

CAMPUS NEWS

Web surfing may come at a price

Jerrod Johnson
ARGUS STAFF

Online safety is an important issue not only on the Winston-Salem State campus but also all over the nation. With various programs that track Web site visitation and the increasing amount of personal information available through the Internet, safety has become a greater priority.

Cuthrell Johnson, director of the Academic Resource Center, says to be careful about posting personal information online, whether it is through e-mail or on MySpace.

"Students should protect their passwords like they would their Social Security numbers," Johnson said in a telephone interview. He related a cautionary tale:

"A few years ago, a student came to see me, saying something was wrong with her WSSU account. She had not been using it, so it was clear someone had entered her e-mail account. It turns out that she gave her password to her boyfriend, with whom she broke up a week or so later; her then-ex later logged into her personal account, read her personal files and erased a very important message."

Johnson suggests that one should erase the history of visited Web sites to avoid being tracked. In Internet Explorer, this involves clicking on "tools" and scrolling down to "internet options." The next step is to click the "general" tab, the "delete files" tab and then the "delete cookies" tab.

According to Microsoft.com, one of the most effective ways to ensure online safety is to make sure to log out of certain sites, not just by closing the window. This is especially important regarding instant-messenger programs such as Yahoo, or Web sites such as MySpace and Facebook, which often have automatic login features to remember usernames and passwords.

"Just closing a window does not guarantee your privacy," Johnson said. "If you don't make sure to log out as well, someone can look in the history of your visited Web sites and still gain access that way."

Since WSSU is state-funded, Internet guidelines are much stricter than at some other institutions. There have

been multiple instances where people have been reported to authorities due to serious threats and viruses being mailed through their accounts whether they were personally responsible for the messages or not. Because the threat or virus originated from their Web accounts, they will be investigated, which could result in confiscation of the computer.

It is because of such incidents that the university purchased the Cisco Clean Access Agent program for the students' safety. Clean Access is a program that detects whether any computer used at WSSU has updated anti-virus software, cutting down on the number of viruses students could be exposed to.

According to Johnson, the university does not keep records of students' online activities. However, there are a few exceptions to the rule.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, we do not keep track of a student's online activity," he explained. "We don't keep a log of every Web site someone goes to and what they do up there; what students look at or do is their business. But if there is an issued warrant regarding serious and potentially illegal activity going on through the system, we will use every resource at our disposal to stop it."

Even using file-sharing programs such as LimeWire or Napster, while not expressly forbidden by WSSU, does come with its own share of risks.

"When you use a file-sharing program to download music or movies, you're essentially allowing other people to access your computer," Johnson said. "In many cases, just downloading a file-sharing program can infect your computer with spyware."

Spyware are malicious programs that live up to their name. These programs log whatever Web sites a person visits and their computer information then sends that information to a variety of companies. This explains the wave of spam many computer users receive in their e-mail accounts daily. Worst of all, they don't disappear when the "recent history" is removed, and it will remain in a computer.

Fortunately, there are multiple free and highly effective programs to counter spyware and countless other computer bugs. One of the most effective is Ad-Aware, available for free downloading at lavasoftusa.com.

Johnson offers an alternative. "I'd just go to sites like iTunes and pay the dollar to download the song there. It's cheap and the music [is] of much better quality."



Facebook users divulge personal data, study finds

John Boudreau
MCT WIRE SERVICE

SAN JOSE, Calif.

Four out of 10 users of Web site Facebook unwittingly expose themselves to the risk of identify theft and virus attacks, according to a new study that underscores growing concerns about security experts about online social networking.

Sophos, a Boston-based Internet security company that set up a fictional account on the Palo Alto, Calif.-based site, reported that in a random survey of Facebook users, 41 percent divulged personal information, such as phone numbers, birthdates and e-mail addresses, that could be viewed by strangers.

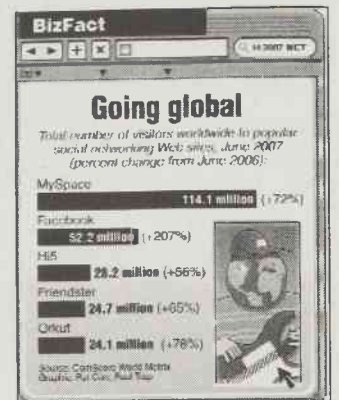
A Sophos fake user, "Freddie Staur," invited 200 Facebook users to be an online friend. Eighty-seven accepted the invitation, and of those, 82 "leaked" personal information.

Sophos said Facebook's privacy features "go far beyond" those of competing social networking sites. And in a statement, a Facebook spokesperson said, "Facebook has long deployed technology that limits the availability of personal information and welcomes every opportunity to educate users about how to protect their data online."

Facebook users are not the only Internet social-networkers to face dangers in this new era of instant information-swapping. In January, News Corp. and its MySpace social-networking site were sued by four families who said their underage daughters were sexually abused by adults they met on the site.

Furthermore, security experts have begun sounding alarms about a new generation of thieves trolling the Internet, from social-networking pages to sites devoted to rental units and real estate, looking for personal information they can use in a scam.

Sophos said it decided to



Graph courtesy of MCT Wire Service
Daily BizFact: Chart showing number of visitors to popular social networking sites, with percent increase since last year.

look at Facebook, which has some 31 million users, because the company requests some personal details before giving someone a new account, said Ron O'Brien, senior security analyst with Sophos. Facebook then allows users to cloak that information, though many don't.

"The only way to avoid that is to go to the security setting on your profile and set it so it can only be seen by a limited number of people," said O'Brien.

Eighty-four percent of respondents to the Sophos "user" listed complete birth dates; 78 percent divulged their address or location; 72 percent listed at least one e-mail address; 87 percent provided details about their education or workplace. Twenty-three percent gave their phone number, while 26 percent provided an instant message name.

Such personal information can be used for targeted scams. For instance, online scammers can send an e-mail birthday card embedded with a link to a Web site that can unleash a malicious virus, O'Brien explained.

"When you provide information about yourself, you are giving a bad person the opportunity to exploit your identity," O'Brien said.

The problem is that young people often view their Web pages much like their bedrooms — they think only those they invite in can see what they are doing. But without privacy settings turned on, they are exposing themselves to virtually anyone online, O'Brien said.

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