

Facebook's developers look forward

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(U-WIRE) WASHINGTON - "I check it, like, 7000 times a day ... mainly to stalk people," said 17-year-old Brianna Russo.

"Yeah, I check my email, and go on Facebook," added Kristen Warn, 18, who also uses the popular internet site to "stalk people."

The University of Maryland freshmen laughed as they described their obsessive relationship with Facebook.com, a popular Web site used to keep friends connected, but the truth is their comments are part of the normal buzz that surrounds the latest internet fad.

Despite the unexpected protests over two features added to the site on Sept. 5 (News Feed and Mini-Feed, both were revised to include additional security controls after being described as an invasion of privacy by some users) Facebook developers continue to expand their product.

While Melanie Deitch, the director of marketing, is not permitted to announce the next developments on the site before their official release, she did say that the users are the ones to decide what comes next.

"We have a pretty vocal user base," Deitch said. "We get thousands of emails every day that our customer support team sifts through in determining what the changes will be."

One of the most recent additions is the Election 2006 section, which allows users to voice their support for their favorite political causes.

Users can now track who is ahead, among Facebook voters, in the gubernatorial and congressional elections state by state. There are even campaign issue groups where members can voice their opinions on all matters relating to the races that interest them.

"If I noticed it, I would use it," Russo said.

"You would have to do a lot of research [on the candidates], and that's not worth it," said Warn.

Both students are from out of state, and therefore do not feel well-informed on who was running back home to investigate this feature. And, since they're not from Maryland, they don't feel they know enough about local politics to be involved in those races either.

The development team at Facebook has also recently added the "Development Platform."

Users who are fluent in programming can create programs that work within Facebook, allowing members to do everything from finding a date, to voicing their opinion on campus issues, to sharing playlists and photos.

The Facebook Development Platform Group, an online forum for developers to discuss their programs, already has almost 3000 members, or just over 3 percent of the over nine million total people signed up on the site, just one month after its debut.

Russo and Warn shake their heads, "no," when asked if they have heard of this feature.

Deitch said that the Facebook company was started as a way to replicate "the individual user's real world," and they will continue to add features to make sure there is something for everyone. Deitch added that Facebook developers are considering offering the site in languages other than English. But so far nothing definite has been decided.