



Hints for Using Social Media Safely

Could your social networking behavior be putting your personal information security at risk? The answer may be “yes.” Social networking sites have become popular targets for criminals looking to siphon personal information or expose users to malware. So it’s important to be mindful of the risks and security implications that come along with sharing information on these sites.

Pay attention to privacy settings

Before you post any personal information online, pay attention to the privacy settings on the social networking sites that you visit. If you don’t take action to ensure that only trusted friends, relatives, and associates can view your site pages, the personal information you post could actually be public and therefore more easily seen by cyber criminals.

Don’t reveal too much personal information. Even if your postings are private, you should still be cautious about sharing certain information, including your full name, birthdate, cell phone number, home address, place of employment, and the names of family members and pets. Remember, it only takes two or three pieces of personal information for a cyber thief to put in motion a scheme to attempt to steal your identity.

Social networking and answers to security questions

Another reason to be mindful of what you post on social networking sites is to avoid unwittingly giving criminals the answers to the security questions for your other online accounts. The problem here is that a lot of companies offer the same or similar security questions to their customers, such as:

- What’s your mother’s maiden name?
- What’s the name of your pet?
- What was your high school mascot?
- In what town were you born?

For example, perhaps you chose the “high school mascot” and “mother’s maiden name” options as security questions for a couple of your online accounts. Maybe you’ve posted an old photo of you and your high school friends on Facebook and added a caption that happens to mention the school you attended. Or, maybe you listed the names of some relatives on your profile page, and from their names, an observer could figure out your mother’s maiden name. Believe it or not, this is all a cyber thief needs, along with a little

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trial and error, to potentially determine the answers to your questions, break into your online accounts, and reset your passwords.

Make up the answers to your security questions. Aside from minimizing how much personal information you share online, an almost surefire way to keep criminals from obtaining the answers to your security questions is to make up your responses. But the caveat here is that you might have trouble remembering those answers! A best practice is to store the phony answers in a password vault such as [LastPass](#) or [Dashlane](#).

When all is said and done, you shouldn't let information security concerns prevent you from staying in touch with others online. Just remember that caution is the watch word, and be sure to follow the above guidance to help minimize your risk.

Questions?

If you have any questions about the information shared here, please feel free to call me at 610-280-9330.

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