

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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**U.S. Citizenship
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Services**

Social Networking Sites and Their Importance to FDNS

The Internet has made it increasingly easier for people to get connected with each other whether that is with long-distance family, friends, or to find new loves and friendships. Social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Classmates, Hi-5, and other similar sites are designed to allow people to share their creativity, pictures, and information with others. Sometimes people do this to find romance, sometimes they do it to find friends with similar interests, and sometimes they do it to keep in touch with family. Narcissistic tendencies in many people fuels a need to have a large group of "friends" link to their pages and many of these people accept cyber-friends that they don't even know. This provides an excellent vantage point for FDNS to observe the daily life of beneficiaries and petitioners who are suspected of fraudulent activities. Generally, people on these sites speak honestly in their network because all of their friends and family are interacting with them via IM's (Instant Messages), Blogs (Weblog journals), etc. This social networking gives FDNS an opportunity to reveal fraud by browsing these sites to see if petitioners and beneficiaries are in a valid relationship or are attempting to deceive CIS about their relationship. Once a user posts online, they create a public record and timeline of their activities. In essence, using MySpace and other like sites is akin to doing an unannounced cyber "site-visit" on a petitioners and beneficiaries.

Here is a step-by-step process of how a generic social networking website works:

1. A user registers an email address and password with the site thus creating a unique account.
2. Typically, the website sends a confirmation email to the user's address to validate that person's identity.
3. The user may then create a profile. This profile may contain whatever information the user decides to publish online. The user can decide whether to make the profile public or private. The user may change or manipulate information in his profile at any time. In this step, the new user can become a member of a number of networks. These networks can be based on high school, hometown, job, church, or any other type of social group.
4. Anyone may search for another user by complete name, screen name or email address and request to be that user's "friend." That user can deny or agree to the "friend" request.
5. When adding a user as a "friend" the accepting user can now see your profile including all the personal information entered into the profile. The new friend can also see any new information the user may add at a later date such as an online journal entry or photographs.

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6. By repeating steps four and five the user will gradually accumulate a large list of friends effectively becoming part of the social network.

A list of social networking sites and the countries where they are popular can be found on Wikipedia at this link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

Here are a few social networking sites that most people are familiar with; the number of registered users is astounding.

Name	Description/Focus	Registered users	Registration	Global Page ranking (May 08)	Active Users
Badoo	General, Popular in Europe	13,000,000 ⁽²¹⁾	Open to people 18 and older	213 ⁽¹⁰⁾	
Bebo	General, Popular in the US, UK, Ireland, NZ and the Pacific Islands	40,000,000 ⁽¹²⁾	Open to people 13 and older	108 ⁽¹⁴⁾	
Buzznet	Music and pop-culture	10,000,000 ⁽¹⁸⁾	Open	498 ⁽¹²⁾	
ChinaRen.com	General, Popular in China	50,000,000 ⁽¹⁾	Open	823 ⁽²²⁾	12,800,000 ⁽²⁴⁾
Cyworld	Young South Koreans	2,100,000 ⁽²⁴⁾	Open	223 ⁽¹⁵⁾	
Facebook	General, Popular Worldwide	70,000,000 ⁽²⁾	Open to people 13 and older	8 ⁽²⁷⁾	
Habbo	General, Over 31 communities worldwide. Chat Room and user profiles.	82,000,000 ⁽⁴⁾	Open to people 13 and older	4,050 ⁽⁴²⁾	
hi5	General, Popular Worldwide	70,000,000 ⁽³⁾	Open to people 13 and older	13 ⁽²⁶⁾	
in8m	Music, Video, Photos, Blogs	28,000,000 ⁽¹⁷⁾	Open	140 ⁽²²⁾	
MI Gente.com	Latins	2,800,000 ⁽²²⁾	Open	5,266 ⁽⁸³⁾	
Muslim	Muslim social networking	2,400,000 ⁽²⁰⁾	Open to people 13 and older	150 ⁽¹⁶⁾	
MySpace	General, Popular Worldwide	110,000,000 ⁽²³⁾	Open to people 13 and older	6 ⁽²⁵⁾	
myYearbook	General	5,100,000 ⁽²⁵⁾	Open to age 13 and up & Grades 9 and up	894 ⁽²³⁾	
Netlog	Formerly known as Facebook.	28,000,000 ⁽¹⁷⁾	Open	112 ⁽²¹⁾	
Orkut.com	Social, Friends and Family	32,000,000 ⁽¹¹⁾	Open	2,311 ⁽⁸⁰⁾	
Windows Live Spaces	Blogging (formerly MSN Spaces)	120,000,000 ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾	Open	4 ⁽¹¹⁾	

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