from across a range of social networking sites by your name or email address, or of the development of facial-recognition search software.

Managing the risks

Site members need to be mindful of what they post and how they behave publicly online. Anyone who wants to post pictures or videos of other people should ask for their permission. Service users should ensure they don't give out inappropriate or personal information/content about themselves or other people. Some services – for example, YouTube – require users to have the permission of the people appearing in videos before they post them.

In addition, service users should understand site permissions, for example privacy settings, and be able to use them effectively to regulate who gets access to the information they post. The granularity of site permissions varies from site to site, and some sites have very complex permissions available to users. Understanding how permissions work is important to all members, otherwise they may allow more people than they intend to see information, or make information available to public search engines.

²⁴ Acquisti, A. & Gross, R. (2006) Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook. Retrieved 20 February 2008 from <http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/~acquisti/papers/acquisti-gross-facebook-privacy-PET-final.pdf>

Basic permissions will be some variation on “private”, “friends”, and “public”. It is important to remember that private information isn’t necessarily private from the service provider, so information sent via instant messaging or social networking services’ mail should be thought of in the same way as postcards. Also, people who collect “friends” may end up making personal information available to people and networks that they don’t really know or trust. Members who don’t know and trust everyone on their friends list need to treat any information made available to “friends” in the same way as they would treat public information.

All Internet users need to think about all the information they post. This means not just thinking about the information they publish to one location or social networking service, but about all the information collectively over all the sites they use. Using search engines to search for themselves is an easy way of checking what information other people might find. Looking for specific information – such as a home phone number, photographs or a home address – can help users identify and take down inappropriate information, although making sure this kind of information is not posted in the first place is the most effective strategy.

Many social networks allow users to close accounts and permanently delete their information. It is important that users remember that publicly posted information may remain accessible through Google cache records – which produce a copy of pages that have been searched – even after information has been taken down or deleted.

The law applies to social networking services as well as to anywhere else, and certain content and behaviours are illegal. In addition, services have their own rules in their terms and conditions. It is important that users are aware that they can report issues to the service provider and also to the police. It is good practice for service providers to have clear and accessible reporting functions available to their users.

When reporting, it is helpful if users keep evidence of what they want to report. For social networking services, keeping the URL, copying the relevant pages, or even printing the page can be useful ways of preserving evidence.

- **Controlling your data, and losing control**

It is important that educators can access the information and resources they have created online. Network issues affect access to the Internet. Most major services advertise downtime (for example when the service needs to close for maintenance or improvement), but services still occasionally become inaccessible. Service outage can be devastating if an educator plans a live demonstration of a site or has materials online for a due project or looming exam date.

Always make sure you have backup copies of essential documents, and think about alternative ways of using and storing your information. Carry out a simple risk assessment to check what you would do, for example, if the site goes down during exam week or if important data are lost or permissions reset.

- **Intruding on young people’s space**

Using some social networking sites might be viewed as an intrusion on young people’s personal space, especially if the permissions set is not granular enough to allow different functions between different kinds of groups or friends.

Investigate group functions; for example, if a member of staff wants to use a site to moderate or lead activities, it might be appropriate to find a site that doesn't require people to be friends to be members of the same group (i.e. that has an additional level of access permissions). Consider sites that your students don't have a personal attachment to, so that students can establish a professional account, and make sure that appropriate behaviour is discussed and negotiated before using the platform.

Another alternative is to provide information in an official or objective capacity, for example setting up an account or page as a group or a school, rather than as an individual. Again, you will want to look for a site that doesn't require reciprocal friendship, or enables your students to keep their personal information private.

- **Cyberbullying and anti-social behaviour**

Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of ICT, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, deliberately to upset someone.

It is vital that schools understand the issue (see <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullguidance/understanding>), know how to prevent incidents (see <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullguidance/preventing>) and respond to incidents (see <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullguidance/responding>), and keep up to date on the legal issues surrounding this challenging subject.

Make sure all your students understand what cyberbullying is and what the impact and consequences can be. For more information, see the guidance for schools on preventing and responding to cyberbullying that Childnet has produced for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (see <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying>).

Check also that students know how to identify and report inappropriate behaviour on sites they are using.

- **Impersonation and identity theft**

Everyone should understand that people online are not necessarily who they say they are. Someone may pretend to be a real person or invent a new identity. People might be dishonest about anything: their addresses, names, ages, genders or interests.

There are a broad range of reasons why someone might be untruthful. For example, fake profiles can be used to cyberbully or be used by an adult to groom children (see below for information about grooming).

There are risks related to giving out too much personal information publicly on social network services. One risk of giving out too much personal information is identity theft. There are also clear risks in giving out information which can enable others to contact and locate you offline.

- **Potentially illegal behaviour and illegal content**

Online grooming of a child is illegal in the UK. Online grooming refers to a number of techniques that are used to engage the interest and trust of a child or young person for the sexual gratification of an adult. An adult makes contact with a child in an online environment, then develops a relationship with the child, manipulating the child's emotions with the intention of arranging a

meeting and sexually abusing the child. People who do this often lie to gain trust, and may or may not pretend to be someone else. They may also try to use either threats or guilt to try and secure a meeting with the child or young person.

Any suspected potentially illegal activity with a child or young person online can be reported to the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) (<http://www.ceop.gov.uk>).

Illegal content in the UK includes indecent images of children, material that incites racial hatred, and criminally obscene content. Potentially illegal content can be reported to the UK's national hotline, the Internet Watch Foundation (<http://www.iwf.org.uk>). It is important that young people who post pictures of themselves or their friends online think about the appropriateness of these images, and are aware that indecent images of children (i.e. people under 18) are illegal.

- **Sites or services spamming address books or contacts lists**

Users should be careful when they sign up to anything that involves giving access to an address book. Unscrupulous sites may spam contacts, for example inviting them to join services in order to boost their membership. While it may be useful to search for those among your contacts/address book using the same service, it is important for users to understand what they are agreeing to allow the service to use that information for.

- **Don't be bullied into being "friends" with someone**

For social networking service users, deciding whether to accept a new "friend" can be socially difficult. However, users should never feel bullied into accepting people. Accepting a "friend" and then later trying to delete that person from a friends list without anyone noticing is not a good strategy, although users should remove and block people when necessary, and report to the provider any people who have broken the service's terms of use.

Users should decide a clear framework for accepting "friends". The rules chosen may vary from service to service; for example, users may decide to use a service account as a very public one and accept "friendship" from anyone who offers it. Alternatively, users might decide only to accept requests from people they know reasonably well, or from people they regard as close friends. Users should always ask people requesting friendship where they know each other from, if they don't remember.

7. Ideas and examples

This section provides links to examples of and discussions about using social networking services in education. These examples are designed to support the areas for investigation identified in **Evaluating social networking services**.

Educators may be interested in:

- staff development and digital literacy – for example, to better understand sites that are popular with learners, or to be able to deliver e-safety information
- engaging with students and other members of the school, college or organisational community who are using services – for example, by setting up a school profile to provide information about the institution
- using social networking services for e-learning – for example, working with learners or supporting their collaboration on a particular class, topic or project
- ICT provision planning – for example, exploring services because they are considering hosting or running services for their communities
- personal learning environment planning – for example, seeing how particular services can be incorporated into institutional service provision, and how learners might use social network services as hub sites, exporting and importing resources created in other locations.

The examples below cover these different approaches to exploring and evaluating services and practices. They are divided into the profile-based, content-based, white label, multi-user virtual environments and micro-blogging services outlined in the initial chapter, **What are social networking services?** The micro-blogging examples, based here on web and mobile social networking service Twitter, also serve to explore mobile services.

Profile-based social networking services: Bebo, Facebook, MySpace

ECAR: Facebook as a teaching tool?

<http://nellison.blogspot.com/2007/12/ecar-facebook-as-teaching-tool.html>

Nicole Ellison, Assistant Professor at Michigan State University, USA, discusses Facebook as a platform for teaching and learning, and links to her research on students' use of social networking sites. Looking at some of the issues surrounding the use of Facebook as a teaching tool, the post highlights some specific benefits and reasons to be cautious. Benefits include responding to environments which are already incorporated into students' daily routines, and the potential of social networking services to support digital literacy and social engagement. Drawbacks include the lack of the independent commercial services' accountability to the education provider, and the difficult territory of student-teacher "friending" – adding people to your friends list within the service.

Open University course profiles on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/apps/application.php?id=4472914735&ref=s> (requires a Facebook account to log in)

One of the application's developers, Martin Weller, writes in his blog about the Open University course profile application http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/no_good_reason/2007/10/first-ou-facebo.html.

The application allows Facebook users to look up Open University courses by code or title and then list the courses they have studied on their profiles. This application provides a good example of how providers can create their own applications or widgets to provide students with useful

services through the social networking services that they already use. The application allows students to display courses they have taken or are currently taking and to link with other users on those courses. It also offers a starting point for thinking about learner-centered e-portfolios and how providers could support learners to record and demonstrate their achievement in non-institutional online environments.

Students Against Closures

<http://www.bebo.com/saveedinburghschools>

This is the Bebo profile of the Edinburgh-based student-led campaign to protest against proposed school closures. It is an example of students using social networking services within peer networks to coordinate activities, and provides a good starting point from which to explore the range of independent uses that students put social networking services to.

Services may also be used by student councils (for example, the Bebo profile of Redditch Student Council <http://www.bebo.com/Profile.jsp?MemberId=3931605902>) and unions (for example, the Facebook page run by the University of Nottingham Students' Union <http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Nottingham-Students-Union/6432383094>).

Warwick University at MySpace

<http://www.myspace.com/warwickuniversity>

The MySpace profile for the University of Warwick, UK, provides information about the university and acts as a meeting place for current, prospective and past Warwick students. This page demonstrates how education providers are approaching social networking services and creating a presence in order to connect with learners.

Content-based social networking services: Flickr, YouTube

Classroom displays

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/classrmdisplays>

This Flickr group is administered by UK primary school educator Linda Hartley to connect and share ideas with others who are interested in the creative use of classroom displays to enhance children's learning. The Flickr group works as a visual archive to capture interesting and original displays that would otherwise vanish unrecorded, and to promote discussion. This is a great example of educators using social networking services to create peer networks of practice. As well as creating a useful resource for practitioners, the site demonstrates the author's creativity and competence in using online tools effectively, and could be used to evidence personal professional development.

Tell a story in 5 frames

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/visualstory>

This is an international visual story-telling group on Flickr. This is a lively and popular group which uses Flickr to explore visual narrative using a framework of submission rules. This is a useful example of how social networking services could be put to imaginative and effective use by both teachers and learners. This type of narrative approach addresses a range of learner preferences and could be used to support a wide range of disciplines.

The whole Merode Altarpiece

<http://flickr.com/photos/ha112/901660>

This is a great example of how the annotation tool and comments feature can be used to support learning – in this case art and art history. Individual pictures uploaded to Flickr can be easily

annotated by clicking the “add note” button that appears in the tool bar and resizing and dragging a box frame over the part of the image you want to attach your note to. Members can also give permission for others to use the feature on individual pictures. Labelling, annotating and elaborating on elements of images is an approach which can support a wide range of disciplines.

University of California, Berkley, at YouTube

<http://youtube.com/ucberkeley>

The University of California, Berkley, was the first to make full course lectures freely available through YouTube. It runs its own channel as a YouTube partner and provides over 300 hours of programming.

White-label social networking services: Ning, Elgg

Classroom 2.0

<http://www.classroom20.com>

Classroom 2.0 was created to provide an easy introduction to the tools of Web 2.0 and to encourage educators to be part of an online conversation about using new technologies to support learners. It is administered by USA-based educational technologist Steve Hargadon, and particularly supports educators interested in using Ning to set up their own social networks. A wide range of information and links to example networks are available, as well as discussion around using social networking services to support a wide range of topics and kinds of learner.

Community @ Brighton

<http://community.brighton.ac.uk>

Community @ Brighton is an institutionally run social networking and blog service for students and staff at the University of Brighton. The service is Managed by Stan Stanier and run on the open source social networking software Elgg. It serves as a good example of how providers might create and run their own social networking services rather than rely on third-party, externally hosted services.

Talkabout Primary MFL

<http://primarymfl.ning.com>

Talkabout Primary MFL is a social network run on Ning for people teaching, or considering teaching, foreign languages in primary schools (ages 3–11). It is a place to share worries and successes with supportive colleagues. UK-based primary modern foreign language teacher Jo Rhys-Jones started the site in 2007.

Again, this is a good example of how staff can make use of social networking services to form online communities of practice. Such communities serve many purposes: they can support discussion, be used to share ideas and opportunities, and contribute to professional development.

Multi-User Virtual Worlds: Second Life

Schome

<http://www.schome.ac.uk>

Dr Peter Twining of the UK’s Open University directs the Schome Park project, a closed community run within Teen Second Life for 13- to 17-year-olds. Current students come from the UK, the USA and the Falkland Islands. The project explores the potential of the virtual world as a creative and engaging alternative to traditional schooling environments. More information about

the project and its success to date in supporting learners in a non-traditional environment can be found on the site.

Second Life in Education

<http://sleducation.wikispaces.com>

This wiki-based site provides a range of resources for educators who are interested in exploring the use of virtual worlds, in particular Second Life, in teaching and learning. It was developed by Jo Kay and Sean FitzGerald, who are both based in Australia. The wiki includes useful resources for educators who are new to Second Life, including how to get started, an extensive overview of educational uses of Second Life, a comprehensive categorised directory of current and future virtual worlds, and links to Jo and Sean's presentations and workshop materials.

Suffern Middle School in Second Life

<http://ramapoislands.edublogs.org>

This blog presents a running account of the process of the proposal, acquisition, development and integration of a virtual presence for education at Suffern Middle School, New York, USA. Hosted and maintained by Peggy Sheehy, facilitator of the virtual campus, the blog tracks the successful progress and expansion of the programme to support 1,000 13- to 15-year-olds and their teachers. The virtual world campus in Teen Second Life supports a wide range of teaching, learning and curriculum exploration.

Mobile social networks and micro-blogging: Twitter

Twitter in the Classroom

<http://web20primer.wetpaint.com/page/Twitter+in+the+Classroom?t=anon>

This is a wiki page from Web 2.0 Primer for Newbies (<http://web20primer.wetpaint.com>), a collaborative project that supports the Teaching and Learning in a Networked Classroom course at Plymouth State University, USA. The page provides links and examples of how the micro-blogging social network service Twitter is being used in schools. The use of micro-blogging to support teams and collaborative work, and to provide fast updates on projects, is elaborated.

Twitter me this: Brainstorming Potential Educational Uses for Twitter

<http://eduspaces.net/csessums/weblog/179742.html>

Here, Director of Distance Education at the University of Florida, Christopher D. Sessums talks about the pedagogy of micro-blogging. He discusses using the micro-blogging service for short, focused responses from learners, and for project management. The post also links to useful third-party Twitter applications – services that allow Twitter to be updated in different ways or allow Twitter to be used in conjunction with other services.

Twitter Tweets for Higher Education

<http://web20teach.blogspot.com/2007/08/twitter-tweets-for-higher-education.html>

This blog offers tips and useful links from Alan A. Lew, a geography professor at Arizona State University, USA, on Twitter for learners and for library service professionals.

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9. Glossary

Blog

A blog or weblog is a type of easy-to-maintain website.

Blogging software typically offers users a selection of templates so they can create an attractive, professional looking site. Content is submitted using a post template, typically with form fields for a title and the main body of the post. This makes it very easy to have a good-looking and well-organised website with little or no knowledge of code; users just have to worry about their content.

Most social networking services offer their members a blogging tool, although these vary in terms of how much customisation is offered. Not all of them come with a web feed, which may restrict the sharing of content to within the host site only.

Creative Commons

Creative Commons (CC) licences build upon copyright law, signalling the owner's permission that work can be used in a variety of ways, not automatically allowed under copyright law. This allows people to make a greater range of work available to others to reuse without having to seek the permission of the person who holds copyright. Creative Commons search engines can help people discover materials that they can freely and legally share or build upon.

See <http://creativecommons.org> for further information.

Functional permissions

Functional permissions are the minimum permissions required by a social networking service in order to do its job: the permissions you need to give to service providers to store and access your data to use your account.

Sites may also request additional permissions, for example they might make it a requirement that you agree to let them reuse your content for purposes other than running your account.

You can find out what permissions you are agreeing to by reading carefully the terms of use and privacy policies.

Granularity

Granularity refers to the degree to which users can set permissions with regard to their information – the choices a member can make over who gets to see what information and data they upload or create on site.

Most services offer basic permissions within broad friend categories: you can share all your information with no-one, with all friends or with everyone (the public).

Granular services allow users more flexibility over what they make available and to whom. Members may be able to assign permissions to different areas of their on-site activity – make parts of their profile or particular blog posts available to specific groups. They may also have greater group granularity – the ability to create more finely controlled groups – for example, putting other

members into smaller specific groups and assigning permissions to them (for example, allowing only a small group of friends to view a message).

Moderation

Online moderation of members' activities and uploaded files can be provided by social networking services in a number of ways. The Home Office Task Force for Child Protection on the Internet (2005) defined these as including:

- Pre-moderation: in a pre-moderated service, all material supplied by users is reviewed by the moderator for suitability before it becomes visible to other users.
- Post-moderation: in a post-moderated service, all material supplied by users is reviewed after it becomes visible to other users. The length of time between the material becoming visible and being checked may vary.
- Sample moderation: a moderator may "patrol" a number of spaces or otherwise examine a sample of content, but not all content is reviewed after publication.
- Reactive moderation: in a service of this type, moderation takes place only after a request for intervention is made.

Skin

"Skin" is slang for a site template. Just as human skin is the outer layer of the body, so the skin of a blog, website or profile is the design element that determines how web pages look. Many social networking sites offer users a wide variety of skins or templates, allowing members to customise their spaces to better reflect their interests and aesthetic preferences.

Tagging/tag

Tags are the keywords given to content – web pages, posts, pictures, videos, music or files – by a user or by other people. Tags aren't predefined – they are chosen by the user to best describe the content. Tags offer a way of informally classifying and organising content that makes it easy for users to find and share information.

Third-party application

Third-party applications are elements of any service which aren't produced by the host service but by another company. Widgets are often created and managed by other services. Profile templates and other site add-ons might be produced by someone other than the host company.

All third-party applications have terms of use that are separate to the main provider's, and these should be carefully checked, particularly when the application requires you to give access to the data and to friend connections you have on a social networking service.

Web feed/RSS feed

Web feeds are a great way of accessing frequently updated information. Feeds allow users to share (syndicate) their content, and allow other people to subscribe to updates. This means you don't have to check back and see if new content has been posted to your favourite sites – the content is delivered to your feed reader as soon as it is published. Many sites now provide or can generate web feeds for content, and these can be subscribed to through a feed reader or run through your own website or space.

You can get web feeds for all kinds of content: updates to websites, new posts to blogs, picture or video feeds, or audio feeds (audio files that are syndicated in this way are called podcasts). Some sites also generate feeds for specific users or keywords, allowing users to produce custom feeds.

Widget

Web widgets are chunks of code that have been designed to be added easily to a user's website or profile page. They usually add an interactive or automatically updated element to static web pages, bringing information which is generated or stored on one part of the web to another. They allow you to decorate your space with fun and/or useful content, or bring in content and links to other sites or social networking services you use. Widgets come in all shapes and sizes: a widget might be a mini computer game, a video clip which is uploaded to a video-hosting site, or an update of the latest music someone has listened to or sites they have bookmarked.

Many websites now generate code for embedding their content into other sites. The data remains hosted at the original site, but the code opens a direct view of that data in another site.

Widgets are often third-party applications – content from a source other than the web or social networking service.