5 Things You Should Know About Your Online Profile

The public expects state leaders to be accessible on social media and the Web, but many state officials are hesitant about using them because of privacy concerns. Here are five tips to help officials address privacy concerns so they can take advantage of what social media has to offer.

**Tip 1**
**Facebook Basic Privacy Settings**

When using Facebook, you should proactively manage your privacy settings so you can control what you share and who can see it.

To begin, click on the “Settings” tab located in the top right of the page under a small arrow to the right of the “Home” link.

When a menu appears, click on “Privacy Settings.” If you are new to Facebook, this is one of the first things you should do.

Here, you can adjust several aspects of privacy on Facebook, such as how people can search for and find you, how information is displayed on your Timeline, if there are certain people you want to block, etc. State officials will likely find the ability to control the searchability of their profile and personal information, as well as the amount of information displayed on their Timeline, to be the most useful settings to adjust.

**Tip 2**
**Facebook Biographical and Contact Information Privacy**

While the “Privacy Settings” tab is a relatively obvious place to start, privacy controls related to your biographical and contact information are a little harder to find. Tweaking this information will control the visibility of details, such as where you live or have worked, your contact information, your birthday, etc. To access these visibility settings, go to your Timeline profile homepage by clicking on your name near the top right corner in the blue bar on Facebook.

Click your name to get to your Timeline profile, then click the “Update Info” box to the right of your name at the top of the page.

This will take you to a page that includes your profile information. Here, select the pull down arrow next to each biographical item to select its level of visibility. The default setting options include allowing the public to view information, allowing only your friends to view information or making it so that only you can see certain information.

Checking these settings is important because of a box in this section labeled “Contact Info” where, for example, you can add your cell phone number. You may not want the general public, or even all of your friends, to have your cell phone number, email or other contact information; set your privacy controls accordingly. These are the basic privacy settings for Facebook and more settings also can be tweaked on the Timeline for more advanced users.

**Tip 3**
**Facebook Frictionless Sharing Apps**

“Frictionless sharing” means that Facebook apps, once approved and installed on your Facebook account, can automatically post certain things you are doing online. For example, the music you listen to using certain apps, like Spotify, is automatically shared with your friends,
even if you don’t actively agree to post that information each time you use Spotify. See the agreement for installing an app for Slideshare. In order to use this app, you must agree to let it post as you. This means, for example, that if you view a slide show on the Slideshare app, technically it could publish what you’re viewing to your friends.

Frictionless sharing can be potentially embarrassing when you install apps that automatically post what you read online.

The Washington Post Social Reader is a popular frictionless sharing app. If you install this app and read an article on The Washington Post through it, the app will automatically publish what you read to your friends’ pages. Several Facebook apps allow for frictionless sharing. Be aware of their posting capability as you install and use them on Facebook.

To remove or edit the sharing permissions of apps, go to the basic Privacy Settings page detailed in Tip 1. From there, click on “Edits Settings” next to “Apps and Websites.” You will see another category, “Apps you use,” and another button to “Edit Settings.” After clicking this second “Edit Settings” button, you will see a screen that allows you to change the settings of your apps or remove them entirely.

**TIP 4**

**Google Alerts**

Google Alerts monitors the Web, and any time a term or terms that you specify is mentioned on the Web, Google Alerts sends you an email about it. State officials can use this service to monitor their online presence by tracking when their name appears online. This service also can be useful to monitor what is happening with important issues such as health care reform.

When you sign up for Google Alerts, you can select what terms to monitor and how and when to be notified of activity. Notification emails include the context in which the alert term appeared and a link to the source. For example, if you are monitoring your name and an article runs in the local paper’s online site, your notification email will include the article context and a link directly to the news piece.

If you want to set multiple Google Alert search terms, such as your name and an issue you care about, you may want to create a Google Account. Do this by visiting www.google.com/accounts. After you create an account, you’ll be able to better manage your Google Alerts from a single screen and create as many search terms as you want.

**TIP 5**

**Twitter Basic Privacy Settings**

Privacy on Twitter focuses on whether your Tweets are protected or are publicly visible. If you choose not to protect your Tweets, anyone can follow you and receive your updates. If you choose to protect your Tweets, then a Twitter user must request to follow you and you must approve them before they are able to receive your Tweets. The default setting is public or unprotected.

You can adjust this setting by clicking the down arrow that is part of the link to your username. From there, click on the menu item “Settings.” This will take you to a page with multiple tabs, including an “Account” tab, where you will find a check box labeled “Tweet Privacy.” Check this box to protect your Tweets, or leave it unchecked to continue to allow anyone to follow you.

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