

The Good, The Bad, The Ugly AND The Why of Social Networking



Are you sick of hearing about social networking yet? [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Google+](#) and on and on.... You can't escape the buzz about these things without entirely disconnecting from the internet, from TV, from print and radio outlets, from the world! It can grow tiresome, especially if you are not involved and don't see the value in it all.

But there is incredible value. Social networking may be transformative in the way we communicate and in the way we connect the world over. So why might you want to get involved and discover this value? Let's explore.

The Why

Social networking lets you connect to the world around you in unprecedented, powerful ways. You can easily learn more about what interests you as obscure as it might be. You can shape and influence things that are important to you even if they have previously felt inaccessible. You can demand and get better services out of companies you work with. And you connect with people in new and exciting ways.

As with virtually anything, there is good and bad that goes into all this opportunity. And in social media, there's also some ugly that you should be aware of prior to jumping in.

The Good

There is so much "good" by being involved with social networking. There are three benefits in particular worth highlighting as you consider getting involved in the first place: availability of information, connections galore and improved service.

Social networking makes nearly all information available to you at your fingertips. Just about anything you want to know more or learn about or discuss is available to you. And that information can arrive to you with such pace and velocity it can be breathtaking. Learn about an earthquake in Washington DC an hour before traditional media reports on it. Find out that a neutrino has (and then has not) traveled faster than the speed of light moments after it happens. Whatever it is, you can find outlets on social networking platforms.

Social networking also offers you ways to connect with family, friends, professional colleagues and business in intimate and authentic ways. You may have family and friends who you only see from time to time, but would like to keep up with a bit more. Connect on Facebook and you can know what's going on in one another's lives between those infrequent get-togethers. The next time you visit one another, you'll be much better connected than in the past. Or follow colleagues on Twitter to share important professional information and ideas. Participate in the next major professional conference without having to attend. Follow companies you often frequent to discover special deals they are offering or new services available.

Social networking can also offer you better service from companies you already work with. A growing number of companies are monitoring social networking platforms for mentions of their brand, and to respond to complaints and questions posted by people. Sometimes this is done even more efficiently than by telephone or email. Occasionally, even generic complaints about a service to friends have been greeted by companies with unexpected, positive resolutions. Allowing service-providers you work with to follow you also allows them to get to know you and what you value better. This gives them the opportunity to learn and offer services that are better tailored to your needs and values.

The Bad

All these positive benefits are accompanied by some negatives. Some people discover that these negatives are too great to make the positives worthwhile. Others see these negatives as nuisances that can easily be managed.

Social networking delivers information directly without interference from outside sources. This is great for rapid delivery of unfiltered information, but it also means information can be wrong or just an opinion or even a downright lie. Sometimes it can be difficult to sort through fact or fiction or opinion or lie. More often information is shared with the belief it is accurate, but is simply unconfirmed and incorrect. There was no malicious intent, but without a journalist verifying the facts it just turns out to be wrong.

Social networking technology is also evolving at a tremendous pace. MySpace, the social networking darling only a few years ago, is a virtual ghost town deserted for the brighter pastures of Facebook and Twitter and Google+. Speaking of Facebook and Twitter and Google+, these platforms seem to introduce new features and changes on almost a daily basis. And new ideas and platforms, some that stick and more that fail, are constantly popping up. [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and [Pinterest](#) and [Path](#) and [Quora](#) and [Reddit](#).... It's hard to keep up with everything. It's even harder to decide where to commit the time you allow for social networking in your life.

Sensory overload is a common symptom of heavy social networking use. Follow just a couple hundred people on Twitter and the stream of information is entirely overwhelming. Make that a thousand followers and the information overload is stunning! Yet there's so much good stuff being shared, it can be hard to pull away and not try to keep up with everything. Toss in a Facebook and Google+ account, and focusing becomes extremely difficult.

The Ugly

There is at least one negative that is truly ugly, the one that keeps many people away and causes others to leave. It's the one negative that you really need to decide you are comfortable with before getting involved.

Privacy in social networking is at best a myth. Anything written or shared on a social networking site is public. Each social network site offers tools to increase or decrease the privacy of information, but none

of these is foolproof. You may share something with only one person, but they then have the choice to share your words with whomever else they like.

Some platforms (ehhh emm...FaceBook) have particularly poor privacy records. They simply don't seem to value the importance of user privacy highly. Other platforms, like Twitter, are specifically designed not to offer privacy. It's this openness that gives Twitter its power, but it's this openness that results in people making major mistakes. Look no further than [Anthony Wiener's infamous Twitter scandal](#) to understand this.

People will know more about you than they ever have before. They will know what you're thinking. They will know where you eat and where you shop and where you work. In social networking, there is no privacy.

You Don't Have to Get Involved (Yet)

It's up to you. Can you handle the bad in order to get all the good of social networking? Right now you do still have the choice. More and more people are choosing to dive into social networking and connecting in these powerful ways. They are discovering the bad and ugly, and learning how to manage the negatives as well as possible. They are getting tremendous value out of participating in social networking.

The day may come when staying in touch requires you to use social networking platforms. Free telephone calls, video chatting, instant messaging, emailing, texting and other communication tools are already available on these platforms. They could unseat more mainstream communication tools in the future.

But, for now, consider the positives and the negatives and decide if social networking is right for you.

(If you do want to get involved, but aren't sure how, watch for future articles on getting started on various social networking platforms.)