

Social networking—advice for staying safe online

In conjunction with the Federal Privacy Commission's recent 'Privacy Awareness Week', ACMA has published information on some of the key risks of using online social networking sites.

Social Networking—Staying Safe Online highlights that, while such sites can be a great way to exchange ideas, information, photos and games; expand social networks and pursue new interests, putting personal information online does come with some risks.

Users who upload personal details to the internet can become a target of criminal activity such as financial fraud, cyberstalking, identity theft, malware or scams—regardless of their age.

ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman says a common sense approach to the type of information you make available online is the best defence.

'It can be easy to forget that not all the people who have access to your information online are really friends.

'Common sense steps like restricting sensitive personal or financial information, and being careful about how much personal information you share can go a long way to ensuring your online safety. The web offers so many opportunities for creating

communities, learning and making connections, but—just like in the real world—it pays to take a few precautions online.'

Users can protect themselves by taking the following simple steps:

- being aware of the potential risks
- thinking carefully before giving out personal or financial information
- reading the terms and conditions before signing up to any social networking sites
- checking privacy settings and understanding who can access their information
- knowing where to go for help if something goes wrong.

Most social networking sites have information on how to help users or report problems. Users

should read this advice carefully before signing up, and keep security and privacy settings up to date. Any criminal activity should be reported to the police.

More than 32 per cent of adult Australian internet users have viewed a social networking site, with popular sites including Facebook, MySpace, and Bebo.

Social Networking—Staying Safe Online is available from the ACMA website at <www.acma.gov.au> (go to For the public: Consumer & community advice > Internet: Internet security & safety). The SCAMwatch website, <www.scamwatch.gov.au>, also provides advice about scams and how to report them.

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