

How to Use Facebook... And still show your face at work

By now, you probably understand the potential dangers of social media. Indiscriminate use can seriously damage your professional reputation. So when people in your office (especially your boss) want to be your Facebook friend, how do you use Facebook so that you can still show your face at work?

Here are several quick tips for managing your Facebook account without jeopardizing your professional reputation:

Think hard before accepting friend requests. Before accepting any friend request from a co-worker, client, current or former boss, consider the potential pros and cons of the virtual relationship. On the upside, using Facebook for professional networking can strengthen business relationships and even help move you forward in your career. But on the downside, friending the boss means that the good and the bad of your online persona are fair game. If you have something to hide, or use Facebook to post wild photos and vent about your job, you probably should reconsider friending any professional contacts.

Carefully choose your Profile picture. If you plan to friend co-workers or superiors, err on the side of caution. While you don't have to dress in a suit and stand against a tan background for your Facebook Profile pic, avoid using a picture that is too sexy, cartoonish or might alienate your co-workers (translation: skip the glamour shots, Halloween costume party pictures, or photos of yourself in your wetsuit).

Set up Friend Lists. Create different groups of contacts such as "College Friends," "Work Friends," "Family," etc. Then, set privacy settings for each group to control access to more personal content. For example, you can opt to be someone's friend but not let him see your pictures or comments that others leave on your Wall.

Avoid Biography section pitfalls. By design, social networks like Facebook encourage a bit of narcissism. As a result, you may be tempted to provide lots of details about yourself. While it's perfectly fine to share nuggets of info that convey who you are, bear these points in mind:

- You may not want to share political/religious/social views with your boss or co-workers. Manage your privacy settings to make this biographical info accessible to friends and family only.
- Protect your children by not including their names anywhere in your biography.
- Exclude your birth year on your profile. Your friends and family know how old you are--your co-workers don't need to.

Use a critical eye. Before uploading photos, put them under a "professional microscope" and ask yourself, "How would my boss and/or co-workers view this content?" If you're unsure, it's best to leave the photos off your account--or at the very least, control who can view them.

Think before you post content, links and news. Offering contacts a decent glimpse into what makes you "you" can strengthen business relationships--people like to do business with people

they know. Hence, posting content that highlights your (socially acceptable) personal interests and professional areas of expertise is a great idea. But if you ever question the appropriateness of content, refer to these guidelines:

- Manage your online content as though your boss will read or view all of it.
- Spamming is a definite no-no, as it can irrevocably damage your social capital.
- Keep your romantic break-ups and get-togethers in private forums (i.e., email, IMs or phone calls).
- Avoid posting political or religious diatribes, or links to similar editorial content.
- Quite obviously, don't ever complain about anything work-related: clients, co-workers, your boss, or your job.
- Make sure never to post sensitive or confidential company information.

Don't be the "Reply All" guy. You know who we're talking about: the self-satisfied guy who relentlessly hits "Reply All" on every group email sent within your company. While Facebook's Wall is a fun place to leave publicly displayed messages, or a bit of witty banter, don't use it to make specific social plans. Your Wall invitation to meet a co-worker for drinks after work may inadvertently insult others who are not included. Unless you're including everyone, use Facebook's private messaging feature for social planning.

Watch your tone. It's important to keep a polite and measured tone when using social networks like Facebook--especially when your co-workers are friends. As a general rule, say things you'd generally feel comfortable saying at work; conversely, avoid posting inside jokes, sarcastic humor or coded comment that may potentially exclude or insult others.

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