



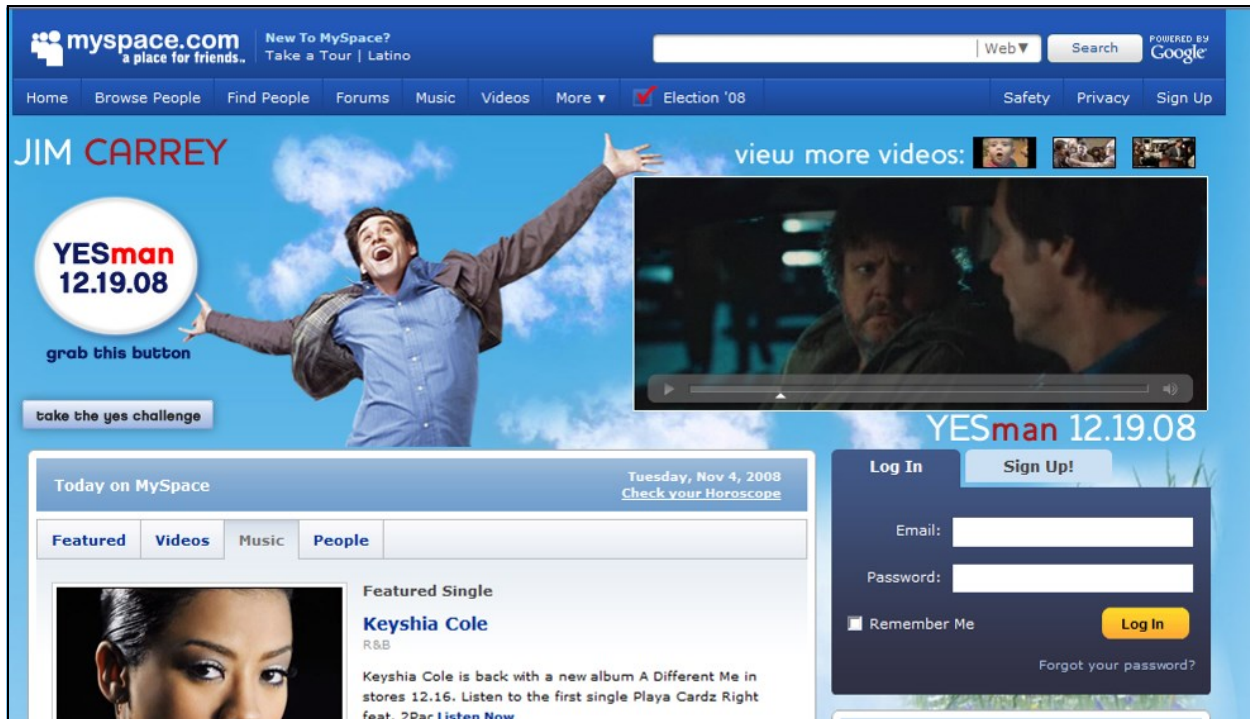
“Deconstructing Darfur” workshop held for teens in Teen Second Life virtual world

# Social Networking

*On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog.*

In the old days—around ten years ago—we used to have friends, classmates, teammates, buddies, etc. Today, we have social networks, or more precisely: social network services.

For the most part, social networks are on the internet. Once on the internet we can meet (virtually) people from all over the world, not just around town. There are dozens of websites that bring people together around common interests such as music or gaming. Others are open to anyone. Here's the problem: “On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog” is a phrase that went around during the early days of the Web. It might also be said, “Nobody knows you're a creep.”



My Space offers a colourful space to make friends and share your thoughts, pictures, music and videos.

## Getting Together with Friends

### Hundreds of millions of them from around the world

Every day millions of people get on the internet to be with their friends. Online social networks have been around for more than fifteen years. But it hasn't been until the last few years that they've taken off.

With over 100 million registered users each, Facebook and MySpace are the most popular social networking sites in North America. Dozens of others are used by people around the world.

For those out there who have never ventured onto one of these sites, here's how they work: The typical public site (not private) allows people to create profiles of themselves and share this information with others. The

information might include:

- Personal identification information such as name, age, gender, hometown, ethnicity
- Interests
- Pictures and videos
- Comments or blog
- List of other "friends" on the network

Creating a space on a social networking site can be a great way to express yourself and meet people with similar interests. You can communicate with other members by sending emails, commenting on their pages, visiting in chat rooms, or instant messaging (with or without video).

Some social networking sites offer enhanced activities, such as discussion forums and more realistic interactions and actual building of virtual communities.

## Second Life



Perhaps the most ambitious social networking site is *Second Life* and its youth-oriented *Teen Second Life*. These sites allow “residents” to interact with one another through avatars (virtual beings) they create. This site focuses as much on creating your virtual world as making friends in it.



Teen Second Life is intended for young people aged 13–17. You can create an Avatar and interact with the people and places in Second life for free. However, a paid account allows you to do more things, like owning virtual property.

## Creativity Sites

Some social networking sites focus on the photos, writing, drawings, or Flash programs you create. These sites let you upload your creations, view others’ work, and comment about them. In addition to getting to know new people, you can improve your skills.

## The Dark Side of Social Networking

Sexual Predators: Although most social networking is fun and harmless, there is a dark side. There are sexual predators, usually older men, who pretend to be someone else in order to meet young girls and boys.

Predators often pretend to be teenagers with interests similar to you. They may share sexually explicit material just to see how you react. At some point, they’ll try to see you. Never give your name, phone number, address or school to anyone online. And never agree to meet with someone you know just from the internet. Whenever your communications start to feel weird, tell your parents or just stop communicating with that person.

Harassment and Cyberbullying: A mother was recently indicted for pretending to be a teenage boy on MySpace. Prosecutors said the mother harassed a girl and may have helped lead to the girl’s suicide.

Concern about adults and kids using the internet to pick on a child has led to the creation of a special term: *cyberbullying*. This is when one or more people use email, texting, instant messaging, or online postings to say cruel and damaging things (often false) about someone.

Cyberbullying might start as a joke or trash talk, but may escalate into truly hurtful communication. Experts say it is best to simply avoid public criticism altogether. If you have something to say to someone, say it directly to them in private.

## Social Networking | Key Vocabulary

avatar	In computer virtual worlds: an image representing a user. From Hindu religion: a manifestation of a Hindu god.
cyberbullying	When someone repeatedly makes fun of another person online or picks on another person using email or chat rooms.
enhanced	When something is increased in value. "My life is enhanced by your love."
harassment	Being tormented by continuing attacks, criticism, or sexual statements.
indicted	Charged with a crime.
predator	Someone who attacks or takes advantage of a person to gain advantage. "That sleazy guy is a sexual predator."
virtual	Existing like something but not the real thing. "I have a virtual house that I built on the Second Life Web space."

### Discussion Points

1. Social networking sites are hugely popular. Why do you think this is?
2. What are some advantages of having friends you visit with only on the Internet? What are some advantages of having friends in your community who you can do things with face to face? Is one way of having friends better than the other?
3. One of the difficulties with social networking sites is adults (mostly men) who pretend to be a young person in order to make a sexual connection. Social networking sites ask members to indicate their age, but people lie. What do you think can be done to lessen the risk of sexual predators on social networking sites?
4. It's not new that teenagers make fun of another person. Sometimes they can be very cruel. However, what is new is that lies, distortions or angry words about a person can now be uploaded to the Internet where hundreds or thousands of people can see them. Have you ever seen or participated in cyberbullying? Is this something we should be concerned about? What do you think can be done to lessen cyberbullying?