

MySpace.com causes student debate

MySpace is too dangerous for teens

LOGAN KELLY

Sports Editor

Have you ever tangled with your parents about MySpace.com? Maybe they believe that they are protecting you or even that they just don't want you to waste your time. Sound familiar?

Well ponder this:

On Oct. 16, a registered sex offender was caught prowling for underage boys. Andrew Lubrano, 38, was arrested for his fourth sex crime. The New York City Police Department still believes that many offenders are out there and will be very hard to catch.

"Proactively scouring MySpace pages is futile: The smarter sexual predators stick to private messages, and diligently prune their public comment boards of any posts from young friends that hint at what's happening behind the scenes," Frank Giardina, detective, said.

Your first thought, I know almost for certain, is about safeguards and private accounts. Then I must ask you, do you know all of your friends? One automated search revealed that there are 744 registered sex offenders with accounts. According to the United States Sex Offender Registry, there are over 40,000 registered sex offenders in the country and on MySpace.com it is estimated that there are 124 million users.

Only 744 users seems a little low to me. Most criminals guilty of sex crimes never recover and some of them are probably smart. Smarter than you and smarter than the Executive Branch. Smart enough to assume a fake identity and get you to add them to your friends' list.

After they pass the first hurdle, they would gain access to all of the information on your page, where you live, possibly your school and even your friends. How bad would it be if your intuition told you to block him or report him, but your friend did not. I know I would feel terrible, I hope you would too.

When I first opened my MySpace account, I loved it. I could leave comments on almost all of my friends pages, but after a while it got old. I had searched all of the bands I wanted, and then some, joined the groups, played the games and met the people that had similar interests to me. With over 1.4 million bands and 50,000 groups MySpace keeps many people busy; it attracts more men than ESPN.com.

Instead of doing homework, playing soccer in my yard or going for a run, I was sitting on my computer. These days, that is a common situation, but what our generation really needs to ask themselves is, "Why?" Do we really need to be connected to someone we have never met that is halfway around the world? Is instant messaging not enough? All that we are doing by having an account is exposing ourselves to forces we

have no need to be exposed to. As my mother says, "It's not you who I don't trust, it's other people."

As if getting molested is not enough, businesses are now known to look at applicant's pages looking for anything the might ruin their chances. The potential employees who have posted pictures of drinking, smoking, and other explicit activities have been known to be out done by their lesser counterparts. Think deleting your account is enough? Well think again. There are, currently, sites where a user can pull up a web site from many years ago that has since changed. Services like that could come back to haunt you possibly even 20 years now.

To protect ourselves the best, we should all just stop using the service. If, in your case, quitting is unacceptable, take these precautions:

According to Angie Hammond, Information Technology Specialist, kids put too much information on their pages. With the information predators can befriend you and act like they are interested in what you do. Then they will try to gain your trust and after that, only God knows what could happen. "Putting information on MySpace is like putting it on a giant billboard and standing in front of a mall. You just wouldn't do that."

According to the government funded project, iSAFE, a predator only needs three pieces of information: date of birth, gender and your zip code. With that information predators can track you down with very much ease.

In the world of comments and friend lists, you are only as strong as your weakest link. Talking about where you are going and who you are going to meet is a huge mistake. A predator could easily track down and take advantage of your whole group.

Take the advice of your elders and keep your MySpace clean and make an effort to spread the word to your friends. Most of all, listen to your intuition and use common sense. Surely everyone does stupid things but, on MySpace, your emotional and physical well being are always at stake.

MySpace helps teen communication

ROYA ELIZEH

co-Editor-in-Chief

With more than 124 million profiles posted, the website MySpace.com has become a phenomenon mostly among the teenagers. Teenagers communicate via profiles with other teens from around the world. With this relatively new networking system, many parents and school administrators have been worried about the use of MySpace and the effects it's having on their sons, daughters and students.

MySpace, launched two and a half years ago, was created as a way to communicate with others. Beating out older competitors such as Xanga.com and Bolt.com, MySpace has grown into a bigger corporation that most did not expect.

With a new \$900 million advertisement deal with Google Incorporated, the website used by so many teenagers doesn't appear to be going anywhere fast. So why is their such a major controversy with one of the most successful websites to date?

Most would agree that the site does have a potential to be used incorrectly. We have all seen the "Dateline" episodes in which they track sexual predators in the midst of strolling through a house hoping to meet the "minor" they were talking to online. Incidents like this have happened through the MySpace website. I believe that most teenagers know of the dangers of the internet and, if not, we should be educating our youth early about what happens when personal information gets into the wrong hands.

With this information, I believe that the mishaps on the website are not the responsibility of MySpace.com. If it wasn't through MySpace, it would be through some other website

which makes it unfair just to blame the most popular one.

Teenagers need to use discretion when using a website. By not posting personal information, revealing photographs, and not adding anyone you don't know as a "friend" will most likely guarantee you a free of stalker fun time on MySpace. There is also a feature that allows you to make your profile private, meaning that no one will be able to see the information you decide to post without your consent first.

Although these steps are basic and common sense, many teenagers don't follow them and find themselves in terrible dangers. If a teen feels that he or she is being stalked over the internet, or that someone is making you feel uncomfortable, they should share what is happening with an adult.

MySpace.com has become both a blessing and a curse to me. Having been on the site for about a year, I constantly feel the need to check it on a day-to-day basis in hopes of finding a new comment. On the other hand, I've been able to find friends from the previous places in which I have lived. I recently got in contact with my childhood best friend in Las Vegas. Without the help of this predominantly teen driven website, we would have never been able to catch up and see how the other is doing. MySpace is also a great place to check out new music. With more and more bands added each day, it's a great way to find music from up and coming music artists and to access their touring schedules.

With all the potential dangers associated with the internet and MySpace.com, I feel that teenagers should be responsible with this powerful tool. Although we cannot control those who take our information, we can choose to make good decisions about what goes on our MySpace pages. In this way, we can all be safe from the dangers of cyberspace.

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