STAYING SAFE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

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About the Book

Social media and its use in finding out more about our ancestors offers many opportunities for genealogists and family historians. In ***Staying Safe with Social Media: A Guide for Genealogy and Family History***, you'll learn the techniques needed to get the most out of using sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and blogs while at the same time protecting your own privacy and information.

The ability to connect with others through the Internet and, namely social media, brings great opportunities, but also issues, complications and problems which can turn a fun journey of sharing into a bad experience. It all comes down to common sense and a formula: **EDUCATION + ACTION + VIGILANCE**.

Social Media: A Formula for Success and Safety

The formula for a successful online experience involves these basic components: **EDUCATION** + **ACTION** + **VIGILANCE**.

Education

Before you begin using any website, especially social media sites, make sure you fully understand how the site works.

- Terms of Service

- Privacy Settings

- Removal of Information

- Marketing and Advertising

- Settings

Action

Once you've signed up, work "smart" when using certain functions and also check your settings!

- Don't click on e-mail links

- Don't accept offers to build followers

- Understand how shortened URLs work

- Avoid games and quizzes

- Turn off location-based services

- Limit what you share

Vigilance

Don't become complacent . . . be vigilant when it comes to using social media!

- Block and report spam posts and spammers

- Reserve your name on social media sites

- Social media is not kids' stuff

- Learn to post privately

- Use a "burn" e-mail address

- Use strong passwords

- Fake your security information

- Install good antivirus and spyware protection

In-Person vs. Online: There's A Difference!

Many users forget that our actions online via e-mail, social media sharing, etc. cannot communicate the same way that in-person interaction can. There are no non-verbal cues, no way to easily interpret actions, etc. How often has the meaning of an e-mail to a friend been misinterpreted accidentally?

Now take that same situation and apply it to social media which can compound the problem a thousand-fold (or however many friends and followers you might have). Interacting with others online is very different than interacting in-person and we often forget this. Again, common sense rules and sometimes we just need to pause and think before we click the Send or Enter button.

Terms of Service and Settings

Almost every social media site worth using has what's called a TOS meaning "Terms of Service" which spells out what can and can't be done on the site. In addition, many sites have a Privacy Policy which also sets out how the site can use your personal information. If you can't easily locate this information on a social media site, you might want to reconsider using it at all!

- **Read and understand the Terms of Service**. It is your duty before signing up and using a service to know how your information will or will not be used by that site. Don't click that "I accept the terms and conditions . . ." box until you've read the terms completely. Download and print out a copy if necessary.

- **Understand the privacy settings**. Make sure you understand which personal information is publicly displayed on the website and how you can control the display of information. Download and print out a copy of the site's privacy policy. Do not automatically accept the defaults provided by the site. When in doubt, consult the Help section of the site.

- **Marketing and advertising information**. Will the site gather information on your activity to feed you advertising or to advertise to your friends and followers on the site? It really depends on the site but it is still your responsibility to know. Once you add an application, on Facebook for example, immediately go to Privacy Settings and see what data the app is collecting. Very often you can change the settings to block some or all of the collecting features. Or simply remove the application if you don't feel comfortable with the collecting arrangement. Review the site's policies and learn how to change any marketing settings.

- **Stay up-to-date on policy changes**. This means reading the e-mails about updates to a site's terms of service or privacy policy. Some sites have forums or RSS feeds where you can subscribe and get alerts. Again, you need to stay in the loop on what a social media site is doing with your information.

- **Removal of Information**. What happens to your information if you decide to leave the site? Can you export your data? Do you have an exit strategy? Does the site retain any of your information once you've left?

Privacy

One of the "hot button" issues when it comes to social media is the perceived lack of privacy. The key word here is <u>perceived</u> since many sites have mechanisms to protect your privacy; however users don't take the time to understand how these settings work and how to implement them.

- **Limit the amount of personal information you display**. This means information you display publicly and to friends or followers. Don't include your full birth date, hometown and other items of information used to verify personal identity. Remember: once information is posted, even though you change the display of that information later on, someone may have seen (and copied) the original data.

- **What does your employer see about you on social media?** More and more employers are doing research about their employees on social media and they don't always like what they find. Make sure you don't share information publicly <u>and</u> make sure you know who you allow to see your personal information.

- **Be anonymous if you want**. This isn't always easy to do but no one said you have to use your real name. Some sites like Facebook don't allow fake names and will either shut down your account or convert it to a Facebook page. Still, you might consider adopting an alias for social media accounts.

- **Is your birth date public?** Facebook requires you to enter your birth year when signing up (to verify that you are over 13 years of age to meet their terms of service requirements) but make sure you go to Privacy settings and set the display settings to <u>not</u> show your birth year <u>or</u> just remove your birth date display.

- **Never give out your e-mail password, even to a social media site**. Facebook and others try to convince you to find all your friends via your e-mail address book. Sounds like fun, right? Not if that site later uses your contacts to send advertising e-mails etc.

- **Don't post your daily routine**. Again, just like location-based check-ins, don't let strangers know your daily habits such as walking to work, etc.

Friends and Followers

The hallmark of social media sites is the ability to connect with others, even if you've never met in-person. There are smart ways to interact and collaborate with others and ways to attract those who will help you the most with your genealogy and family history.

- **Use sites that are permission-based**. This means a site where you give permission for people to follow you or see your content/information. With Facebook, you can grant permission before another user becomes your friend and has access to your information. Twitter, on the other hand, **allows** anyone to follow you with no permission needed. You can, however, block someone on Twitter once they've tried to follow you.

- **Do you really know your friend's friends?** Remember **what** Mom used to say about knowing your friends' friends? Do you really know them? The same is true with social media. Avoid privacy settings that allow anyone who isn't your friend to see your information or to even comment on status updates and photos.

- **Mutual friends matter**. When receiving a friend request on Facebook, do you have mutual friends? If so, it is likely that the person is **legit**. Ask the person how they know you and why they want to interact with you on the site.

- **Challenge and request more information**. When you receive a friend request from someone you don't know, send them a message and ask how they know you and why they want to friend you. If you **only** use Facebook or other sites for genealogy, make it clear to the potential friend how you use the site and what information you are willing exchange.

- **Don't race to build followers**. Sure and steady wins the race, as they say. Who said you had to have 5,000 followers right away? Almost all e-mails offering to increase your followers are scams and they only want your login credentials to that social media site. Besides, what would you really do with 5,000 followers?

- **Hide or unfriend**? On sites like Facebook, you can specify what types of updates you want to receive from someone. This means you can still be friends, but you want to narrow the information you see about them.

- **Unfriend when needed**. Have no qualms about **pruning** your friends or followers list especially if a person does not respect your privacy or shares information about you inappropriately.

Games and Applications

Remember it's all fun and games on social media until someone has their personal information compromised! Social media uses "gamification" to increase the amount of enjoyment you get from a site; however what sometimes seems fun can have a sinister side.

- **Games can be misleading**. Do you really know what you are getting into when you agree to download a game app in Facebook or another social media site? Again, read the Terms of Service. Many games seem like fun but they are collecting data on what you click on within Facebook or another site and some games even follow what else you do on your computer or on the Internet.

- **Understand how 3rd party applications work**. A site may ask you to authorize using it with another site via an application so that when you post content to one site it may appear on your Facebook page etc. Take time to read the Terms of Service for that application as well as how it will be using your content!

- **Avoid quizzes!** You may get asked to answer "25 random things about me" or another type of quiz. They seem like fun don't they? You answer questions about yourself and share it with friends on social media. But have you ever looked closely at what type of data is being collected? Birthplace, birthday, school info . . . all items that can be used to steal your identity. Avoid quizzes and don't perpetuate them by sharing with others.

Pitfalls and Stuff to Avoid
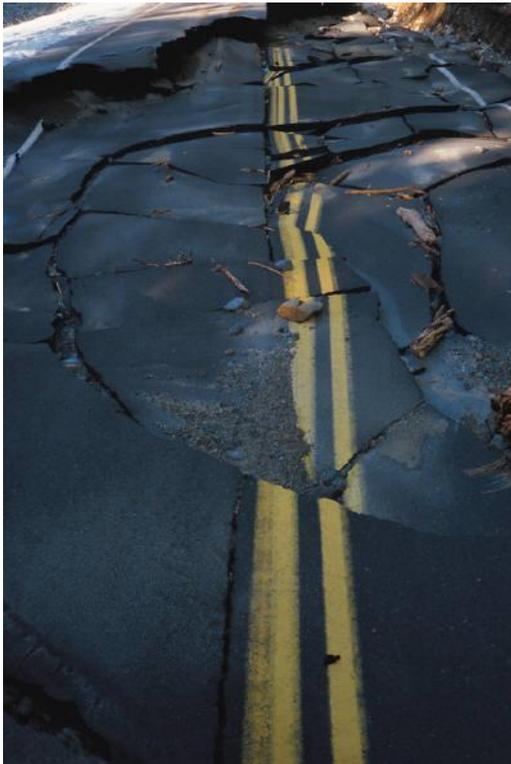
Many times, navigating your way around a new social media site can be like navigating a mine field. Having an enjoyable experience gets easier over time, but there are many things you need to watch for when you get started!

- **Avoid e-mail links to add friends/followers or to add applications**. You will probably receive a "confirmation" email once you sign up for a social media site; it is fine to click the link on these emails. However, you may get subsequent email notifications about new friends or people wanted to connect with you.

  Be very careful with these emails especially since spammers can create emails that look like they are from Facebook and these other sites! The basic rule is this: if the notification is true, then you should receive a notice at the original site as well.

  This means you should delete the email, sign in to the site, and then check your notifications there. Never sign in to a site using a link in an email. This is how your account at the site can be hacked and compromised!

- **Don't accept offers to build followers**. You may also receive emails or messages with offers from services that can help you get more friends and followers. Don't take the bait! Most of these services are scams that simply want access to your account in order to spam others. Build your friends and followers by adding them yourself or waiting to be invited by others.

- **Be careful with location services.** Location services are a hot ticket these days with many folks stating where they are and who they are with, but who's watching the house or minding the store? Don't advertise your activities publicly, especially concerning vacations and the like.

- **Beware of shortened URLs**. With the increasing popularity of social media, spammers have taken advantage of the increase use of shortened URLs to hide their links. Use a program that can reveal the true web address of a shortened URL like **CheckShortURL** (checkshorturl.com).

- **What about copyright and social media?** Yes, copyright still applies when using social media. This means you should use the various share buttons associated with a web page or blog post instead of copying the text and pasting it into a status update. Share content responsibly and legally.

Take Action

In no time you'll be comfortable using social media, busy sharing information and connecting with others. Remember that you need to stay vigilant by taking action to protect yourself and your personal information.

- **Block and report spam posts and spammers**. Most sites have mechanisms to mark an update as spam or in violation of the site's Terms of Service. In addition, report specific users if they violate the rules of the site.

- **Reserve your name on social media sites**. Sign up with multiple sites in order to protect your identity. Use a site like **NameChk** (namechk.com) to see which sites are already using your name.

- **Social media is not kids' stuff**. Know what your children are doing on social media and monitor their activity when appropriate. The minimum age for Facebook is 13 years, although many children younger than that age are using the service. Make sure your children understand all the rules including yours!

- **Learn to post privately**. This means knowing the difference between a public post and a private post. And don't forget that when you post publicly, on Facebook for example, **it will remember the last setting!** Always check the setting before posting and change back to private when needed.

- **Use a "burn" e-mail address**. Set up a dummy e-mail account that you only use with social media. Forward the account to your real e-mail account.

- **Use strong passwords**. Take time to construct a password that is easy for you to remember but not for a hacker to guess at. Avoid names of family members, locations etc. Use combinations of letters, numbers and special characters.

- **Fake your security information**. When asked for security information, either use fake data or provide information that others would not know about you. Example: for mother's maiden name, who said it has to actually be your mother's maiden name? Be consistent with usage across all social media sites.

- **Install a good antivirus and spyware protection program on your computer**. You don't need to spend a lot and some programs are even available for free! A good program (for free) is **Avast** (www.avast.com).
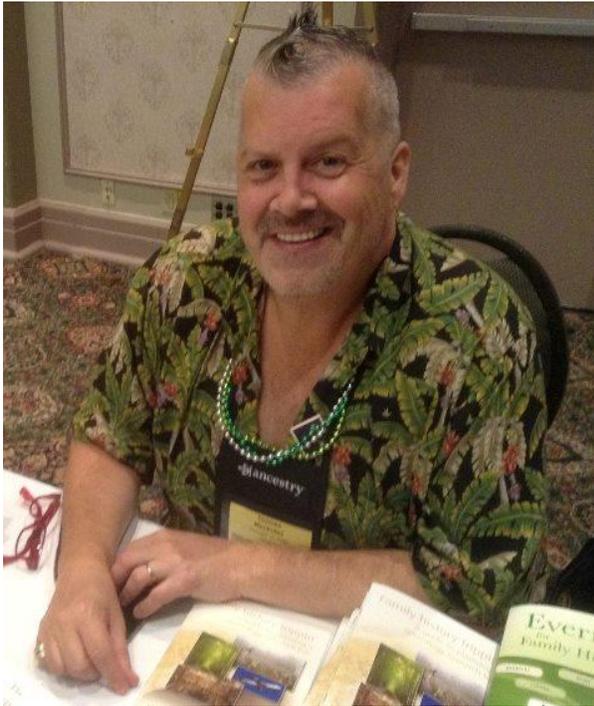
Genealogy-Related Tips and Tricks

Genealogists and family historians use social media differently than most people, especially when it comes to finding clues and information related to our ancestors.

- **Using Maiden Names**. Given past experience in locating maiden names, many female genealogists on Facebook deliberately include their birth surname when setting up a profile. Others will include their maiden name in the About section only. Realize that you may need to somehow use your maiden name in order to be successful in connecting with new cousins on social media.

- **Set up a Group or Page**. Rather than create a different social media account on a site like Facebook (one for personal purposes and another for genealogy), some genealogists simply create a group or page where they post all their family history-related information.

- **Use keywords in descriptions**. When setting up a profile or posting information, always use those important keywords such as "genealogy" or "family history" as well as surnames and place names related to your ancestors. This makes it easier for other users to search and find your information and ultimately connect with you!

- **Go private**. Many social media sites, even Pinterest and Blogger, now have the option to create a private board or blog. Take advantage of these features and then invite only family members or other researchers with whom you are familiar.

Resources

- **4 Steps to a Secure Password**
  https://www.lifewire.com/how-to-choose-a-good-password-2483123

- **Avast**
  https://www.avast.com

- **CheckShortURL**
  https://checkshorturl.com/

- **Electronic Frontier Foundation - Privacy**
  https://www.eff.org/issues/privacy

- **Facebook Account Security**
  https://www.facebook.com/help/keeping-your-account-secure

- **Facebook Privacy Basics**
  https://www.facebook.com/about/basics

- **Facebook Privacy Settings**
  https://www.facebook.com/settings?tab=privacy

- **Hootsuite**
  https://www.hootsuite.com

- **Hack Proof : How to Create Super Strong Passwords**
  https://www.lifehack.org/articles/technology/hack-proof-how-create-super-strong-passwords.html

- **NameChk**
  https://namechk.com

- **OnGuard Online.gov**
  https://onguardonline.gov

- **Privacy Rights Clearinghouse**
  https://www.privacyrights.org

- **Securing Key Account and Devices – Social Media**
  https://staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/securing-key-accounts-devices/social-media/

- **Social Networking Privacy: How to be Safe, Secure and Social**
  https://www.privacyrights.org/social-networking-privacy

- **Stay Safe Online**
  https://staysafeonline.org

- **The Complete Guide to Facebook Privacy**
  https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-privacy-apps-ads-friends-delete-account/

- *The Password Trick* by Thomas MacEntee
  http://genealogybargains.com/passwordtrick-kindle

About The Author

What happens when a "tech guy" with a love for history gets laid off during The Great Recession of 2008? You get Thomas MacEntee, a genealogy professional based in the United States who is also a blogger, educator, author, social media connector, online community builder and more. Thomas has over 42 years of experience researching family history

Thomas was laid off after a 25-year career in the information technology field, so he started his own genealogy-related business called High Definition Genealogy. Currently Thomas shares many of his articles and videos for free at Abundant Genealogy and also runs the popular Genealogy Bargains and DNA Bargains websites!

Thomas describes himself as a lifelong learner with a background in a multitude of topics who has finally figured out what he does best: teach, inspire, instigate, and serve as a curator and go-to-guy for concept nurturing and inspiration. Thomas is a big believer in success, and that we all succeed when we help each other find success.

Check out Thomas' author page at http://geneaguides.com