

Social Networking Statistics

- According to a Feb. 2010 Pew Research poll, 73% of teens, and 72% of young adults use social networking websites. Some 40% of adults age 30 and over use them, and the number is rising.
- Each the year the number of people using multiple social networking sites grows, making it easier for investigators to cross-reference information and potentially discover photos, videos, and other media about claimants and their activities.
- 73% of adult users have Facebook profiles, 48% of users have a MySpace page, and 14% use LinkedIn.

Digital Footprints/Privacy

- Privacy is not a major concern for many users of social networking sites.
- In fact, 60% of internet users say they aren't concerned about how much information is available about them online
- The majority of adult users feel no need to limit the amount of information that can be found about them on the internet.
- Only 47% of users have searched for information about themselves online, and most people who do self-search only do it once or twice.
- On the other hand, 58% of adults restrict access to content within their profiles, and 60% restrict access to their profiles to only their friends.
- After recent uproars over the privacy and data retention policies of Facebook and other major websites, many people have begun to take full advantage of the privacy and security features on these sites, making access to information more difficult to investigators and anyone who is not a "Friend" of the user.
- Regardless of people locking down their profiles and restricting access to their information, a good deal can be learned from a public profile, and at the very least one can confirm whether the profile belongs to the person/claimant in question.

Facebook

- Personal info, photos, News Feed/"Wall" – The News Feed/Wall lists all status updates made by a person, as well as any public messages/comments/responses made by Friends. People will often put out status updates revealing their schedule for the day, cell phone number, upcoming plans, and photos; all without realizing how much information they are revealing to the world.

- Reading the wall, taking advantage of linked content (photos, comments) - The wall/news feed lists all recent activity on the person's account. If they comment or tag a picture, it is noted in the feed. If they update their status, it appears on their friends' news feeds. These pages often link to content that may be otherwise inaccessible (for example, clicking on a comment made by a subject for a particular photo may allow you to view an entire album of photos that could be otherwise hidden. This is due to the privacy settings for comments and photographs being separate, so the comment cannot be shown without also displaying the corresponding photograph.
- The Friends list – an indispensable tool – By looking at the list of someone's Friends and cross-referencing it with info from IRB or other database sources that list relatives/associates, you can refine your search and confirm if they are the claimant you're looking for.
- Facebook's search function allows you to search within a variety of networks (i.e. university, employer, city, metropolitan area, high school) depending on which networks a person has become a member of. If a person is within your network due to geographical location, you may have access to certain content that other users don't.
- The "Friend finder" function is intended for use by people seeking out old friends, classmates, coworkers, etc. However, by setting up an online persona in a certain network, you can search by certain criteria (name, DOB, interests, groups, and employer). This type of search is most effective when you have some idea of what you're looking for.

Building an Online Identity

- Using believable information (Realistic name, choose DOB carefully, work/education info) – be detailed enough to seem real, but not so detailed that it arouses suspicion. Too much information could prompt questions from the subject. Too much contact with the subject is damaging to any investigation and could compromise the entire effort.
- Finding the perfect photo (and alternatives) - Use free stock photo services, obscured photos, or something else that seems to represent a person without necessarily showing a face (i.e. someone in hockey or lacrosse gear, wearing a hat/sunglasses)
- How will it be used? - Will you contact the claimant directly? It is important to determine whether you will try to befriend your subject. If so, you will need some kind of believable cover story that will lure them into accepting your request (met at a club/bar/party, were in a college course together)
- If your identity seems believable and you provide the right amount of information, you have slightly better than 50/50 odds that the person will accept your request after minimal consideration. This trick seems to work best on males, especially when the online persona is an attractive female.
- Maintaining the identity - it's important to regularly update your profile with status updates and by changing profile information to make it seem that the account is active. Having others post messages or comments to your Wall makes the account appear more genuine, because if your subject is checking out your profile and sees comments/activity with other "people," they will tend to accept it as a legitimate account and not spam/viral marketing.

- Managing multiple identities (One for monitoring, one for communicating, different claims) - It is recommended to use different online personas for different tasks. Use one for monitoring subjects, and create a new one for each claimant you attempt to befriend or contact. You can never be 100% sure who knows who, especially in this age of constant communication and colliding social networks.
- Use Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, or Guerillamail.com to set up a dummy email account to use for your investigations. Use false information and do not provide a secondary email address.
- For added security, use a proxy service when conducting online investigations. www.proxy.org is a good resource for online privacy/anonymous web surfing information and contains a list of web-based proxies you can use for free. A proxy server will reroute your connection through one or more servers, masking the originating IP address and providing several layers of anonymity.

Twitter

- Activity updates, location info, photos/videos – People post 140-character long “tweets” which can be status updates, messages to other Twitter users, or simply mundane musings about the person’s mood or activities at a particular moment. We have used Twitter in the past to determine when a claimant (retired professional athlete who lived on the West coast but traveled regularly for work to the East coast) would be traveling, because he tweeted with other users about his schedule and posted pictures of events, completed with dates, timestamps and location info.
- Twitter Search – Allows you to search by account, content, person – powerful search capability and highly networkable due to the massive amount of communication between users.
- Geolocation - People who tweet through their cell phones have an option to use Twitter's Geolocation feature, which integrates with Google Maps and shows the approximate location from which the "tweet" was sent. Obviously, this feature can be a boon to investigators, and a surprising number of people use it despite its significant implications for personal privacy.
- This feature was used by a webpage called "Please Rob Me" (pleaserobme.com - now defunct due to the media attention it received) that scanned Twitter and another geolocation-capable site called 4Square to give a current (and constantly updating) list of people who had posted information to these sites that showed that they were away from their homes. While no one was ever robbed because of it, nor was it the intention of the site's creators to encourage any kind of criminal behavior, it was a wake-up call to many people about how much information is floating around unprotected.

MySpace

- Photos, info, posts, and friends list - Most people restrict access to this information, but public profiles are still occasionally useful.
- Last Login Date indicates recent account activity – confirms currency of information

- Sifting through the junk - MySpace profiles are polluted with advertisements and viral marketing efforts. Most comments (and many profiles) are simply marketing tools used to promote various services and events.

Google

- Search operators:
 - Phrase search - Enclosing something in quotation marks tells Google to search for those exact terms in that exact order. EX: "Alexander Bell" will force Google to miss pages where "Alexander Graham Bell" appears. This is one of the most basic and powerful features of effective Google searching.
 - site: (operator) - Typing into Google "James Joyce site:borders.com" will search for all pages where James Joyce appears, but **ONLY** on borders.com. Useful when you know what site you're searching through
 - intitle: (operator) - Typing "movies intitle:top ten" will search for any pages whose title contains the word "top ten" and whose content relates to movies. This is the kind of operator you would use when trying to search for a particular person's personal webpage, or to narrow down search results when you have some idea of the page's title.
 - inurl: (operator) - Typing "Jenni Jones inurl:myspace.com" will search for all occurrences of the name Jenni Jones" on myspace.com - This works best when you know the subject's username, or if you know particular domain you want to search.
 - intext: (operator) - This operator allows you to search for a particular term within the text of a page. EX: Searching for [J Wilkes intext:Powerdrive, Inc] will return all results where the name J. Wilkes appears on the same page as "Powerdrive, Inc"
 - **Text operators**
 - **[+]** affixing this to a term will search for a term exactly "as is", and exclude any synonyms. When you put a + sign directly in front of a word [+childcare] with no spaces, it performs the same type of search as when you use quotation marks.
 - **[-]** affixing this to a term will exclude it from the search. Use when similar terms will pollute your search results, EX: [jaguar -cars -football] will return all results for "jaguar" except for those relating to Jaguar Cars or the football team.
 - **[*]** - Wildcard operator. If you use this in a search, Google will try to treat the star as a placeholder for any unknown terms and then find the best matches. EX [Obama voted * on the * bill] will give you stories about different votes on different bills.
 - **[~]** - This operator will automatically search for synonyms for whatever word it is affixed to. EX: [~auto loan] will automatically search for truck loan, car loan, etc
 - **OR** operator - By default Google searches for all words in a search. This will search for exactly two (or more) terms. EX: [New York Yankees 2007 OR 2008] will give results about either of those years.
 - **cache:** - Example: searching [cache:www.irs.gov] will return items held in Google's cache which may have since been removed or changed and not included in normal search

results. This is incredibly helpful when trying to find determine if and when a page or profile has been altered. We have found claimant photos in the cache that were removed from a claimant's MySpace page.

- **info:** - Returns web page info for a given page. This will sometimes show the author name, the original creation date, last modified date, etc. This information is useful for determining when changes were made and who authored a particular web page. Example [info:siia.org] will return page
- **related:** - Returns links related to a certain site/page. This will help find related web pages about a company, person, product, news story, etc. [related:nytimes.com]

The Deep Web

- The deep web is several orders of magnitude larger than the surface web. It contains approx. 7,500 terabytes of information (about 550 billion individual documents - imagine taking the largest consumer-grade computer hard-drive available today and multiplying its capacity by ~7.5 million), although some extrapolations from a study at UC Berkley speculate it is actually closer to 91,000 terabytes. Compare this to the surface web (what we use daily) which contains about 167 terabytes of data.
- The deep web contains dynamic content from pages that are created on-the-fly after filling out a form; unlinked content that prevent search engine crawlers from indexing it; private web pages, scripted content, non-HTML/text content including .PDF files, Word Documents, spreadsheets, Power Point presentations, audio/video files and other file-types.
- The deep web contains all data hosted on web servers that is not indexed by search engines, including internal data and documents left accessible to the savvy searcher.
- Pipl.com- Free deep web person and business search. Scans numerous sources including some public records sources. One of the best resources available for person searching.
- DeepPeep - A search engine project funded by the University of Utah. Used for searching through form-based websites to find points of entry to the deep web.

Records Searches

- Public records (Criminal, court, professional licenses, MV info, property info, businesses)
- BRBpub.com - Aggregates all public records websites for all 50 states. Also has a subscription service that provides easy access to multiple sites at once, as well as a newsletter and other services for public records researchers and investigators.
- Policereports.us - Repository for police reports from a number of US states. Some reports can be accessed directly; the site also directs you to the proper place to obtain reports.

Pay and Subscriptions Sites

- Companies offering "background checks" for a fee or monthly subscription. The information found on these sites is not validated by anyone and can be very misleading. These sites will not validate or cross reference data in order to determine its accuracy. Much of the information

included in these reports is out of date and sometimes entirely inaccurate. Be very wary of these services, especially when you have a limited amount of information on the person you're researching.

- **IRB** used by a professional investigator, coupled with a comprehensive web and deep-web search (including all social networking sites) is the best way to develop a comprehensive and accurate background on a subject/claimant. Relying on these sites (who rely on volume sales to employers/landlords etc) is not the best way to develop useful or usable information

Other Resources

- **Boardtracker.com** - Many people post to various discussion boards/forums. The topics range from politics to a particular brand of car (e.g. Subaru WRX forums) and there are multiple forums for pretty much any topic imaginable. Using this in conjunction with a service like Pipl, Wink.com or Peekyou.com, which allow you search by username or email address, you can pinpoint those posts made by your subject/claimant. We have used this service in efforts to locate and identify people who post under the same username used in their email address and social networking profiles.
- **Knowem.com** - This site lets you search by username, email address, business name, etc and will search a huge number of sites for any occurrence of particular name, address, product or business name, etc.