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Why do Facebook users reveal so much private data?

Facebook has reached 300 million users — but why are we so open about sharing information about ourselves that we wouldn't do with a person on the street?

By Asavin Wattanajantra, 17 Sep 2009 at 11:02

Why do users on **social networks** such as Facebook reveal so much confidential and potentially embarrassing information, even if they sometimes know all the risks?

This is the question asked by Professor Ronald Leenes of the University of Tilburg, speaking at the **ENISA security conference** in Greece.

He said that there were well-publicised risks around using social networks, noting an example of British woman Hayley Jones who was allegedly killed by her ex-partner after changing her relationship status.

Future employers could also look at profiles of employment candidates and finding embarrassing photos that could **hurt their chances for getting the job**.

He used a **video called from the 'Idiots of Ants'** to illustrate how open we were to complete strangers, and highlighted that there was a **Facebook quiz** that illustrated the amount of information we are giving to app creators.

It is also in the social networks' interest to keep data as long as possible, because the value of the network is in its size and the amount of information it had, according to Leenes.

Leenes also revealed some of the reasons why people are open in becoming 'friends' with many different users, sometimes disclosing information to complete strangers.

He said some were ignorant of the risks, while others assumed they had privacy on these networks. Some felt they had no choice to join or be left out socially.

"If ignorance is the case then we have to educate the kids about the risks," Leenes added. "You have to raise awareness. Tell the kids that their profiles may be open to other people other than their friends."

Leenes believed that many people are already aware of the risks of talking in such a public forum, but believes that they should have some form of privacy, especially if they are talking with friends.

"It is a call for the re-establishment of the social more that you stay out of people's conversations, unless you were invited to participate," Leenes said.

Other users felt that they had no choice and that "social" thinking

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over-rode any "logical" thinking that they had about keeping their privacy.

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