

Escaping Facebook

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

One user of Facebook joked to The New York Times that the social networking Web site is "like the Hotel California" immortalized in the old Eagles song. "You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave." Facebook users complain that it has been nearly impossible for them to completely remove their information from the site's labyrinth of archives. An independent online group even has 'sprung up to help ex-users hack through Facebook's digital vines.

While Facebook has argued that it's easier for ex-members to return if their information is archived, the company has an obligation to its users to delete their information if they want out. And it should be painless. To its credit, Facebook announced Tuesday in the wake of the Times story that it would make it easier for users to delete their accounts permanently from the site.

It's reasonable to wonder if Facebook, which has 64 million users, tried to stick to users because their demographic and behavioral information is useful to marketers. Facebook is trying to figure out how to make money from its popularity, and giving advertisers access to demographic data is one way to do that. Given that temptation and with the advent of online communities, the concept of privacy may be changing. It's still good advice to not put anything online that you don't want the world to see.

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