



The Last of the Facebook and Twitter Holdouts

For Some, Privacy, Personal Relationships and Time Keep Them Off Social Networks

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They're a rare breed, some might even say an endangered species.

But as [social networking sites](#) like [Facebook](#), [MySpace](#) and [Twitter](#) continue to build populations surpassing those of many countries, the last of the Web 2.0 holdouts remain proud to be freewheeling free agents.

Day in and day out, the invitations to join the social network nattering pour in.

But, especially as members gripe about [Facebook's new facelift](#), its [terms of service controversy](#) and, now, [Twitter's tendency to buckle under the strain of a swarm of new users](#), the unfriended and tweet-free are relieved to be independent.

"I receive emails from friends and family, requesting to join these networks almost daily. At first I did feel pressured to join but I quickly got over that. I now reject every invitation to join and I don't feel bad about it," said Oscar Salgado, 37, a social worker from Honolulu.

Danielle Carter, 29, an office administrator in New York agreed.

"I certainly see the draw and the appeal from everyone around me who's a part of Facebook, but I appreciate that I don't have any of the problems they can bring," she said.

Web 2.0 Teetotalers in the Minority

According to a March report from research firm Nielsen, two-thirds of the planet's Internet population visit [social networking or blogging sites](#).

Across the world, activity in "member communities" accounts for one in every 11 minutes spent online, the report said. In the United Kingdom, the average is one in every six minutes. In Brazil, it's one of every four minutes.

Given such ubiquity, the nonconformist anti-networkers could seem like curiosities to the people accustomed to sharing every detail of their lives online. But the Web 2.0 teetotalers just don't understand what the fuss is all about and couldn't be happier on their own.

"Some of the great joys in life are meeting new people in person and people watching and spending time with my kids and writing," said David Vicker, a 37-year-old freelance media producer who lives in the suburbs of Kansas City, Mo.

Privacy, Personal Relationships Too Important to Sacrifice

Given his [profession](#), Vicker said he "should be as socially networked as anybody."

But though he's been told time and again how he [might find more job opportunities online](#), he said he's not buying it. He said he's actually attempted to set up social networking accounts but quickly abandoned them.

"I value personal relationships to build business. I want to know the people who hire me," he said. "I've also run into an elitist attitude about social networking -- that you have to set up your account in a certain way and create a certain 'presence' to be taken seriously. I got over cliques in junior high, thank you."

Others say it's simply a matter of valuing their privacy.

Katie Koch, 27, and her husband, Paul, are both pastors in their small Minnesota community. Although they often feel like they're out of the loop because they're not members of any social network, Koch said they feel like they're in the public spotlight enough as it is.

"Our lives are very public. We're always up in front of people," she said. "If we put all of our lives up there [and] pictures of ourselves, then suddenly people are going to be able to see it and we won't have any privacy."

Pressure to Join Can Be Hard to Resist

She also worries that it could complicate her relationship with parishioners. Teenagers, for example, see her in a role of authority and guidance at church. A friendship through Facebook, MySpace or another site, she indicated, could obscure that.

And "it's hard to say no to people who you don't want to friend," she said.

Still, she added, the temptation can be hard to resist. Koch just gave birth four months ago and said that many of the play dates in the area are organized through Facebook. Sometimes, events with other couples are arranged in the same way.

"In those instances, there's the pressure of feeling left out," she said. "And we feel we should sign up so we [can] do those things."

But the urge isn't great enough to make them give in. Especially as she and her husband hear about couples that have split because one person re-kindled an old romance online, she said they recommit to their decision to stay unconnected.

Off the Grid and Proud of It

And Koch, like many others, acknowledged that this isn't the first time she's chosen to remain off the grid.

Scott Habig, 31, who works in finance in New York, said he was the last of his friends to buy a cell phone. Now that he's one of few friends without a Facebook account, he's been subject to the same kind of pressure.

But he said, "There's some pride in not having to deal with it."

And even though people may compare being without a cell phone to being without a social network, he said he couldn't imagine "how it's even in the same league of usefulness as a cell phone."

"In no way, shape or form do I think Facebook fits the same mold," he said.

Habig, however, also admitted that if he signed on, he'd likely use it and doesn't need another procrastination tool. Plus, by piggy-backing on his wife's account, he already can keep in touch with friends and share photos of his own.

Facebook: The Constant Cocktail Party

But the holdouts aren't the only ones wrestling with the constant connectedness of a Web 2.0 world. Though it may pain the social media elite to hear it, some of the most connected among them admit that they sometimes near the verge of exhaustion.

"I have this feeling that people are hitting that breaking point. There's too many choices, too many invitations," said Dan Tynan, a technology journalist for a number of publications, including Computerworld, who also keeps his own blog, [Tynan on Tech](#).

Recently, he said he's started to feel a little burnt out himself. So, for April 1, he decided to have a little fun with his frustration.

The 'Anti-Social Network'

Tynan opened a Twitter account for "Garbotweets" and wrote a [Computerworld blog post about a new "anti-social network."](#)

Named for the reclusive 1930s film star, he wrote that Garbo "allows users to quietly de-friend everyone in their Linked-In, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Digg, and other social networks without anyone noticing." Future plans for the service include a national Do Not Tweet registry, which prevents people from writing anything about you on Twitter, and EnemyFeed, which serves the same purpose for other kinds of online media.

"When I go on Facebook I feel like I'm at a cocktail party with everyone I've ever met in my life," Tynan said. "But you can't stay at a cocktail party doing that forever."

Justin Smith, editor of [InsideFacebook.com](#), acknowledged that the non-stop cocktail party with family, friends and mere acquaintances can give rise to awkward moments and embarrassments.

But said, "Most people just joining Facebook now will probably be surprised by the value of the information that people are sharing that they just wouldn't get access to otherwise."

As the rules we live by in our day-to-day interactions migrate to Facebook, he said we'll slowly learn what to share and who to share it with.

"I think as a culture, we still have a learning curve in terms of what's appropriate to share on Facebook and how to negotiate the social contracts that exist between you and all the people that you know," said Smith.

And, if we never learn, there's always Garbo.

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