

TALK THE TALK

Social networking 101

Sure you've heard of YouTube, but can you Digg Flickr? Here are basics about sites that help people communicate. Most tie into Facebook and Twitter. For example, you can connect YouTube and Facebook to share your favorite YouTube videos with your friends. But we get ahead of ourselves. Read on.

Services are free unless otherwise noted. To reach most sites, type the name plus ".com." Note that rules and benefits are changing all the time. (For instance, Facebook recently announced its own messaging service.)

Facebook. It has 500 million members and counting. Keep up with people on your Friends list by posting updates or linking to newspaper articles, adding photos to your gallery, chatting, or inviting people to events. But: Work carefully through privacy settings.

MySpace. It's similar to Facebook but also a spot where musicians and other artists show their wares. The site is organized by media, and you can track favorite artists.

Twitter. Tweets (messages limited to 140 characters) tell you about a spontaneous protest, comment on news, or inform you that your best friend is in the bathroom. Post by sending a text on your cell phone or by typing into the site from your computer. Watch topics listed under Trends on your home page to see what people are talking about at any time. Or set up lists—of food bloggers, say—that you can access for more targeted info. But: For extra privacy, allow only those you approve to see your posts. The location-based feature is off by default; if

it's on, readers of your tweets will know where you are if you use a smart phone.

YouTube. Share videos with the world—or watch clips of TV shows, catch up on Web-only shows, and watch movie trailers.

Groupon. Sign up to receive daily local deals on museum admissions, show tickets, food, clothing, even facials. But it takes a village—or enough buyers—for a deal to take effect. If you're interested, click on the Buy button. Once the required number of buyers is reached, your credit card is charged.

Foursquare. A mix of geo-location technology and social networking. Check in with a smart phone when you visit a favorite restaurant, for example, and tell those connected to you (via Twitter, Facebook, or otherwise) how your meal was. Check in often enough from the same establishment and you'll become "mayor," which may earn you rewards from the vendor. But: You're letting people know you're not home.

Blog. The word is short for Web log, a diary you share online. Some blogs are for businesses (like the CONSUMER REPORTS blog), others are personal. One of the most famous: the Julie/Julia Project, on which the movie "Julie & Julia" was based. You may need software such as WordPress or Blogger to publish.

Wiki. It's a changing database that can be edited by participants. Wikis can be specialized—companies create them to store corporate knowledge—or wide-ranging. Wikipedia, for example, is an online

encyclopedia. But: There's no fact-checking on some wikis.

Scribd. Lets you upload documents you think are worth reading, from amicus briefs in court cases to magazine articles and excerpts from novels. Rate what you've read or let friends know what you've been reading.

Flickr. A place to store and share photos, with apps such as Streetside Photos, which mixes Bing Maps (Microsoft's answer to MapQuest) with photos posted by Flickr users.

Ping. Reach it through iTunes. Find out what music friends are buying, find music reviews by people with tastes similar to yours, and follow favorite artists.

Digg. You'll see Digg buttons on news sites. Join this free service and Digg a story by clicking on the button. The more Diggs, the higher a story rises in the news hierarchy on Digg.com. It's a way to get recognition for stories you think are important and to see what others are reading.

