



# SOCIAL NETWORKING CONFERENCE REPORT

FUJITSU



**YouthLink**  
Scotland  
The national agency for youth work

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# FOREWORD



Social networking has made a considerable impact to the way we conduct our lives in a very short space of time. For millions of people around the world, it has fundamentally changed the way they use the internet. No longer just passive consumers of content, they have become active participants – publishing, sharing, connecting and collaborating. Young people have been at the forefront of this change, taking the opportunities social networking sites give them to create their own space on the internet and to connect with friends through a new, exciting and feature-rich medium.

The growth of social networking sites has been phenomenal. They have become a part of everyday life for a lot of young people who use them. Everything from chatting with friends, organising social lives, to sharing music or debating the major issues of the day now takes place online.

It is of little surprise that this has happened as, in essence, social networking is a very simple concept – it's about connecting people together. The need to socialise, communicate and build friendships is a fundamental aspect of human nature. People of all ages have always sought to do this and social networking is just the latest way of doing so – in a way that better fits our increasingly connected and technology driven lifestyles.

This can be seen well beyond just the younger section of society. People of all ages and walks of life are increasingly using social networking, whether it's to find old friends, find a job, or share a hobby and it is now making an impact in

the business world. Companies increasingly recognise the need to give employees new ways to share knowledge, work collaboratively and learn from their colleagues. Social networking is fast becoming part of the mainstream of both our business and social lives.

With young people at the forefront of this revolution, social networking is a key way of engaging in dialogue with them. However like any medium of communication, there are norms and expectations that need to be met. Trust is a pre-requisite of meaningful dialogue, and that requires a high degree of honesty and transparency. And in the crowded social networking space an element of creativity and innovation may help to get attention.

Young people are also in a strong position to bring their social networking skills into the workplace. If they can offer employers the skills and attitudes they are looking for, they will be well placed to thrive in the modern workplace. As an innovative company Fujitsu is actively seeking to develop social networking skills in the workplace and views such skills as a valuable asset to any private or public sector organisation. Fujitsu is therefore proud to sponsor this conference on social networking.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graeme Mackay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Graeme Mackay**  
**Social Networking Expert, Fujitsu**

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# BACKGROUND

In August 2009 YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot held a conference to explore how the youth work sector could engage with young people through the use of digital technologies with a particular focus on social networking sites. The event provided information and advice to practitioners who wanted to develop this area of work and it showcased current examples of good practice. Delegates came from a wide section of the youth work field ranging from the voluntary sector, local authorities and public sector bodies that have an interest in engaging with young people.

The conference had four outcomes:

1. Youth work providers will feel supported to network, train, share expertise and work together to fill gaps in provision for young
2. Youth work organisations will understand the opportunities available through social networking to develop their practice
3. Increased number of youth work providers developing youth work opportunities through the medium of social networking
4. Increased engagement with young people using digital technologies

To realise these outcomes delegates were able to take part in workshops provided by a variety of organisations. These were:

- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
- Duke of Edinburgh Award
- Fujitsu
- North Lanarkshire Council
- Perfect Storm
- Young Scot

Through the knowledge gained during the workshops and previous knowledge the delegates had, they were asked to provide their feedback on a draft of this guidance produced by YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot. Additionally feedback was sought from Tim Davies, a consultant in young people's participation, social media and social change, who provided his expertise.

Social Networking is still an emerging area with change happening at a rapid pace, however it is hoped that by working with the delegates and a leading consultant in this field the following guidance will benefit practitioners.

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# INTRODUCTION

There has been a dramatic rise in the usage of social networking sites in the UK over the last few years. These sites now form a significant part of everyday life, particularly among young people, with many people organising their social life through the medium. However, there is an uncertainty about the use of these sites to engage with young people and this paper aims to provide guidance.

## What are Social Networking Sites?

Social networking sites are websites that facilitate online communities where people from all over the world can meet and share common interests by setting up a “profile page”.

These sites are particularly popular amongst young people. A recent Ofcom report revealed half of all users accessed their social networking site at least every other day.<sup>1</sup> Further, a MSN/MTV survey found only 18% of young people are yet to try social networking.<sup>2</sup> Its popularity can be further observed as an Experian-Hitwise study found social networking is replacing email services for the internet messaging market.<sup>3</sup>

Social networking sites can be divided into two categories:

1. *Profile based* as Bebo, Facebook and MySpace,
2. *Content based* – such as YouTube and Flickr.

This guide will focus on the profile-based social networking sites.

The motivation for using social networking sites vary. In general, Childnet identified that young people use these sites to:<sup>4</sup>

- Keep in touch with friends and sharing interests
- Experimenting with their identity and opinions
- Having a space where their parents or carers are not present
- Demonstrating technical expertise

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# SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

This section will look at the most popular social networking sites in the UK. These sites have broadly similar features including the following:

- Blogs
- Comments
- Instant Messaging
- Photos
- Videos

## Bebo

URL: [www.bebo.com](http://www.bebo.com)

Minimum Age: 13

Bebo is currently a dominant force in the social networking market with a 28% share.<sup>5</sup> Neilson Online established that 33% of Bebo users are under 18.<sup>6</sup> The site is aimed at under 30s with a core membership of 16 – 24 year olds who spend 1.14 billion minutes on the site per month.<sup>7</sup> The site contains safety videos designed to educate young people, parents and teachers on how to use Bebo in a safe and positive way.

Profiles can be either personal (an individual), group (a club or organisation) or a band (music). Profiles can be set to either 'Private' or 'Public'. Private profiles can only be viewed by people who have been accepted as friends whereas public profiles can be viewed by anybody.

Bebo users can post brief comments onto profiles and these messages appear to all viewers. However users can moderate comments made on their own profile. Following an email alert the owners can accept or decline the comment before it appears live on the page.

Group profiles are controlled by individuals through their personal profiles. This status is called a moderator and means that a personal profile has to be created before a group profile can exist.

## Facebook

URL: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

Minimum Age: 13

This site is popular with those in their early 20s and older as the style is restricted to a simple text and profile photo. Despite lacking the customisation of Bebo and MySpace the site is more popular with older users and Hitwise identified that only 6% of Facebook users are under 18.<sup>8</sup>

Facebook's *News Feed* allows the user to see all the activity within their network. It's very similar to an RSS feed, in that when a person logs into Facebook they immediately receive an update of all of the actions their network has taken.

Facebook contains a help section that outlines how to add different features to the profile page.

There are two types of profiles in Facebook personal and group. Personal profiles have very effective privacy settings that give the user complete control over who views their profile. This can be changed for each section of the profile. For example, everybody could be allowed to view the user's photographs but only selected friends could view personal information. Similarly to Bebo, a group profile is controlled by a personal profile.

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## MySpace

URL: [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

Minimum Age: 14

With its embedded music player, MySpace is popular amongst music lovers. Nielson Online analysis found 16% of users were under 18 and MySpace automatically set profiles to private if they are aged 14 or 15 years old.<sup>9</sup>

The site contains many of the features common to social networking sites including comment moderating, having the ability to set a profile to private and appear offline.

Unique to MySpace is the *bulletin board* which users can use to message everyone in their list of friends or selected members. This makes the site particularly useful for organising events and promoting activities, such as concerts.

## Twitter

URL: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Minimum Age: None

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages of up to 140 characters. Known as Tweets, these messages are displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers, known as *followers*.

Senders can restrict delivery to those in a specific group or, by default, allow open access. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) or external applications. While the service, itself, costs nothing to use, accessing it through SMS may incur phone service provider fees.

## Ning

URL: [www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)

Minimum Age: None

Ning allows users to create their own social network. With more than 1.8 million Ning Networks created and 39 million registered users, millions of people every day are coming together through Ning to share common interests.<sup>10</sup>

There are a wide choice of features that can be added to Ning sites, including RSS support, messaging, videos, photos, chat, music, groups, events, and blogs. As a result of this broad set of choices, each social network on Ning is unique in its purpose, design, branding and features.

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# Using Social Networks

## Should Organisations Use Social Networking?

Young people are often regarded by marketers as “hard to reach” as they are shunning traditional communication tools and their media consumption is increasingly fragmented. As a popular online space, social networking sites therefore provide a place to reach young people. Hence, a very diverse range of organisations have embraced social networking as a means of communicating with young people.

However, there are barriers to using such sites. Many organisations, including schools, councils and large businesses have preventive firewalls to such social networking sites. There are also significant safety issues surrounding the availability of information on social networking sites and concerns about their influence in young people lives. One example relates to the Bridge End suicides where police thought that Bebo indirectly encouraged young people to commit suicide.<sup>11</sup>

It should be noted that, in general, criminal law applies equally to the Internet as elsewhere and what is illegal offline is illegal online.

Tim Davies identifies in ‘Safe and Effective Engagement with Social Network Sites for Youth Professionals’ that there are five ways that young people can be engaged:<sup>12</sup>

- Supporting young people with information and opportunities for reflection and group discussion about SNS and online behaviour
- Promoting services and provision through social networking sites
- Using social networking sites to enhance face to face work with young people
- Using social networking sites for online research, participation and virtual detached youth work
- Supporting young people to carry out peer to peer work online

## Risks – Young People’s Attitudes

Recent research by Ofcom discovered emerging trends amongst young people (and in many cases, adults) about their online usage habits:

- A general lack of awareness of the issues;
- The assumption that privacy and safety issues have been taken care of by the sites themselves;
- Low levels of confidence among users in their ability to manipulate privacy settings;
- Willingness to add and engage quickly and easily with people they don’t know – e.g. adding friends of friends, sharing photos and messages with strangers;
- Information on privacy and safety being hard to find on sites;
- Feeling among younger users that they are invincible;
- Perception that social networking sites are less dangerous than other online activities.

This leaves young people potentially exposed to predatory individuals who could lie about their age or other details in order to access and engage the young person.

These topics lend themselves to one-to-one and group work discussion with young people, to raise their awareness of the risks and work should be done in order to keep them safe.

Workers also have the opportunity to engage with young people about the content on their individual profiles if they have shared it with staff or been advised of potentially inappropriate content. In exactly the same way that workers should challenge inappropriate racist, sexist, sectarian or homophobic language within a youth club setting, young people’s online profiles provide an excellent opportunity for informal education.

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## Professional Guidance

The next section of these notes provides practitioners with recommendations for best practice when using social networking sites. Before the conference, YouthLink Scotland produced draft guidance that aimed to provide delegates with information on how to use social networking sites to engage with young people. During the event these guidance notes were discussed by all the delegates to determine if they met the needs of practitioners. From the various discussions the following recommendations of best practice have been established.

### Online Professional Boundaries

1. Workers need to introduce themselves clearly, stating the purpose of the work – why they are engaging with young people and the limits and boundaries in that contact. Youth workers should use a clearly identifiable work profile. Under no circumstances should workers be undertaking work related activity from a personal profile.
2. Young people should not add their youth workers to their own profile. The young person should be notified through the organisation's profile that explains the boundaries and welcoming contact through the organisation's channel.
3. Workers should take care about the visibility of their own profiles in public and ensure the appropriate privacy controls are set. A youth workers digital identity is equally as crucial as their professional persona and should be treated as valuable!
4. Young people also need to be told who they can contact if they have any concerns or complaints about the online engagement.
5. If young people have access to posts on the organisational profile page, consideration needs to be given to ensuring this is appropriately moderated. Check the settings of the site to make sure that posts have to be approved on any forums.
6. If a young person wants an organisation added to their profile they should be reminded that this will be visible to anyone that can see their profile. This is particularly important if the organisation is engaged in support of sensitive issues for example such as health outreach or support with sexuality issues.

## Advice for Youth Workers to pass onto Young People

1. Be careful not to share too much information to people you don't really know. After all, you wouldn't invite a stranger into a room and randomly disclose everything about you, so 2.
2. If you see anything suspicious online report it to an adult or those running the site. Save any transcript of strange conversation – cut and paste it.
3. Block any contacts that are harassing or upsetting you.
4. Be careful what you post or share! Consider if you wouldn't want your parents or carers to see it, would you share it? If the answer's no then don't post it online.
5. Don't post pictures wearing school uniforms or any other identifying items – this could allow people to track you down – the less information, the better!
6. Don't give out specific information on tweets, Facebook, Bebo, etc – for example don't say – "I'm going to JP's for a party Sat at Athole Gardens, Glasgow" just say "Off to party tonight – excited! " – this makes it harder for those who would try to use your information.
7. Think about what pictures you post online. Once you post something it's difficult to get it back as you don't know where it has been forwarded to or who else has taken a copy! If you're not happy sharing it round the common room why are you posting it online?

## Management Challenges

- Is there an appropriate online safety policy for staff?
- Is there an effective cyber bullying policy with clear guidance for staff?
- Is there a system for gathering online youth work and recording staff concerns? Is there an appropriate process for reviewing recordings?
- Can staff access sites such as Facebook and Bebo or is access blocked by the IT department's firewall?
- What training needs do staff have in order to operate in an online environment? Outreach work for example, delivered via social networking is as specialist a discipline as street based youth work – requiring basic ICT skills, ability to understand young people's online shorthand (e.g. LOL – laughs out loud!) and awareness of some of the dangers in an online setting.



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## Child Protection – Recording Online Activity

In general, a youth worker is no more or less likely to encounter situations online which give rise to child protection concerns than they would in comparable face-to-face work. Any situation that causes concern should be responded to in line with existing professional practice

Online activity should be recorded using the same processes that apply with offline youth work. As a minimum:

- A log of who was contacted (username)
- Any issues raised during the discussion
- Any inappropriate behaviours/dialogue and actions taken
- Any follow up actions required as a result of the interaction (requests for information, additional advice/signposting etc).

All staff should be aware of the general child protection and reporting guidelines for an organisation. These guidelines will apply for online youth work as well as for face-to-face work. Any concerns should be raised with senior managers or the appropriate child protection/e-safety co-ordinator within an organisation and all actions should be recorded.

The use of images or videos online means that consent forms should be completed. Obviously if the young person is aged under 16 then a parent or guardian needs to sign it on their behalf.

## Inclusion and Accessibility

Youth Work is committed to supporting all young people so they feel included and supported in all youth work activity, and to maintaining an environment free of discrimination and exclusion.

The same principles apply to the use of social networking as a tool for the delivery of a quality youth work experience. Workers should give particular consideration to inclusion and accessibility. You should align your practice to organisational policies such as equalities, inclusion, access, disability, discrimination and diversity.

## Help

There are four main organisations to turn to if there is a suspicion that a young person is in immediate danger. If a young person is in immediate danger telephone 999. The other three areas where support can be gained are:

### CEOP

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) are a police agency with powers to investigate concerns about grooming or sexual abuse of young people online. Professionals and young people can report concerns to CEOP via the 'Report Abuse' button on their website.

<http://www.ceop.gov.uk>

### IWF

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) respond to reports of obscene and illegal content on the internet. Content can be reported to the IWF and they will work with Internet Service Providers to ensure the content is removed or access to it is blocked.

<http://www.iwf.org.uk>

### Network Provider

Responsible website providers will have clear processes for dealing with reports of abuse including inappropriate content or bullying. For concerns which do not involve illegal content or conduct, look for the 'report abuse' feature on the website in question. Most social network sites only check content when alerted to it by users.

### Training

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) offers two courses on social networking safety that have a particular focus on Bebo.

One course is a half day that allows adults who work with 11-16 year olds to deliver safety training to young people. In addition it explains many of the popular online and mobile technologies that young people are using.

The other is a full day course costing £125 training a person to become a CEOP Ambassador. The training provides both a law enforcement and education perspective. Once the training is completed the ambassador can cascade train colleagues and young people.

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk/teachers](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/teachers)  
[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

# GLOSSARY

<b>Application</b>	Pieces of software usually created by third party developers that interact with the core features of a social networking site. Examples include trivia quizzes.
<b>Blog</b> (short for weblog)	It's a frequently updated journal that is intended to be public. It usually represents the personality of the website.
<b>CEOP</b>	The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre – the primary law enforcement authority in the UK for child protection on the Internet.
<b>Cyberbullying</b>	Bullying that happens on the internet.
<b>Digital Literacy</b>	The ability to access and understand online communications.
<b>Friend</b>	These are members of a profiles network and are not necessary friends in real life.
<b>Instant Messaging</b>	Real time communication between two or more people based on typed text.
<b>Skin</b>	The background or texture of a user's profile. These can include patterns, animations, photos and other formatting.

## Relevant Documents

Youth Work and Social Networking: <http://blog.practicalparticipation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/fullYouth-Work-and-Social-Networking-Final-Report.pdf>

The Youth Engagement & Social Media Guide: <http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/>

The Youth Work Online Community of Practitioners: <http://www.youthworkonline.org.uk>

Circuits of Cool: Key Themes and Findings: <http://advertising.microsoft.com/wwdocs/user/en-us/researchlibrary/researchreport/Circuits-of-Cool-Social-Networks.PDF>

**Ofcom:** Social Networking: A quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use: [http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media\\_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/summary/](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/summary/)

UK children's media literacy: [http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media\\_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/uk\\_childrens\\_ml/full\\_report.pdf](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/uk_childrens_ml/full_report.pdf)

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## FOOTNOTES

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3. The Impact of Social Networking in the UK, Experian Hitwise, 2008
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10. <http://about.ning.com/>
11. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/7204172.stm>
12. Safe and Effective Engagement with Social Network Sites for Youth Professionals, Tim Davies, July 2009

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