

Protecting Your Image (Literally!)

Posting pictures on the internet has become a common practice. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace encourage users to post albums of pictures for friends to see. Entire websites, including Flickr and Webshots, use picture posting as a primary means of building community. Similarly, our names are showing up in more places around the web. As more and more of our lives move into the online realm, our names are finding their way into increasing numbers of online databases. E-mail lists, newsletters, online purchases - all of these activities increase the exposure of our names and other pieces of personal information.

Our need for vigilance, then, needs to increase as well. As we seek to be "wise as serpents" in our connected world, we must recognize the possibility for danger as our online presence grows. Some suggestions to help in this effort:

- Be mindful of the pictures you post. Once an image is online, it is available to anyone who wants to download it and use it - for good and bad. Even if you remove the image eventually, there is no way to tell who already has it stored on their hard drive somewhere else.
- If you are posting pictures on a church website, post group pictures, not pictures of individuals. Don't use identifying information such as names; instead, just label the picture with the activity, such as "Ski Trip 2009" or "District Rally."
- Make sure that you have permission to post pictures on websites or use pictures in publicity pieces.

Common sense is the rule of the day. Remember - if you wouldn't give that picture or your personal information to a complete stranger in the real world, it shouldn't happen online either.

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