



Facebook Privacy Settings

Submitted by Christopher B. Hopkins and Diana L. Martin on behalf of the Technology Committee



Last year, the Palm Beach Bar Association held a "Tweet, Meet & Eat" seminar to discuss how lawyers and paralegals could sign up to use Twitter and Facebook. Since the Bar seminar, Facebook has twice revised their privacy settings. It is important to modify privacy settings when using social networking sites since the sites control what information can be discovered about litigants, witnesses, experts – and you. Proper adjustment of your personal settings can maximize your visibility while maintaining your privacy.

The broadening of Facebook settings creates a great researching opportunity for paralegals and lawyers. Overall, we are seeing our society change its attitude about privacy. That said, many people believe that these privacy decisions should be made by the individual user. Since the "Tweet, Meet & Eat" seminar was such a success, here's an updated primer for your Facebook privacy settings.

In late 2009, Facebook reconfigured every users' setting to default to "everyone." This meant everyone on the internet could see everything about a Facebook user unless that person affirmatively turned off that access. More recently, Facebook announced at an April 2010 conference that "connections" and "instant personalization" features were being implemented. Again, these new "features" permit personal data, photos, and video of users to spread throughout the internet.

To begin, log into Facebook.com and click "Account" in the upper right corner. We will focus on "Account Settings," "Privacy Settings," and "Application Settings." The general rules of privacy settings are that you likely want to limit your information to "only friends," turn off any instant or automatic publishing, and curtail other applications from distributing your personal data.

Account Settings

/Settings: make sure your "security question" is not something which could be guessed by browsing your public data (e.g., name of high school or hometown). Skip "manage privacy" on this page since we will address it below.

/Networks and /Payments: most users have not configured networks or payment information. Unless you use these tools, just ensure they are set to "none" or zero.

/Facebook ads: there are two drop-down menus on the page. Set both to "no one." Facebook will quibble with you via pop-up windows that you should let them use your name and image. Stick with "no one."

Privacy Settings

/Personal Information: set your bio to "everyone" and everything else to "only friends." Under "photo albums," make your profile picture public and everything else limited to "only friends." These settings will likely not provide much greater information than your law firm biography but will give people enough information so they can be sure they are communicating with you and not just someone with the same name.

/Contact Information: everything but "your website," "add me as a friend," and "send me a message" should be set to "only me." Your email address should be limited to "only friends." Again, these settings provide enough flexibility for someone to contact you.

/Friends, Tags, Connections: set everything to "only friends" except city and education/work (this information is likely already on your firm's website). Double-check your settings with the "preview my profile" button in the upper right corner. Note that "fan pages" are now controlled by connections.

/Applications and Websites: an entire new page appears under this option. Below are the suggested settings, with "Instant Personalization" being the most important.

/Friends Can Share: uncheck everything but "website."

/Activity on Applications: set to "only friends" or consider "customize" to reduce even further.

/Instant Personalization: uncheck the box so Facebook cannot share your information. Much like de-selecting Facebook ads, the website will seek to convince you to participate in Instant Personalization. Given the controversy and unclear extent of this "feature," uncheck the box so you are not participating.

Application Settings

Facebook controls its applications under privacy (above) as well as another list of settings under Application Settings. If you use applications, then you may decide not to follow the suggestions below. If you do not use applications on Facebook, the following conservative settings are recommended.

/Events: remove the box and tab and set to "only me."

/Gifts: remove the box and set to "only me."

/Groups: this includes alumni and other groups so it may be ok to keep as "added." But set privacy to "only me." People in the group will still see you as a member.

/Links: remove the box and tab and set to "only friends."

/Marketplace: remove tab and set to "only friends."

/Notes: keep box as "added," remove tab, and set to "only friends."

/Photos and /Video: keep box as "added" and set to only friends.

When you are finished, review your Profile (button at the top right of screen). It may be a good idea to go onto an available computer at work and search [your name city] on Facebook to see what information "anyone" can find. Alternatively, if your browser has an "incognito" feature, perform the search that way. As a test, enter your Facebook user name on www.zesty.ca/facebook to see what it can find out about you. If you feel you are missing any Facebook features, then just turn them back on. Happy (and safe) surfing.

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