

# **Management is On-line Too: Basic Precautions for Online Activism**



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## Fact Sheet 7: Workplace Privacy

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### Employee Monitoring: Is There Privacy in the Workplace?

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#### 1. Introduction

Employers want to be sure their employees are doing a good job, but employees don't want their every sneeze or trip to the water cooler logged. That's the essential conflict of workplace monitoring.

New technologies make it possible for employers to monitor many aspects of their employees' jobs, especially on telephones, computer terminals, through electronic and voice mail, and when employees are using the Internet. Such monitoring is virtually unregulated. Therefore, unless company policy specifically states otherwise (and even this is not assured), your employer may listen, watch and read most of your workplace communications.

Recent surveys have found that a majority of employers monitor their employees. They are motivated by concern over litigation and the increasing role that electronic evidence plays in lawsuits and government agency investigations.

A 2005 survey by the American Management Association found that three-fourths of employers monitor their employees' web site visits in order to prevent inappropriate surfing. And 65% use software to block connections to web sites deemed off limits for employees. About a third track keystrokes and time spent at the keyboard. Just over half of employers review and retain electronic mail messages.

Over 80% of employers disclose their monitoring practices to employees. And most employers have established policies governing Internet use, including e-mail use (84%) and personal Internet use (81%). For additional findings from the AMA's 2005 survey,

visit [www.amanet.org/press/amanews/ems05.htm](http://www.amanet.org/press/amanews/ems05.htm).

## 2. Telephone Monitoring

### Can my employer listen to my phone calls at work?

In most instances, yes. For example, employers may monitor calls with clients or customers for reasons of quality control. However, when the parties to the call are all in California, state law requires that they be informed that the conversation is recorded or monitored by either putting a beep tone on the line or playing a recorded message. (California Public Utilities Commission General Order 107-B, [www.cpuc.ca.gov/Published/Graphics/567.pdf](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/Published/Graphics/567.pdf)) Not every business is aware of this requirement, so your calls might still be monitored without a warning. Federal law, which regulates phone calls with persons outside the state, does allow unannounced monitoring for business-related calls. (See Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 USC 2510, et. seq., [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode).) An important exception is made for personal calls. Under federal case law, when an employer realizes the call is personal, he or she must immediately stop monitoring the call. (*Watkins v. L.M. Berry & Co.*, 704 F.2d 577, 583 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1983)) However, when employees are told not to make personal calls from specified business phones, the employee then takes the risk that calls on those phones may be monitored.

**Privacy Tip:** The best way to ensure the privacy of your personal calls made at work is to use your own mobile phone, a pay phone, or a separate phone designated by your employer for personal calls.

### If I wear a headset, are my conversations with co-workers subject to monitoring?

Yes. The conversations you have with co-workers are subject to monitoring by your employer in the same way that your conversations with clients or customers are. If you wear a headset, you should use the same care you would if you were talking to a customer or client on the phone. Some headsets have "mute" buttons which allow you to turn off the transmitter when you are not using the telephone.

### Can my employer obtain a record of my phone calls?

Yes. Telephone numbers dialed from phone extensions can be recorded by a device called a pen register. It allows the employer to see a list of phone numbers dialed by your extension and the length of each call. This information may be used to evaluate the amount of time spent by employees with clients.

Employers often use pen registers to monitor employees with jobs in which telephones are used extensively. Frequently, employees are concerned that the information gathered from the pen register is unfairly used to evaluate their efficiency with clients without consideration of the quality of service.

## 3. Computer Monitoring

If you have a computer terminal at your job, it may be your employer's window into your workspace. There are several types of computer monitoring.

1. Employers can use computer software that enables them to see what is on the screen or stored in the employees' computer terminals and hard disks. Employers can monitor Internet usage such as web-surfing and electronic mail.

People involved in intensive word-processing and data entry jobs may be subject to keystroke monitoring. Such systems tell the manager how many keystrokes per hour each employee is performing. It also may inform employees if they are above or below the standard number of keystrokes expected. Keystroke monitoring has been linked with health problems including stress disabilities and physical problems like carpal tunnel syndrome.

2. Another computer monitoring technique allows employers to keep track of the amount of time an employee spends away from the computer or idle time at the terminal.

#### **Is my employer allowed to see what is on my terminal while I am working?**

Generally, yes. Since the employer owns the computer network and the terminals, he or she is free to use them to monitor employees. Employees are given some protection from computer and other forms of electronic monitoring under certain circumstances. Union contracts, for example, may limit the employer's right to monitor. Also, public sector employees may have some minimal rights under the United States Constitution, in particular the Fourth Amendment which safeguards against unreasonable search and seizure.

There may be some additional rights for employees in California given specific statutes of that state. See the paper by Los Angeles attorneys John Caragozian and Donald Warner, Jr., titled "[Privacy Rights of Employees Using Workplace Computers in California](#)," published in 2000.

#### **How can I tell if I am being monitored at my terminal?**

Most computer monitoring equipment allows employers to monitor without the employees' knowledge. However, some employers do notify employees that monitoring takes place. This information may be communicated in memos, employee handbooks, union contracts, at meetings or on a sticker attached to the computer.

In most cases, employees find out about computer monitoring during a performance evaluation when the information collected is used to evaluate the employee's work.

### **4. Electronic Mail and Voice Mail**

#### **Is electronic mail private? What about voice mail?**

In most cases, no. If an electronic mail (e-mail) system is used at a company, the employer owns it and is allowed to review its contents. Messages sent within the company as well as those that are sent from your terminal to another company or from another company to you can be subject to monitoring by your employer. This includes web-based email accounts such as Yahoo and Hotmail as well as instant messages. The same holds true for voice mail systems. In general, employees should not assume that these activities are not being monitored and are private. Several workplace privacy court cases have been decided in the employer's favor. See for example:

- **Bourke v. Nissan**, [www.loundy.com/CASES/Bourke\\_v\\_Nissan.html](http://www.loundy.com/CASES/Bourke_v_Nissan.html)
- **Smyth v. Pillsbury**, [www.loundy.com/CASES/Smyth\\_v\\_Pillsbury.html](http://www.loundy.com/CASES/Smyth_v_Pillsbury.html)
- **Shoars v. Epson**, <http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/mchon/web/Cases/shoars.html>

#### **When I delete messages from my terminal, are they still in the system?**

Yes. Electronic and voice mail systems retain messages in memory even after they have been deleted. Although it appears they are erased, they are often permanently "backed up" on magnetic tape, along with other important data from the computer system.

#### **My employer's electronic mail system has an option for marking messages as "private." Are those messages protected?**

In most cases, no. Many electronic mail systems have this option, but it does not guarantee your messages are kept confidential. An exception is when an employer's written electronic mail policy states that messages marked "private" are kept confidential. Even in this situation, however, there may be exceptions. (See *Smyth v. Pillsbury*.)

#### **Is there ever a circumstance in which my messages are private?**

Some employers use encryption to protect the privacy of their employees' electronic mail. Encryption involves scrambling the message at the sender's terminal, then unscrambling the message at the terminal of the receiver. This ensures the message is read only by the sender and his or her intended recipient. While this system prevents co-workers and industrial "spies" from reading your electronic mail, your employer may still have access to the unscrambled messages.

**Are my text messages on an employer-provided cell phone private?**

In an opinion issued on June 18, 2008, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that employers must have either a warrant or the employee's permission to see cell phone text messages that are not stored by the employer or by someone the employer pays for storage. While e-mail typically is stored on a company's own servers, text messages usually are stored by cell phone companies and the employer does not directly pay for their storage. That distinction formed the basis for the court's decision. (*Quon v. Arch Wireless, et al.* 529 Fed3d ((9th Cir 2008). Petition for rehearing en banc denied January 27, 2009, <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2009/02/06/0755282o.pdf>

## 5. Workplace Privacy Protections

**What about my employer's promises regarding e-mail and other workplace privacy issues. Are they legally binding?**

Not necessarily. Usually, when an employer states a policy regarding any issue in the workplace, including privacy issues, that policy is legally binding. Policies can be communicated in various ways: through employee handbooks, via memos, and in union contracts. For example, if an employer explicitly states that employees will be notified when telephone monitoring takes place, the employer generally must honor that policy. There are usually exceptions for investigations of wrong-doing. If you are not already aware of your employer's workplace privacy policies, it is a good idea to become informed.

In *Smyth v. Pillsbury*, the employee's termination was upheld by the court, even though the company had a policy of allowing e-mail use for personal communications. In this case, the employee had sent messages to co-workers that were deemed highly inappropriate for workplace communications. (*Smyth v. Pillsbury*, C.A. NO. 95-5712, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Jan.18, 1996, Decided, Jan. 23, 1996, Filed. [www.Loundy.com/CASES/Smyth\\_v\\_Pillsbury.html](http://www.Loundy.com/CASES/Smyth_v_Pillsbury.html) )

**Are there any laws that deal with workplace privacy?**

Currently there are very few laws regulating employee monitoring. If you are concerned about this issue, contact your federal legislators, especially the members of the House and Senate Labor committees in Congress. (See PRC Fact Sheet 18 "Privacy in Cyberspace," [www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs18-cyb.htm](http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs18-cyb.htm).)

**Are there organizations that assist employees regarding workplace privacy?**

Yes. There are several groups that are actively involved in workplace monitoring issues and that advocate stronger government regulation of employee monitoring activities.

- **National Work Rights Institute**  
166 Wall St.  
Princeton, NJ 08540  
(609) 683-0313  
Web: [www.workrights.org](http://www.workrights.org)
- **9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women**  
207 East Buffalo St., #211  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
(414) 274-0925  
Hotline (800) 522-0925  
Web: [www.9to5.org](http://www.9to5.org)

- **Workplace Fairness**  
[www.workplacefairness.org](http://www.workplacefairness.org)  
Affiliated with the National Employment Lawyers Association, [www.nela.org](http://www.nela.org)
- **American Civil Liberties Union**  
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004-2400  
(212) 549-2500  
Publications Ordering: 1-800-775-ACLU (2258)  
Web: [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also has information related to workplace privacy issues that are not discussed in this fact sheet. Some of the issues of growing concern involve psychological testing, drug testing, polygraph or lie-detector testing and off-the-job surveillance of employees. Visit the ACLU's Web site at [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org).

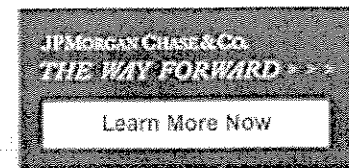
Labor groups are taking a stronger interest in workplace monitoring. If your union represents employees' interests regarding workplace monitoring, please contact the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse so we can include information in this publication. Contact Us:  
[http://www.privacyrights.org/about\\_us.htm#contact](http://www.privacyrights.org/about_us.htm#contact)

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**Fact.** Bank lending has remained stable,  
while securitized markets have collapsed.



**BusinessWeek**

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MARCH 27, 2006

WORKING LIFE

## You Are What You Post

**Bosses are using Google to peer into places job interviews can't take them**

One drizzly night in Seattle in 2001, Josh Santangelo was hanging out on his computer, clicking through an obscure Web site called Fray. After reading a post that asked if anyone had ever had a bad drug trip, the 22-year-old straightened up and began banging away. "Actually yes, about 36 hours ago..." he wrote. "Two Rolls Royces and four hits of liquid later, I was at a Playboy-themed birthday party with a head as dense as a brick.... It's hard to say no," he explained, "when a pretty girl is popping things into your mouth."

That was back when Santangelo was an up-all-night raver in giant pants and flame-red hair. Today he's a Web development guy with a shaved head who shows up at meetings on time and in khakis. Clients have included such family-friendly enterprises as Walt Disney (**DIS**) and Nickelodeon, as well as Starbucks (**SBUX**), AT&T, and Microsoft (**MSFT**). You can read all about it if you Google (**GOOG**) him, right alongside the bold-faced entry: "Josh Santangelo on drugs and..."

Oh, the horror. Shortly after Santangelo's late-night overshare, famed blogger Jason Kottke linked to it on his site. That bagged so much traffic that five years later the "drug dump" still ranks No. 7 out of a total 92,600 Google hits that come up when you type in Santangelo's name. He says with a half-laugh that so far "it hasn't hurt me too bad," but he fears for the MySpacing, YouTubing, Facebooking masses - the bloggers and vloggers (video bloggers) who fail to realize that there is no such thing as an eraser on the Internet. "I see people do that sort of thing now, and I think: 'Oh man, that could come back and bite you.'"

Do you give good Google? It's the preoccupation du jour as Google hits become the new Q ratings for the creative class. Search engines provide endless opportunities for ego surfing, Google bombing (influencing traffic so it spikes a particular site), and Google juicing (enhancing one's "brand" in the era of micro-celebrity). Follow someone too closely and you could be accused of being a Google stalker. Follow yourself too closely: Google narcissist.

But Googling people is also becoming a way for bosses and headhunters to do continuous and stealthy background checks on employees, no disclosure required. Google is an end run around discrimination laws, inasmuch as employers can find out all manner of information - some of it for a nominal fee - that is legally off limits in interviews: your age, your marital status, the value of your house (along with an aerial photograph of it), the average net worth of your neighbors, fraternity pranks, stuff you wrote in college, liens, bankruptcies, political affiliations, and the names and ages of your children. Former Delta Air Lines (**DAL**) flight attendant Ellen Simonetti lost her job because she posted suggestive pictures of herself in uniform on her "Queen of Sky" blog - even though she didn't mention the airline by name. "We need Sarbanes and Oxley to come up with a Fair Google Reporting Act," says Brian Sullivan, CEO of recruitment firm Christian & Timbers. "I mean, what the hell do you do if there is stuff out there on Google that is unflattering or, God forbid, incorrect?"

Not a whole lot. That's because today there are two of you. There's the analog, warm-blooded version: the person who presses flesh at business conferences and interprets the corporate kabuki in meetings. Then there's the online you, your digital doppelgänger; that's the one that is growing larger and more impossible to control every day.

Because anyone, anywhere, at any time can say anything about you on the Web, reputations are scarily open-source. And because entire companies dedicate themselves to recording every inch of information on the Web, it's becoming difficult to unplug from the Google matrix, let alone make anything on the Internet go away. "This takes people's own agency out of how they want to present themselves," says Alice Marwick, a technology consultant and PhD candidate in New York University's Culture & Communications Dept. The Internet started out with avatars and anonymity. Now online and offline are bleeding together. "It's consolidating personal information into the aggregate," says Marwick, even though "our social practices haven't figured out how to keep up with the technology."

Search engines make it possible for employers to scour all manner of digital dirt to vet employees. Online profile company Ziggs.com



CEO Tim DeMello fired an intern after he discovered that on the intern's Facebook profile he divulged that while at Ziggs he would "spend most of my days screwing around on IM and talking to my friends and getting paid for it."

There's also the risk of having no hits at all. (Translation: You are not a player.) Or the risk of having one too many. For lawyers, Google is paradise, often delivering more damning information than the discovery process does. Employment attorney Eric C. Bellafronto was recently on the phone with a client who had an employee with a history of being MIA. The slacker's excuse that day was that he was in Arizona taking care of a sick grandmother. While talking to the client, Bellafronto Googled the suspected faker and up came the fact that he was in Sacramento, being arraigned in federal court.

#### "PEOPLE CAN SEE EVERYTHING"

Schools are warning parents about Google's danger to the MySpace generation, for whom the Internet functions as a virtual diary-meets-barstool confessional. Adolescents try on identities and new behaviors like sweaters. Only now they are trying them on in front of the world. A Pew Research survey found that more than half of all online teenagers are ripping, mixing, and burning their own content, usually placing their creations right alongside their names and photos. The teenagers on the "companies and co-workers" section of MySpace who are talking smack about employers like Blockbuster (**BBJ**), Target (**TGT**), and Gap (**GPS**) are clearly unaware of the implications. "People need to realize that this is like putting stuff up on the 6 o'clock news," says employment lawyer Garry G. Mathiason, a partner at San Francisco's Littler Mendelson. "Once you've opened the drapes, people can see everything. They can see your past life."

That's why Dave Fonseca, a senior at the University of Massachusetts, pulled his Facebook profile down in December. "Employers are looking at these things," he says. (It's easy for people to get passwords and noodle around on the site.) Fonseca even knows the verb for people who get fired for what they put on their Web sites: "dooce." The name comes from Dooce.com, the blog of Heather B. Armstrong, who got canned after writing about her job on her blog. Even Friendster, a social networking site that thrives on getting people to reveal everything about themselves, has been insistent on old-school discretion in-house. The company terminated esteemed engineer Joyce Park 18 months ago for mentioning Friendster on her blog, Troutgirl. The rumor on the Web was that the offending entry referred to Friendster's earlier sluggish performance. But the info was already widely known.

Oh, the irony.

By Michelle Conlin

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**SFGate**.com**Peeka-Boo**

Kathleen Parker, Washington Post Writers Group  
Monday, March 12, 2007

IT SEEMED like a good idea at the time.

How often have we all pasted that cartoon balloon over the mental image of a youthful indiscretion? Thank goodness no one had a camera, we might add.

Now everybody has a camera, and youthful indiscretions are captured for all time. And suddenly, we're not so young anymore.

The MySpace-Facebook-dot-com generation has come of age, and some are finding that their silly stunts have come back to haunt them as they enter the grown-up marketplace. Others are finding that their private moments are not so private after all.

Three young women featured anonymously in a recent Washington Post article told horror stories of their attempts to find jobs, only to discover that they may have been disqualified by online postings by virtual strangers. Gossip and graphics included.

One, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate and Yale law student who had gotten articles published in law journals, interviewed at 16 firms for a summer job but received no offers. How could that be?

It turned out that she and others had been discussed in not-so-flattering terms on an online message board, AutoAdmit, which is run by a third-year law student at the University of Pennsylvania and a 23-year-old insurance agent, according to the Post. The board boasts up to 1 million visitors a month, and postings can be anonymous.

And vicious.

Another woman featured in the Post story is a Yale law student and Fulbright scholar who graduated summa cum laude. Not only was she the subject of a derogatory AutoAdmit chat, but photographs of her were posted on a "hottest" law school student contest site with graphic discussions of her attributes.

Not everyone hates to be considered "hot," but this woman was afraid to go to the gym because visitors to the site were encouraged to take cell-phone pictures of her. Beware the chatterbox in the shower stall next door. Another young woman felt afraid when online chatter about her led to an anonymous sexual threat.

The tension between free speech and privacy is nothing new, but the debate has become more complicated by the explosion in video portability and networking Web sites. In today's uncivil

society, the stakes are high and the rules are low.

Invite anonymity to the mix and hostility finds release in the vacuum created when shame went missing.

Unfortunately for some, employers are now using the Internet to vet job candidates. They, too, can be privy to those just-for-fun college forays, as well as to commentary from those with an ax to grind.

The Post reported research showing that about half of U.S. hiring officials use the Internet to evaluate job applicants and that about one-third had denied employment based on material produced by an Internet search engine. Could it happen to you? Apparently, it could happen to anyone.

Today's college students frequently post their bios with photos on Facebook.com. Innocent and inexperienced in the realm of repercussions, they don't hesitate to display their silliest selves, clothed and often not.

The generation that was serenaded by Madonna and marinated in sexual imagery now dwells in a high-tech, freewheeling, sexually explicit environment where porn is the new risqué and everybody's gone wild.

Ivy League and other large universities frequently are home to sex magazines featuring students who say posing nude is "fun" and a "badge of honor," according to last Sunday's New York Times magazine. What's the big deal? "A body is a body is a body, and I'm proud of my body, and why not show my body?" asks Alecia Oleyourryk, co-founder of Boink, a "user-friendly porn" magazine produced by students at Boston University.

"It's not going to keep me from having a job."

Famous last words, perhaps.

It is true that a body is just a body, and everybody has one. But those who've lived awhile know that what we "knew" with certainty in our 20s isn't necessarily what we come to know in our 30s, 40s and 50s. When you sexualize and objectify yourself, it's asking a lot that others -- including future bosses -- refrain from doing the same.

Advice to the young: If you can't imagine your mother or father doing something, you probably shouldn't do it either. Your kids may remind you of that someday.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/03/12/EDGC7N734K1.DTL>

This article appeared on page **B - 7** of the San Francisco Chronicle



photos of me aren't particularly risque, so I'm not too bothered who can see my information. But if you pack your profile with rude quotes, if your status update regularly includes how drunk/stoned/fazy you are, and if the photos of you are ones you'd never want to be posted on the office noticeboard ... you might want to limit all of the information in your profile to friends only.

**Why Should I Bother?**

When an employer decides to check you out on Facebook prior to interviewing you, they won't be able to see your profile, photos of you, and so on. The first impression they get of you will be a professional one from the interview. Leaving your Facebook profile open to them is a bit like inviting them to come and nose around your home (when it's at its most untidy, with your stack of dodgy magazines left lying around...)

And if you doubt that employers do make these checks, here's food for thought from an article on "Facebook Can Ruin Your Life" from the Independent (a UK newspaper) - emphasis mine:

*At Cambridge, at least one don has admitted "discreetly" scanning applicants' pages - a practice now widespread in job recruitment. A survey released by Viadeo said that 62 per cent of British employers now check the Facebook, MySpace or Bebo pages of some applicants, and that a quarter had rejected candidates as a result. Reasons given by employers included concerns about "excess alcohol abuse", ethics and job "disrespect".*

Do you want to risk missing out on your dream job because of your Facebook profile?

**Step 2: Cleaning Up Your Profile**

You might not want to limit access to your profile to only your friends, if you use Facebook for a lot of networking. Or, you might have a lot of "friends" who've added you because they read your blog, or because they knew you in kindergarten: you never know when one of these friends might be a useful ally, a potential employer or mentor.

And although your profile might not contain anything too dreadful (such as admissions of just how you ended up leaving your previous job), things which seem perfectly innocuous could still cause employers to decide to pass on you. The recruitment site [www.onrec.com](http://www.onrec.com) offers ten top turn-offs for employers who are performing discreet background checks using Facebook and similar sites:

*Top ten turn-offs for employers on social networking websites*

1. References to drug abuse
2. Extremist / intolerant views, including racism, sexism
3. Criminal activity
4. Evidence of excessive alcohol consumption
5. Inappropriate pictures, including nudity
6. Foul language
7. Links to unsuitable websites
8. Lewd jokes
9. Silly email addresses
10. Membership of pointless / silly groups

And from the New Zealand Herald:

*Interestingly, employers were not just concerned about alcohol or drug use, or inappropriate photos. They also used the information posted to identify those with poor communication skills, and inaccurately stated qualifications. Bad mouthing of former employers and colleagues was also identified as a concern in a large number of cases.*

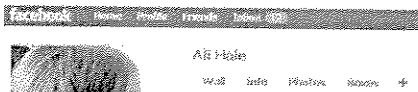
*So it's worth cleaning up your profile to get rid of anything that's not contributing to the impression you want to give to employers, business colleagues and other contacts - anything which undermines or contradicts your personal brand.*

I'm going to focus on two key areas that could be letting you down: "Your Info" and "Your Photos".

**Your Info**

Click on "Profile" in the top bar, then on "Info":

Have a good read through what's listed there. You might want to update old information (I'm awful at doing this...) You may need to self-censor some of your "favorite music" or "favorite movies", if you have somewhat extreme tastes in either. Think about who might read your profile here: if you're going for a job with a right-wing political or charity body, a long list of slasher/horror movies and death metal music might not go down too well, but it could be just the thing if you're trying to land a job with a design agency that prides itself on "alternative" styles and creating shocking, engaging concepts.



Some quick tips that might help you are:

- Get rid of any silly, profane or potentially bigoted (racist/exist/etc) group memberships
- Try to list some favorite books, not just films and music. Employers will be impressed if you look well-read.
- Make your Quotations ones which are funny/profound, not all lewd jokes that your friends made after a few drinks.
- Check for typos and spelling mistakes: these might seem unimportant to you, but they could be sending a negative impression to potential employers

Business

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Take a Survey, Get Paid

### Your Photos

Click onto the "Photos" tab. This will show *everything* which someone's tagged with your name. It's worth going through every single one, and untagging it if it's not something you want to be associated with! Again, use your own judgement here: an unflattering shot might be a disaster if you're trying to become a supermodel, but could be an actual asset if you're aiming for a career in stand-up comedy...

Click on the thumbnail to view a photo full-size, and click the "Remove tag" link next to your name (at the bottom, under the photo) to remove the tag - meaning snoopers can't find that photo of you:

For most of us, photos to look out for are:

- Photos where you look drunk/stoned/comatose (even if you were "just caught at a bad angle, honest")
- Photos containing a number of "unsuitable" looking friends
- Photos where someone's put a really dodgy caption about you (sadiy, employers may decide against you based not only on your profile, but on what your friends seem to be like).
- Any photos containing evidence of illegal or semi-illegal activity - especially if your employer or school could penalise you for it

### Why Should I Bother?

Current employers (or your university/school) may check up on your Facebook profile. The independent article mentioned the unfortunate case of:

*Kevin Colvin, an intern at Anglo Irish Bank, who told his employers he had a family emergency, but whose Facebook page revealed he had, in reality, been cavorting in drag at a Halloween party.*

Photographic evidence can also be used to catch student culprits:

*Oxford University proctors disciplined students after pictures of them dousing each other in shaving foam, flour and silly string in post-exam revelry were found on their Facebook pages.*

### Step 3: Keeping Your Profile Clean

Once you've limited access to your profile and cleaned it up, you need to keep it safe for work. In my last full time job, my boss was "friends" with a number of my co-workers: this calls for considerable caution! If you have parents who are paying your tuition fees, you might want to make sure your Facebook account gives the impression that you're making the most of their money (rather than partying constantly...)

Some good points to pause for thought are:

- When setting your status.** Do you really want to declare that "John thinks work SUCKS" or that "Jane is thinking of throwing a sickie?" Even something a bit less obvious, like moaning about a difficult client, could rebound badly on you.
- When uploading photos.** Is it really something you want your office colleagues to see? Or your mum?
- When commenting on other people's photos, wall, etc.** Think about what your words might convey to someone who wasn't in on the joke or the conversation. Would you look bigoted, illiterate or plain nasty?

It's also unwise to use Facebook while at work - your actions are time-stamped, so if your boss sees that you've been updating your account at 11am when you should've been hard at work, s/he's unlikely to be impressed.

### Why Should I Bother?

Thoughtless use of Facebook has led to people losing their jobs in the past (though this is usually due to admission of some serious wrong-doing, such as theft from the company). Even if you don't get sacked, you might have to face up to consequences.

I'll leave you with the cautionary tale of Kyle Doyle, a call center worker who pulled a sickie ... and bragged about it on Facebook:

*Kyle Doyle, a 21-year-old resolutions expert for telecommunications firm AAPT, bragged about his day off on the social networking site while telling his employer he was away for "medical reasons".*

*But he was found out when his boss spotted this Facebook profile update on the day in question, August 21: "Kyle Doyle is not going to work, f\*\*\* it I'm still trashed. SICKIE WOO!"*

So ... head on over to Facebook, and check out the employer-friendliness of your profile. Let us know what you decide to change (or whether you look squeaky-clean already) - but don't say anything too incriminating in the comments. Remember, bosses read Dumb Little Man too...