

## New meaning for WWW

Gathering new members at the rate of 150,000 teens a day MYSPACE is now the top gun when it comes to online postings. Do teens posting on MYSPACE really believe that only their friends are looking at their site? With 50,000 predators online at any given time it is not a stretch to label MYSPACE as the electronic version of the “White Pages” for predators. The practice of taking pictures with a disposable camera, having them developed, hiding them from parents and then showing them only to friends has now been replaced with taking a digital camera or cell phone and take pictures at a party or even worse – shoot into a mirror so your pose is “just right” and then post all for everyone to see. No longer should teens consider WWW as the World Wide Web but rather they should think of it as the WHOLE WORLD is WATCHING.

As I speak to students across the tri-state area I always hear students say “I made my site “PRIVATE” but they fail to realize that the URL listing contains their name, or the “screen name” that they have used when they first joined. This “name” listing is searchable and more often than not leads to other sites such as Friendster and Xanga where their information is not blocked. These little mistakes will give predators all the information they need to start their search. Other teens will post their information but not put down anything personal, so they say, but more often than not the teen will given out searchable information such as their current sports team. A quick visit to the school’s webs site will give the predator the complete schedule for the sport and all that is left is a trip to the game.

Another issue recently surfacing as a result of those students posting pictures of themselves at parties drinking or participating in other “activities”– are parents calling the school and saying to the administration “do you have a drinking policy?” and if so, why is your star (pick any sport) showing pictures of themselves drinking, my son/daughter should be the replacement. The targeted student’s usual response is that “the bottle was empty” but once again they fail to realize their friends, who are commenting on that photo on MYSPACE, are saying “how wasted everyone was at the party” – their friends are ratting them out! Think of the possibilities here: starting line ups for teams, honor societies, honors given to students, college admissions offices, etc. Let’s also not forget that many HR departments are now looking at candidates’ information on the internet and if a recent college graduate has postings on MYSPACE that are not “upstanding” they can kiss that job good bye.

On more than one occasion I have heard parents say that their teens are claiming “you are invading my privacy”; those posting on MYSPACE must remember they have given up all rights to privacy once they posted information. Parents do have a way and must monitor their teens activities – they can register onto MYSPACE and the by using the Help menu they will see instructions on how to delete their child’s information.

With over 50 sex offenders, as listed on the Megan’s Law website ([www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us](http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us)), living in this immediate area, do they really believe that only their friends are looking at their site or is the Whole World Watching.

Chuck Favata

[www.chuckfavata.com](http://www.chuckfavata.com)

PS. My presentation is entitled “Pedophiles Online – What every parent must know”

For more information on this topic go to [www.chuckfavata.com](http://www.chuckfavata.com)