

A place for friends
Part 1: What is MySpace?
by Lee De Bevoise

Here is a quick quiz for all parents.

1. What is MySpace?
2. Does your son and/or daughter have a MySpace account?

If you do not know the answer to either of the above questions, this first in a series of articles on MySpace.com is a must-read. Even if you answered "yes" to one or both of the questions, this MySpace primer is also for you.

Billed as "A place for friends", MySpace.com has recently been issued a subpoena in the teen suicide case of Missouri's Megan Meier. Megan was the victim of harassment by multiple persons posing as a 16 year-old boy.

The company has also signed an agreement with the attorneys general of all 50 states. In spite of these and other "bumps in the road", MySpace.com remains a favorite among teens and young adults. If you have a teen in your house, odds are they have a MySpace.com account, or wish that he or she did.

To say that their fan base of literally millions of people is avid and loyal is a gross understatement. What is it about MySpace.com that makes these fans so fiercely loyal?

MySpace.com is the place to be. Ask your teen and you will find out that "anyone who is anybody" hangs there. It is the place to meet and be met. MySpace.com is where you not only meet friends but also where you make new ones.

As a parent, learning about MySpace.com is a necessary parenting skill just like asking where your teen will be and with whom. Remember, there are bullies and predators in cyberspace too!

Headquartered in NYC, MySpace.com is the trend in social networking. It utilizes an interactive network mix of blogs, profiles, photos, groups, and even its own internal e-mail system and Instant Messaging (IM). However, the actual working hub of MySpace.com is located in Los Angeles.

MySpace.com is a complete online community. It evolved into its current mode in 2003 and was purchased in July 2005 by Murdoch's News Corporation, the parent company of Fox Broadcasting.

Currently there are close to 100 million registered user accounts, and that total grows every day. In addition to being popular with individuals, many groups, bands, magazines, and organizations have a presence on MySpace.com.

Each profile contains two standard categories or "blurbs": "About Me" and "Who I'd Like to Meet". Other interest and customizable surveys round a usual profile. Each profile usually contains at least one image or photo as a default. These are also known as avatars – most of the time this is a photo of the user. Additional photos, videos, and music are also found as part of a profile. Comments, messages, current mood, and a Top Friends list also appear in the user profile. Profile pages are easy to make through the use of ready-to-go page templates.

The minimum age for users is 14 years old. Those under the age of 16 have

their profiles set to private. However, users 16 and older do not have that option. That is if they tell the truth about their age.

MySpace.com has its own special language, which employs many of the “shortcuts” used in IM (Instant Messaging) and “texting” on cell phones. If you read what you see phonetically, it will make a bit more sense. In any case, this will be a topic of another article in this series.

Some schools and public libraries have banned access to MySpace.com for a variety of reasons. As with the rest on the Web, MySpace.com contains the best and the worst that exists in human nature.

Yes, there is a negative side. Sexual predators have been known to frequent MySpace.com. They lie about their age and gender. Additionally, photos of less than sober and less than fully clothed teens and young adults can be seen. Caution and common sense is the key on MySpace.com, as well as elsewhere on the Web.

As with every other part of your teen’s life, you should be interested in what he or she does online. The Web, as with other parts of society, is not censored, so that job falls to you. MySpace.com is no different in that it contains both the good and the bad that our worldwide society contains. You certainly want to know where your teen is when you give him/her the keys to your car. Knowing what your teen does on the Web is just as important and is your responsibility to monitor.

[Editor’s Note: The next in this series of articles on MySpace.com will deal with the language “shortcuts” that are so popular with teens.]