

Being digital

Social networking: is it for me?

1: Introduction

Are you tempted to try social networking but haven't yet dipped your toe in the water? Or have you signed up to networking sites but not used them actively and would like to get more out of them?

This activity aims to help you get started with social networking. It includes extracts from interviews with people who use social networking sites.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity you should be able to:

- decide if social networking is for you
- select the most appropriate networking site.

2: Social networking sites

Which social networks have you heard about? Facebook and Twitter are two of the most popular, but there are other networking sites that you might want to consider.

Read the extract on the next page, which comes from an audio interview with Michael and Katie. They describe the networking sites that they use. Think about the sites they describe and whether or not they would be useful to you.

Interview transcript

Speaker	Audio
Interviewer	Can you tell me which social networks you use at the moment?
Michael	I use Facebook quite a lot, I use Twitter a bit and I guess you would count SoundCloud as a social network as well, which is the music sharing site.
Interviewer	OK, and can you tell me what you use each of those for?
Michael	Facebook I use half for the standard Facebook thing of keeping up-to-date with friends and family and checking what people are doing and half for promoting local arts and music events to the wider public. Twitter I use to promote arts and music events as well and Sound Cloud just for sharing music we've created with the World.
Interviewer	Can you tell me which social networking sites you use?
Katie	I use several social networks and I use them for different purposes. So I use Facebook for staying in touch with friends in a social way. I use Twitter for professional networking with other people in my field. I also use LinkedIn for career-related networking, and I use Academia.Edu to list articles and presentations that I've done.

3: General, professional, or special interest?

You've read the descriptions that Michael and Katie gave about the social networking sites they use. They talked about popular sites like Facebook and Twitter, but they also mention some not so well-known networking sites.

General

Popular sites like Facebook and Twitter have a general appeal and are used by large numbers of people to keep in touch with friends and family, keep up-to-date, share information about events etc.

Professional

You may want to use social networking in your work life to make contact with people in your field and share information relevant to your role. For example, Katie uses LinkedIn and Academia.Edu.

Special interest

There are also social networking sites which focus on particular interests or themes. For example, Michael uses SoundCloud to publish and share his own music. There may be a special interest site relevant to you.

Stop here, and think about what you might want to use social networking sites for. Perhaps you want to keep in touch with friends and family, or maybe you want to use it in your professional life? You may have a hobby or interest and you would like to share this with like-minded people? You might want to make some notes before reading the feedback below.

Feedback

There is a wide range of networking sites and to make sure you select the right one you need to be clear about what you hope to achieve. We have provided a link to a list of social networking sites at the end of this activity so that you can explore the ones which may best meet your needs.

4: Benefits of social networking

By now you may have an idea of the type of social networking site that might be useful to you. But you may still not be sure what you might gain from social networking.

Katie and Michael use a range of different networking sites for different purposes. Now read the transcript from the rest of the interview. In it they describe the benefits of social networking. As you read, think about how this might be relevant to you, and what you might hope to gain.

Interview transcript

Speaker	Audio
Katie	<p>The main benefits are the way that they provide an easy way of keeping in touch with different groups of people. I do use them for different purposes.</p> <p>I find Facebook provides an easy way of keeping up-to-date with people I don't see that often. And I've also been able to re-establish contact with some old friends I'd lost contact with and I use the messaging facility quite a lot. I've also used it to set up and advertise social events.</p> <p>I use Twitter as I've mentioned for work related networking and keeping up-to-date with what's happening in my field and I sometimes find out things there first so it's a good way of keeping my finger on the pulse.</p> <p>LinkedIn is where I keep my career profile and again I've managed to establish contacts with other people in my field. I haven't yet used it to get a job but I do know people who have.</p> <p>Academia.Edu is where I provide details of my professional publications and conference presentations that I've given and again I've been able to make contact with some useful people through that means and there's some other people working in the same field as me that I follow and they follow me.</p>
Interviewer	What do you think the benefits are of these social networking sites?

Speaker	Audio
Michael	Well SoundCloud is the best example of that. You can get your music online really easily and share it with anyone who wants to hear it. Before you would have to upload things and format everything. With SoundCloud you can just upload the file and you can link to it and direct people to the link. So instead of having to mess around with record labels and stuff you can do stuff yourself.

5: Your use of social networks

These are some of the main benefits of social networking identified by Michael and Katie:

- keeping in touch with friends and family
- getting back in touch with people you have lost contact with
- promoting events
- sharing information, whether it be music or professional publications
- making contacts with other people in your line of work
- keeping up-to-date at work.

Stop here, and take a few moments now to consider your use of social networking sites. Make some about the type of site you might want to use, and what you would use it for. Then read the feedback below.

Feedback

Hopefully you will now have had time to think about social networking sites and how they might benefit you. Hearing how others use social networking sites may have helped you decide whether or not to try it yourself.

If you decided that you would like to get started, the next page of this activity will give you some useful pointers.

6: Getting started

If you want to get started with social networking, the links on this page may help you.

[Facebook](#)

Popular social networking site. Create a personal profile, add friends and exchange messages

[Twitter](#)

Send and receive 'Tweets': short text messages of up to 140 characters

[Pinterest](#)

Pinboard style photo sharing website

[LinkedIn](#)

Social networking site to follow professional interests

[List of social networking sites \(Wikipedia\)](#)

This Wikipedia entry provides a list of social networking sites. This might be a good place to look if you are interested in some of the more specialised networking sites.

References

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