

And the clocks strike thirteen

Why you should worry about social networking websites

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It's not if, but when
It's not when, but who
It's not how,
but how much

"I think students have the view that Facebook is their space and that the adult world doesn't know about it. But the adult world is starting to come in."

Mark W. Smith,
asst. vice chancellor,
Washington University in St. Louis

What is the Problem

When Aldus Huxley and George Orwell wrote their tales of society gone to extremes in the mid 20th century, the future we live in today with the internet and its most recent hot item – social networking -- would seem quite reasonable. Social networking websites are rapidly evolving into the bastard child of *1984* and *Brave New World*. Big Brother is enabled by the voluntary gift of personal information, resulting in a desensitization to privacy. As it continues, we become more and more of a collective and controlled by drowning in a sea of irrelevant information. At its conclusion, a death by excess, pleasure, information and data – more, more, more.

Social networking is the perfect marriage of the fears that drove the author's classic novels. There is one major difference. Big Brother doesn't have to invade our privacy; we volunteer for it with all sorts of personal data on-line. We subject the rest of the group to peer pressure to join into the collective. The result is a culture consumed with the trivial, overwhelmed with vast amounts of information which clutters what is truly important.

The end result is on display every day on-line. From the reasonably innocent tracking of student's days through break-fast postings, classroom schedules and nighttime revelry to the extremes of team bonding gone wild featured on BadJocks.com, the ever-increasing amount of personal data available on line is terribly shocking.

Is it My Problem?

Northwestern, Wake Forest, Elon, Iowa and others will tell you it is. If we are to become the crafters of the public image of our institutions – more than the SID office – we must also become the protectors of our reputations. Even if the media is not using this information, it effects our institutions in many ways – recruiting, donors, public good will.

Privacy has gone from a right to a commodity, and we trade it away to an increasingly invasive media. Cameras in the locker room, on the team bus, all-access – we have allowed the last bastions of collegiate sports to become breached. While attempting to protect personal privacy, the current and coming generations of college students are giving up far more details than we as public relations professionals deem appropriate. It makes a farce of the Buckley Amendment and other federal and state regulations designed to protect student records

It is also our responsibility as educators to inform our students of the real-world risks of their actions. The indiscretions of youth are no longer shared among friends, or the private secrets of an

individual. The teenage diary is no longer hidden under the bed. They quickly become part of their permanent record, more accessible than their transcripts and grades. Finally, predatory individuals can discover a handful of details to give themselves the leg-up in gaining trust and in turn access to student-athletes. They may be the runners for agents. They may be phishing for identity theft information. They may be informants for bookmakers. They may be sexual predators.

Tales from the Darkside

This is a very quick list of some of the most recent SNW headlines.

March 2005: Oklahoma students investigated by Secret Service

Spring 2005: Ole Miss judicial board investigates group dedicated to sleeping with a particular professor

May 2005: Two swimmers dismissed from LSU

Fall 2005: Openly gay student is expelled from a private Christian school, largely based on Facebook entries

Spring 2006: SEC member has entire team mounting group dedicated to their coaches lies

March 2006: MySpace used by perps to get acquainted with a woman; then used by police to arrest six men in connection with her rape and robbery

April 2006: BadJocks.Com discovers photographs posted by dozens of college and university team hazing events, rocks sports world

May 2006: UW-Whitewater students arrested for possession of stolen property

June 2006: The latest in blogs

www.thencaaisweakenhazing.blogspot.com

"We're dealing with a generation of students who are so used to the Internet and so used to putting anything on it, whether it's blogs or making their personal lives public, that they lose perspective."

Shawn Presley, Kenyon College

Why Do They Do It?

Egocasting is one term coined by academics to describe the desire of the current generation to create and project on-line personalities. It allows students to find persons with similar interests and tastes.

SNW represent a generational paradigm shift. Remember those interesting lists about seniors – they grew up without a cassette tapes, rotary phones or busy signals; they have always had cable television – the youth of America can barely remember life without the internet. They have a trust in the internet that is unmatched by all age groups.

PC Magazine points out these chilling research results:

*.. One in five teenagers think it is safe to share personal information on-line.

* .. 45% of teens have been asked personal information by someone they don't know

* .. 79% admit they aren't careful enough when sharing information on-line

Recent CBS story, the subject says "I really don't think employers should be basing their opinion on me on Facebook."

Types of Social Networking Websites

The wonderful world of SNW breaks down into several basic types.

Friend Lists: MySpace, Friendster, Facebook, LiveJournal, Xanga

Share Content: Flickr, YouTube, Zoto, Grouper, Photobucket

Face-to-Face: Airtroductions, Couplets, Reunion.com, eHarmony

Networking: Plaxo, Linkdin, Tribe.net

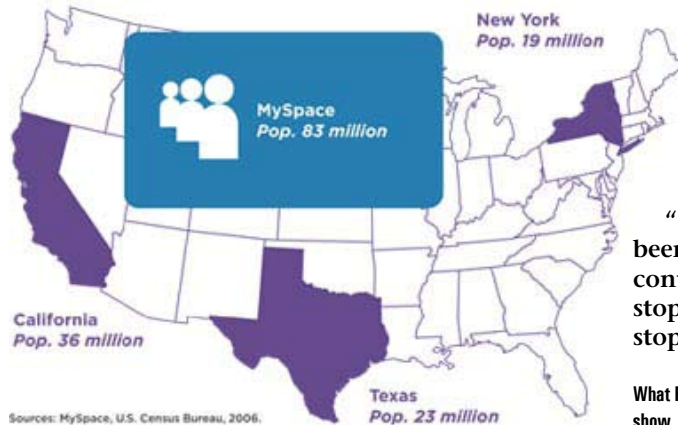
Goal-Oriented: Mom Network, PeerTrainer

Hip Stuff: Spout, LibraryThing, del.icio.us

It is important to note: what we're not talking about here are the sucker fish parasites that live off SNWs: the Blogs

THE STATE OF MYSPACE

Currently, the number of MySpace registered users exceeds the combined populations of the three most populous states: California, Texas, and New York. Its 83 million users even exceed the entire U.S. population in 1900 (76 million).



Sources: MySpace, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

"It's a runaway beer truck, out of control -- cannot be stopped, will not be stopped."

What Regis Philburn said about his show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, certainly applies here.

The Scope of the SNW

Recent reports show over 7 million users from over 2,600 colleges are involved with Facebook. BusinessWeek, March 2006, reported that Facebook turned down \$750 million offer, experts estimate a value of \$2 billion; the 7th highest trafficked website on the internet; Viacom considered top suitor. MySpace.com selling to NewsCorp for \$580 million in November 2005; ranked second on the internet only to Yahoo!

The State of MySpace is larger than the populations of California, New York and Texas – combined. Not unlike the internet itself, you cannot ignore it. While it is a fad with tremendous growth in the past year – page views up 439% in the past year – it is likely that the concept – not unlike instant messaging – will live with us into the foreseeable future.

On the Internet, There Are No Secrets

When asked, the vast majority of participants have no idea how wide-open their supposedly private information is on the web. Unless one takes the extreme measures of utilizing off-shore servers and sophisticated masking schemes, everything you post is recorded – cached in computer terms – and your anonymity is wafer thin at best. The administrators of any on-line service know your IP address, and are required in many cases to maintain records of IP traffic.

Using Facebook as an example, anyone with .edu addressing can get full access to profiles. Those people include teammates, coaches, administrators and alumni. It includes the campus police, the judicial board and your professors. It includes the media. There are services that will sell potential employers a report of web activity of an individual, accessing SNWs. The need for these work-arounds to gain personality intelligence dissolves as Facebook discovers a new audience: corporations. Within a month of starting the program, 4000 corporations, including the heavy weights like Microsoft, Oracle, jumped on-board to get marketing access to the collegiate crowd.

While Facebook security is not good, MySpace is wide open, as are many of the peer-to-peer sharing sites like Flickr and YouTube.

EULAs – I Agreed to What?

There is nothing free on the internet. In that long, legal document that you clicked "I Agree" to for access – the End User's Legal Agreement – are things you never intended. By joining Facebook, you are granting ownership – copyright – to all the postings. You are guaranteeing that you are the sole owner of the material posted, and if not, you are liable for any copyright violations. You have also signed over privacy rights to the use of the data collected in marketing.

There are other types of information collected at Facebook, including typical cookies – information collected about your browsing habits in the web site – but also this vague third kind of information: **"Facebook also collects information about you from other sources such as newspapers and instant messaging services. This information is gathered regardless of your use of the web site."**

If you want to step off into the world of the black helicopters, some of the venture capital in Facebook have links to CIA and DARPA. More realistic, however, are the ties to something much more easy to grasp than Big Brother: Big Beer, Big Snack and Big Soda. The marketing conglomerate Interpublic Group is seeking to conclude a \$10 million deal with Facebook that will provide display advertising, but also access to Facebook user data.

Bans

Kent announced by August 1 all athletes have to pull down their social networking profiles. Grambling State and University of New Mexico have campus-wide blocks on SNW. Many SEC schools block SNW in the athletic academic centers. This won't stop all activity, but it will cut down on the self-inflicted problems, the data mining and provide some level of positive control. It also plugs one hole in digital asset management.

Understand that the IT professionals will tell you that bans on internet access and blocking and filtering programs ultimately will not work with teenagers. There are several websites devoted to the means of hacking the procedures implemented at universities like Grambling or New Mexico.

There are legal ramifications as the ACLU Ohio is hinting it will challenge Kent. Bans or limits have become the cause celebre among campus newspaper editorial pages. Finally, your campus legal council will not want it likely in fear of lawsuit.

I've Got My Rights

Really. What Kent proposes with a hard policy, and dozens of other universities achieved by means of soft enforcement through coaches and administrators has met with adverse reactions from students, free-speech activists and the legal community. If we cannot impose participation bans upon our athletes in these voluntary social activities, then we need to think really hard about the existing encroachments on civil liberties.

We do not allow student-athletes to have free association with certain individuals – boosters, gamblers, agents. We routinely test them for substances that are not illegal to use or possess. We limit their ability to speak freely on certain subjects or to certain organizations. All of these restrictions are imposed upon athletes by a voluntary private agency – remember, the violation of NCAA regulations is not breaking the law. Consider the numerous team rules we invoke – dress codes, cell phone bans, iPod limits – that impede free expression.

"An individual's right to privacy belongs to the individual. If the individual waives a portion for some reason (such as joining Facebook), then they've waived it."

James Devine,
associate dean
School of Law at Missouri.

Beware the Blogs

All the lock downs and bans will not prevent problems. They will happen. The proliferation of technology and the "Pro-Am Revolution" opens the door to an infinite number of media, all watching and waiting. High profile athletes, caught on video or photos, appear in the most unusual places, from Deadspin.com to Playboy.com.

Everyone wants additional content, insider knowledge, an edge in coverage. SNW provide it for free, and with a complete lack of need for confirmation. It is self-sourced – the ultimate sourcing – for media. If it was a joke, an exaggeration or a falsehood, it is the fault of the poster, not the media – Facebook rights, public usage style.

What's driving the blogs and the boards? Call it the Internet Effect – a transfer of power from the producer to the consumer that democratizes information and cuts out the middle man – in this case, traditional media or even the University official sources – which provides instant access to anything.

The majority of universities which have dealt with SNW are imposing soft bans on participation. They are monitored by coaches or administrators with standing orders to force student-athletes to remove anything they deem objectionable. It may not be the physical prohibition of Kent toward participation, but it is none the less.

Few universities allow unmoderated chat and discourage or ban participation on sports or team oriented internet boards. Does the department have a non-disclosure policy regarding team activities? This is a standard business practice that has not reached the campus. Consider formalizing the policy regarding these other forms of expression. If your institution has not faced this situation, you have not dismissed a young coach or staff member or faced a nasty transfer.

The University has Rights Too

All those photos taken from the official campus website – that's about as legal as pirating music and videos. We prohibit the use of our marks and images without expressed written consent. Part of this falls under the "misappropriation of likeness" tort law, and makes one subject to legal action.

Ultimately, the problem is the public image of these athletes. We do have a right to control it on behalf of the institution. Participation on intercollegiate athletic teams – varsity and club – is a privilege, not a right. That is well established. The unfortunate reality is with the exception of their own children, close friends or relatives, no one in the public, the media or law enforcement are terribly concerned with the public behavior of students at the University of Arkansas. How many students are arrested each year for public intoxication or underage drinking? How many fraternity or sorority members are disciplined for hazing incidents? How many are caught on academic fraud, theft of property or illegal drugs? How many make the front page – only the famous, which on most campus are the athletes.

Management

Freedom comes with responsibility. They can't help themselves, however, and whatever restrictions will be violated. It is important to make sure the team rules are clear on how items discovered on-line will be handled. Know what your campus computer usage policies include about the impact of SNW. Cornell has a notable example. There are plenty of individuals posting information on SNW from the college computing and administration perspective. Fred Stutzman's post on 10 rules for university administrators regarding Facebook. Find it at chimprawk.blogspot.com/2006/01/how-university-administrators-should.html

SEC SOCIAL ONLINE NETWORK POLICY

- Be mindful that online content is not private and that there could be long-term ramifications.
- Don't post personal information (cell phone, address, class schedule) for safety reasons.
- Online communication puts one at greater risk for stalking.
- Consider that your coach, teammates, family and even future employers may review your site.
- Do not participate in or post inappropriate photographs or other content.
- Refrain from affiliating yourself with topics that are potentially offensive or degrading.
- Do not post comments about fellow student-athletes, coaches, administration or faculty from your institution or other institutions.
- Fans from opposing teams have downloaded images or information and used it to taunt or humiliate during a contest.

Education

Regardless of position regarding bans or limits, it is the duty of every institution to educate about the risks of SNW.

The Embarrassment Rule

This is an outgrowth of the Grandma-ma Rule we teach our athletes during media training. Anything you wouldn't stand up in the campus quad and shout or put on a poster on the dorm room door should not be used in a Facebook.

SAAC meetings

It is important to get the message in front of the campus athlete leadership, and meeting with this group ahead of general sessions with all athletes is important to establish buy-in and understanding.

SID office media sessions

As a part of LifeSkills, I met with our athletes at a voluntary session this spring; it will be a mandatory all department meeting at fall orientation. We also add more specific coverage of the risks of self-inflicted problems with our teams during media training.

Team sessions

Incorporate this into your annual meetings with teams and staffs regarding media policies and procedures.

Conference support

There is strength in numbers, and many of these issues are best attacked in the collective of the league. In this way, one school is not pitted against another. The SEC made the following addition to the student-athlete media policy at the spring meetings. These guidelines are a great start if you have not considered a policy.

Athletic department policies

If your department does not have a policy regarding use of proprietary information, it needs one. Also, in the enforcement or grievance policy of the student-athlete handbook, how is the "evidence" of on-line material noted. As a result of traditional website problems in the late 1990s, the following was added to our student-athlete handbook:

EQUAL MEDIA ACCESS

It is highly unethical to favor one media outlet or one form of media in giving out information. ***This also includes the use of personal internet website to make comments about yourself, your teammates, your team or other Lady Razor-back athletes or teams. To insure equal access, personal websites created by athletes, coaches, or staff may not use any proprietary information gathered about the Women's Athletic Department and may not use the official marks of the University of Arkansas.*** Any major policy statement, signing or announcement will be provided to all regular media outlets simultaneously through the WCO. Staff and student-athletes are discouraged from commenting prior to such releases to ensure fair play.

Today, it looks clairvoyant.

Liability

The debate is wide open regarding the use of internet postings in matters of administrative or legal proceedings. At best, the participants are self-incriminating – consider the Ohio State students busted for their role in charging the field after a football game this past year. With conference fines to the institution reaching \$25,000 for playing area incursions by fans, expect the guilty to be pursued on-line.

This is a campus hot topic as many institutions have run from any association with the draconian aspects of using SNW as a tool for investigation. However, the feds haven't. States typically haven't either. Just because the campus judicial system or police department turn a blind eye doesn't mean that others will.

“We live in a world now where a future Supreme Court nominee is just going to get Googled to death.”

Kenneth Elmore,
dean of students,
Boston University

“They come in all but-toned up, their clothing is meticulous, they spend years building this resume, and this person that’s sitting there is almost entirely different than the person posting on those web sites.”

Tim DeMello,
internet job service,
on CBS News

“A lot of it makes me thing, what kind of judgment does this person have. Why are you allowing this to viewed publicly, effectively, or semi-publicly.”

Brad Karsh,
president, consulting
firm in Chicago area
in NYT

There is a distinct difference between hunting and gathering. The UW-Whitewater example is clearly using the Facebook for surveillance. Ohio State sought information after the fact. Public image and information gathering in the public place has been increasing every year – do you think those cameras at intersections are only for red light enforcement? The major difference here again – you and your students volunteered for it.

Athletes have certainly lost scholarships and been disciplined for statements against coaches and teammates. Consider the legal aspects of these postings. They are subject to the same standards for libel or defamation of character. Taking photos of room mates asleep in their room or insinuations about sexual preferences are actionable invasions of privacy. At the same time, pictures of your athletes plastered in a public place are not necessarily invasions of privacy.

The Internet Lasts Forever

The return of Bobby Knight outtakes on one of the sports blog websites should serve as a graphic reminder that in the digital age nothing goes away. While making darn sure who has your images and other assets is important, the most dangerous threat in this persistence of memory is the method by which the internet is indexed. In the past, the local service provider or the hosting service kept backups of data. Today, Google and the macro search tools scan and save the internet daily – creating a cache of data. What caching means is that something that might appear for only a day or two before being pulled is never really deleted. It lives in the massive cache of the Googleplex. In terms of scale, Google is working on finishing an IT complex that is rumored to have numbers of servers in the 10s of thousands. You can get information removed from the Google cache, but the bureaucracy involved is something only the federal government could match. Remember, once posted, eternally available.

There is Such a Thing as Too Much Information

Quite chilling that while the athletic department takes great pains to protect the student’s privacy, to provide them with a zone of privacy away from the fans – unlike the all-access life of a professional athlete – they often volunteer dangerous levels of information in on-line profiles. This is my personal mission, and where my passion on this issue comes from. Several on-line IT media persons have clucked loudly at how backward the Kent athletic department’s policy is, and how you can get a lot of that information on any student. However, this is much more than email addresses and screen names – cell phone numbers, home addresses, personal details and now class schedules. It is a stalker’s supermarket. Anyone who doesn’t understand the danger of over-zealous fans has never dropped a touchdown pass or committed a game-losing error.

Let me be very clear. If you have not experienced a stalking situation in your sports information job, you are reasonably new to the business or are the SID of the University of Lollypopland.

Counter Intelligence

So why not foil all those attempts by the man by posting fake photos of one’s squeaky clean lifestyle. Clever, but far more likely

that social networking sites are used to appropriate other person’s identities or to launch attacks on individuals. For example, NBA scouts inquired with one SEC men’s basketball player about the comments he made on his Facebook. He never had a Facebook account. The internet urban legend tells of students at one Pac-10 school using internet encounters to bait a rival player with the promise of a date. Students of a certain ACC school had their psych-out sheets on opponent players posted – showing both the students use of internet research and of course being revealed through the internet.

There’s another side to the counter-intelligence argument. We google every recruit, every new coach. In part, this is to make our press releases more complete and accurate. The unspoken reason – to avoid an O’Leary-like overstatement in a resume makes it into our work. Plus, one wants to know what the media and others can discover on your athletes.

Consequences

In the real world, people lose jobs over blogs and internet postings.

The news is filled with recent reports – from CBS Evening News to the Chronicle of Higher Education to your local media – of how recruiters for businesses and personnel departments are regularly searching internet profiles for more information about the people they seek to hire. Boasts of sexual prowess, recreational drug activities and extreme political and personal statements are a factor in the hiring process.

A consequences example from the internet entitled “Can You Ever Really Leave?” Here is a snippet:

Suppose you apply for a job 15 years from now. The employer uses a new product that matches the information on a candidate’s resume with information in online archives dating back to the late 1990s. Automated data significance analytic modules pluck out the bits of data that match characteristics the employer has specified for screening candidates. Unfortunately, when you were 17, you and your friends took a 100 mile-per-hour joyride, with you in the driver’s seat. Nothing bad happened, no one was hurt, there was no ticket. You weren’t even drunk. Your friend joked about it in a comment he posted on your MySpace site. You commented back. Now in 2021, the person you’d like to work for is reading those comments and asks the computer for more information. It shows you weren’t always the most sensible person and found risky behavior exciting. “Let’s look at the next candidate” the manager decides.

... And I Feel Fine

While all this gives the impression it’s the end of the world as we know it, let me recommend to you Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In his study of the impact of television on American culture, Postman writes: “The problem, in any case, does not reside in what people watch. The problem is in that we watch. The solution must be found in how we watch.” He continued, “For no medium is excessively dangerous if its users understand what its dangers are” He believed in the end that like H.G. Wells, “we are in a race between education and disaster.”

Sourcing disclaimer: While this composition is the work of the author, there are numerous sources for this data, mostly from non-traditional sources posted on-line. As these are supplemental notes to my PowerPoint presentation, they are not annotated in the traditional footnote style. The information is presented to enhance the presentation by elaborating portions that time will not allow. Passages have been taken whole from sources, and citations can be noted if needed on request. Bill Smith

What Can You Do Today

**Get a Facebook account – and for every coach to protect their names
Take a look at what is there – do your counter-intelligence work
Prepare to educate your publics – athletes, coaches and administration
Remember, it’s not if, but when;
the clocks have already struck thirteen**