

Facebook founders defend new changes

Contributed by Beth Mueller

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(U-WIRE) MADISON, Wis. - The creators of Facebook held an online news conference with the student media on Sept. 14 to talk about recent and upcoming changes to the social networking tool.

Facebook is the seventh most-trafficked site on the Internet according to the site's co-creator Mark Zuckerberg, and serves as an electronic social network for over 9.5 million students and adults.

In the online college news conference, Zuckerberg and co-creator Chris Hughes addressed the concerns of college students regarding changes to the site, including the controversial "News" and "Mini-Feeds."

In addition, the duo discussed the anticipated opening of regional networks for new users without e-mail addresses in established school or business networks.

"We're doing this because one of the top suggestions we get from our users is, 'Make it so that my other friends can get on!'" Zuckerberg wrote.

However, he also stressed the company's determination to protect users' privacy. New changes will allow users to retain the ability to control who sees their profiles within and outside of their respective networks.

Current Facebook users have responded with swift outcry against current and proposed changes to the site. Students involved in groups such as the "Official Petition Against Opening Facebook," have expressed their concern that new users, ranging from parents to employers to stalkers, will be able to view their personal information, friends and photos.

"What I initially liked about Facebook is that it wasn't just painting yourself all over the Internet for the whole world to see," said Kelsey Stoerzinger, a Northwestern University student and creator of the group "The New Facebook is Creepy and Dumb." Stoerzinger wrote in a previous e-mail to the The Badger Herald, "Back off Facebook; I'd like my privacy back."

Zuckerberg insisted that Facebook is a secure site.

"The site is exclusive because each network is exclusive to the people who belong there," Zuckerberg wrote in defense of the proposed expansion. "But on the whole, many more people than just college students enjoy Facebook."

Individuals using Facebook will only be able to join networks if they have an official network address.

For example, students with e-mails at wisc.edu are only allowed to join the University of Wisconsin network.

"As a user, nothing will be different for you than it was before, except that you can invite your friends who don't have .edu e-mail addresses to join regional networks," Hughes noted.

Critics of Facebook's expansion have suggested the creators are only driven to increase revenue, regardless of complaints from users.

Zuckerberg defended Facebook against these accusations, citing the high cost of maintaining a site with "literally hundreds of millions of pages each day," he wrote. "There's a lot more that we could do if we just cared about making money," he added. "Instead, we're really focused on building something great."

The changes were originally scheduled for Sept. 11, but Facebook has not yet announced the rescheduled date for the addition of 500 new networks that will cover the globe.

According to Hughes, new users will be required to choose one region to join and will not be permitted to change networks frequently.

"It's that inflexible because we don't want users to jump around from region to region, but instead just choose the region they live in," he said.

With Zuckerberg and Co. opening the doors of Facebook to a nonexclusive group of clients, critics have accused Zuckerberg of creating another MySpace -- another online social network that allows anyone to join.

However, Zuckerberg argued that Facebook would remain far different than its competitor.

"Whereas [MySpace] seem[s] to be trying to be a media portal where you connect with a lot of people you don't know, we're aiming to be a social utility where you rebuild the real-life social networks that you already have," he said.