

Social Networking Sites: What They Are and How to Navigate Them

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■ Description:

The use of social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn has dramatically increased in recent years. Today, over 50 percent of teens and 35 percent of adults in the U.S. are using at least one type of social networking site. If used well, these sites can have many personal and professional benefits. Social networking can be a fun way to communicate with others, and an effective way to expand your social and professional connections. Nonetheless, it is important to practice good judgment and proper “netiquette” when developing personal profiles and interacting with others through such sites. This community program will introduce you to the basics of social networking sites.

■ Goal:

You will increase your knowledge about social networking sites and how to effectively use them.

■ Objectives:

- You will understand what a social networking site is, including the benefits of its use, and the potential challenges of its use.

- You will visit one social networking site and create a profile.
- You will brainstorm possible ways they can use a social networking site in a positive and responsible way.

■ Introduction:

Social networking sites are websites that allow users to connect with others. These websites differ widely in what they offer, but most are designed to allow you to:

- create a profile that can be viewed by others;
- define a network of connections among other users of the site; and
- interact with others in your own “networks” and, sometimes, with people in the networks of your connections (e.g., friends of friends).

Social networking sites provide many benefits. The following activities will help you learn more about social networking sites, understand the different ways you can use these sites, and learn about responsible ways to navigate the sites.

Activity 1. Social Networking Sites: The Basics

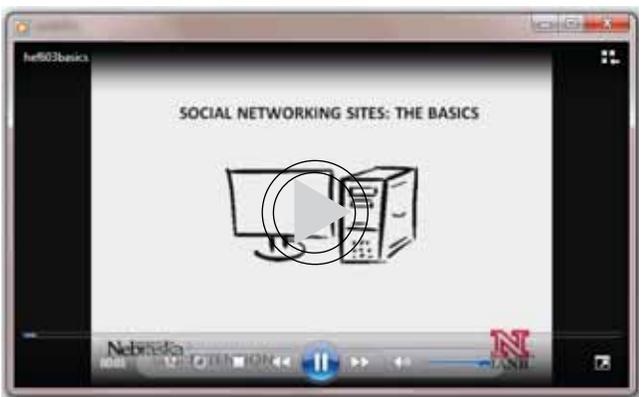
Social networking sites are intended to connect you with other people, whether it is for personal reasons or for professional purposes. While there are many social networking sites, two of the most popular sites are Facebook and LinkedIn.

LinkedIn is a site where you can create a profile that highlights your professional experience and activity. It is meant to help you create a network related to your work or other professional interests. Some people create a LinkedIn account to develop partnerships for their current work — for example, to find collaborators and partners. Others use the site because they are looking for a job and want to post their resume online for potential employers to see.

Facebook is by far the most popular social networking site on the Internet today. While most accounts on Facebook are created by individuals, many organizations, media outlets, businesses, and universities have Facebook accounts. Even the White House has a Facebook account.

The reasons for creating a Facebook account are varied. For many it is a way to keep in touch with friends and family — to update others on their lives or to share photos with loved ones. Some use Facebook to find long-lost friends or family. Others use Facebook to keep in touch with organizations they are involved in, or to keep up with information from professional or nonprofit organizations.

Before starting a social networking account, consider what you want to use it for. To help you think about what you want out of a social networking site, or even if you want to have be part of one at all, click on the photo below to watch a short clip explaining the uses and benefits of social networking sites.



Activity 2. Privacy and Safety

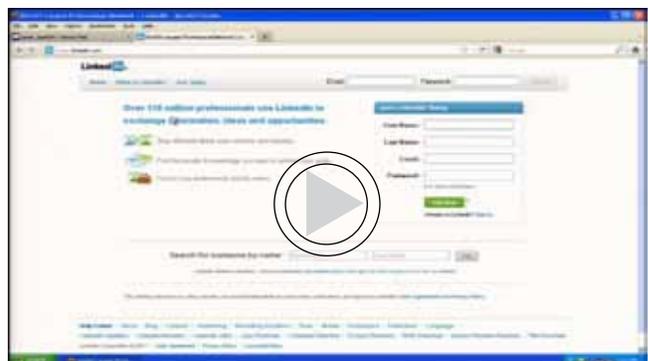
Privacy and safety are two of the biggest issues that face users of social networking sites. This activity will help you consider and understand how to protect your-

self by choosing what types of information you share with the public and exploring the security settings of the social networking site you're using. Click on the photo to start the video.



Activity 3. Signing On

You have now explored the idea of social networking. You have also considered what you would like to use it for and how to be a responsible user. It's now time to create an account and sign on. As mentioned earlier, there are numerous social networking sites out there; for this activity, we are focusing on using either Facebook or LinkedIn, two of the most popular sites. Both are free. Using a computer with Internet access, watch these videos and follow the directions.



■ Conclusion

As you completed the activities in this community program, you might have decided to start participating on social networking sites, or you might have decided that it is not for you at this time. Either way, hopefully these activities have been helpful in your decision-making. If you have decided to engage in social networking, we hope it will be a positive experience for you.

Thanks for participating in this program!