

## Defend Your Identity on Social Media

Social media usage is booming. Facebook just announced their most recent user total has climbed to 1.11 billion, Twitter has over 500 million users and YouTube logs more than 4 billion views per day. However, with the convenience of social media comes security and privacy risks. Here are a few tips to keep your identity secure as you socialize:

**Keep your profile private.** Many social media sites encourage - or even require - users to maintain a personal profile. Be sure to keep yours set to private at all times. These pages include sensitive information such as full name, date of birth, hometown, pet names and other information often used to verify your identity. Also be wary of posting information used in password reset questions. For example, the street you lived on as a child, mother's maiden name, and the make/model of your first car.

**Don't tag your location.** While it can be fun to tweet that you're on vacation or post pictures of your family at the beach on Facebook, this also signals that you are not at home. This can leave you vulnerable to robbery and/or mail theft. Wait until after you've returned to post photos of the trip.

**Always log out when you're finished posting.** Even if you have your privacy settings secured, not logging out allows a potential identity thief complete access to your profile information. This is especially true when you're using a public computer. Getting into the habit of always logging off will help you avoid giving strangers easy access to your identity.

**Use strong passwords.** Most secured websites, including social media, now require passwords to contain letters, numbers and special characters, but that's not always enough to create strong password. Try to use passwords that are at least eight characters long and do not contain any names or words found in the dictionary. One way to create this gibberish and still remember it later is to use a unique abbreviation of a phrase. For example, "m@nitM00n" is derived from "man in the moon." Another tip: don't use the same password for every website, no matter how strong it is.

A 2012 report found that of the people with public social media files 68 percent shared their birthday (with 45 percent including their full birth date), 63 percent shared the name of their high school and 12 percent shared their pet's name. All of this information can be used against you, so protect yourself by carefully monitoring what you reveal on social media.



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