

# Social networking: is it for me?

## 1. Introduction

Social networking is the practice of building a network of contacts or 'friends' to communicate and share different types of content online.

There is a growing number of social networking sites, so to make sure you select the right one you need to be clear about what you hope to achieve.

### Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity you should:

- be aware of the different reasons for social networking
- know how to stay safe on social networking sites

## 2. Why do you use social networking sites?

Social networking platforms are constantly changing with new sites and apps being developed all the time. In 2020, the most popular social networking site worldwide was Facebook (Statista, 2020).

Read the following extracts from interviews with three people. How might the social networks mentioned be relevant to you and your own purposes?

### Sofia

"I use Facebook for staying in touch with friends and I use Twitter for professional networking with other people in my field. I often retweet posts to my own followers to pass on interesting information. I use LinkedIn to keep my career profile up to date and to list articles and presentations that I've done. LinkedIn has also allowed me to connect with colleagues in my field of work. I haven't yet used it to get a job, but I do know people who have. I use sites like Pinterest to get inspiration for my hobbies and share my Pinterest boards with others."

### William

"I've signed up to Twitter for work related networking and keeping up to date with what's happening in my field. I sometimes find out things there first so it's a good

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way of keeping my finger on the pulse. I find Facebook provides an easy way of keeping up to date with people I don't see that often. I've also used it to set up and advertise social music events to the wider public. Another site I use is SoundCloud for sharing music and connecting with other creators."

## Jay

"I use Facebook to stay in touch with my family and colleagues, and I've also been able to re-establish contact with some old friends I'd lost contact with. WhatsApp and Skype are great tools to communicate with my social networks. I previously used Flickr to view and share photos, however now I use Instagram for this as I like the use of hashtags. The reason I haven't explored other social networking sites is because I'm worried about keeping my personal information secure, I know there are settings you can use but I haven't explored these yet."

### 3. Your use of social networks

In the previous section you read about the social networking sites that some people use. You may already use some or all these social networks, or you may have chosen not to engage with social networks at all.

Think about what you might like to use social networking sites for. Perhaps you want to keep in touch with friends and family, or maybe you want to use them in your professional life. You may have a hobby or interest and you would like to share this with like-minded people.

Below are some of the main features of social networking:

#### Make connections and keep in touch

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. Many people use these sites to reconnect with people they've lost touch with, by using the in-built features to find 'friends' or 'contacts'.

Using WhatsApp and Skype, you can connect with friends, family or colleagues by creating groups to have conversations and send instant messages.

#### Professional interests

LinkedIn is the main professional social networking site to make connections with people in your line of work and share information that is relevant to your role. You may wish to build a network and use your profile to showcase your qualifications and

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achievements. Depending on your purpose, you could use LinkedIn to find a job, research an organisation you are interested in, or share articles or events.

Many people also use Twitter in a professional context to share articles and publications, or even to follow others in order to keep up to date in their profession. If you are using social networking sites to build a professional network, consider keeping your profile up to date.

## Share ideas and content

Most sites allow you to share and exchange different types of content, whether that is posts, photos, videos, links, or ideas. Facebook is commonly used to share a wide variety of content, including information on upcoming events. Whereas Twitter is a network to share information fast in short 'tweets'. This makes it a good tool to post and receive news and information as events unfold.

There are also many apps and sites specifically for photo or video sharing, such as Instagram, Tiktok, and Snapchat. You might wish to explore the features of the different apps and ask your family and friends which platforms they use so you can connect with them.

## Create an online community

Social networking allows you to connect with people with similar interests. For example, Pinterest is a photo sharing, bookmarking site where people can share ideas based on their interests. In Twitter and Facebook, you can join special interest groups, or even set up your own. Using Twitter, you can follow people or use hashtags (#) to connect your tweets with others discussing the same topic or event. Many organisations have profiles on popular social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram which people can join or follow.

## 4. Addressing your concerns

If you are still unsure about social networks, here are some tips on how you can keep safe online:

### Keep secure

- Check the privacy settings of the social networking sites you use and tighten up who has access to view your posts or profile.
- Avoid posting any personal information, such as addresses or phone numbers.
- Be mindful of people you do not know, and if necessary, use the block and report tools within the sites to keep you safe.

## Think before you post

- Remember what goes online, potentially stays online, so think before you post.
- You may wish to remove any photos you are tagged in that you don't want people to see, especially employers who may view your profiles.

## Customise notifications

- Some sites send you notifications each time someone has posted something new, this can become overwhelming and become a distraction.
- Consider turning these off or modifying them so you are only alerted when you want.

## Avoid overload

- Be selective of which social networks you use and don't overwhelm yourself with too many tools.
- Consider the pros and cons of each and deactivate any online profiles in sites you no longer use.
- Because of the fast pace of Twitter, it can sometimes be difficult to keep on top of all the conversations happening, so you may choose to dip in and out of it as suits you.

## 5. Summary

### Summary

Hopefully you will now have had time to think about social networking sites and how they might benefit you. You will also be aware of some of the issues surrounding privacy and security to keep you safe online.

### Next Steps

Reading how others use social networking sites may have helped you decide whether to try it yourself.

You may wish to take the time to explore some of the social networking sites mentioned in this activity.

### References

Statista (2020) *Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2020, ranked by number of active users (in millions)*. Available at:

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<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (Accessed: 11 May 2020).