



What's the Big Deal about Facebook?

By Veronica C. Valero, GGCS Member

*Book Review: Facebook Me!, by David Awl, Peachpit Press, © 2011, 229 pages, \$21.99, ISBN: 0-321-74373-2
This is an expanded book review of the one written for the Golden Gate Computer Society's August 2011 Newsletter.*

Believe it or not, I'm not much into Facebook for a variety of reasons, the main ones being: time, privacy, and security. But, as a computer tutor and business person, many expect me to not only be on Facebook, but to also be an expert at it. I do have a Facebook page that I don't really use much. And, I'm not sure if it's worth it to spend the time to do so. But, at the same time, I'm wondering if I'm missing out on something here. I need convincing. To help me decide I read the book, *Facebook Me!: A Guide to Socializing, Sharing, and Promoting on Facebook*. But, first some interesting statistics:

Just the Facts Ma'm

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are 6,956,799,653 people in the world.

From Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>:

- There are more than 750 million active users (*That's over 9% of the world population!*)
- People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook
- More than 30 billion pieces of content shared each month.

From www.checkfacebook.com, as of 7/26/2011:

- Age breakdown of users: **13 years and under:** .5%, **ages 14-17:** 9.9%, **ages 18-24:** 24.6%, **ages 25-34:** 23.6%, **ages 35-44:** 12.5%, **ages 45-65:** 7.7%, **and ages 65+:** 4.6%.
Adding up these stats: **75.1% are 44 years old or younger!**
- More than 70% of Facebook users come from outside the United States.
- Facebook usage: Males: 45.3% Females: 54.7%

According to Ken Burbary who wrote *Facebook Demographics Revisited—2011 Statistics* on his website www.kenburbary.com: The average user...

- ...spends 15 hours and 33 minutes on Facebook per month
- ...spends 23 minutes on each visit
- ...has 130 friends on the site
- ...sends 8 friend requests per month

Other Facts:

- Mark Zuckerberg is the CEO of Facebook, which he founded in 2004. The movie, "Social Network" gives you an insight on its development, but Zuckerberg claims there are inaccuracies.
- The Wall Street Journal, July 14, 2011 valued Facebook at \$84 billion dollars and reported that some predict that when it goes public in 2012 Facebook will be worth over \$100 billion.

So What is Facebook?:

Many of us know that **Websites** generally are public sites created and controlled by businesses, organizations, or individuals. Websites are accessed through the internet to share information, resources, and to make monetary transactions (buy, sell, and trade stuff). **Email** accounts, on the other hand, allow you to communicate privately to select individuals and groups. Any email you send, can be shared by "forwarding" it to others without your consent or knowledge. **Blogs** combine websites and emails that encourage interactive public discourse. Individuals post (write) comments, articles, ideas, or posts images and videos that they find interesting in hopes of generating comments from others that visit their blogs. Some blogs require you to register first, by entering your email address, before you can post (write) your comments to be viewed by all.

Facebook is like having a blog, but you have to join "the club" first by registering to get in, providing an email and birthday. No one under the age of 13 is allowed to register. But, my sister, a middle school teacher, and others

know that there is a lot of under-age Facebooking going on. Once you register, you can't play yet. You next have to find people you know and sent them a request to be "friended." You can only comment on the "walls" of those who have accepted your friendship. This is the socially tricky part: what if THEY don't want you to be their friend? What if someone asks you to be their "friend" but YOU don't want to be their friend? I have one "friend" request in my profile that I don't know what to do with yet. It's a guy from high school that I knew but rarely interacted with? I checked his profile and he has over 900 friends! Why is he asking me to "friend" him when I haven't heard from him for over 30 years? Is he on the high school reunion committee? I really don't have time to find out nor cough up my personal history. This is one of the great dilemmas of Facebook. What to do? *Facebook Me!* does an excellent job at help one navigate this social labyrinth.

What Others Have to Say About Facebook:

But, even in reading Awl's book, I still was not convinced that I want to be an active participant of Facebook, I decided to send a survey to select family, friends, and business colleagues ranging from ages 20 to 65+ asking about their experience and opinions on Facebook. Below are the gleanings:

"I've reconnected with people I definitely would never have sought out before and had rewarding experiences as a result. And I've made new friends, both locally and far away, as a result of interactions and photos and whatnot people posted. If one is open to new ways of connecting to people, Facebook can provide some amazing things."
–**Jory Prum** (Age 36, 31 years computer experience, Sound Guy www.studio.jory.org)

Why do you like Facebook?: "I don't. It does have some good qualities: It's easy to accidentally catch-up with old friends, like virtually running into each other in a supermarket. It can be used as a way to invite a large number of people to an event without the awkward need for them to decline if they can't make it. Other people post pictures of me or my friends, which I can grab for scrap-booking. Overall, though, I think it is a waste of time. Facebook was created by a group of very brilliant computer scientists, and through its app development features, it encourages people to pursue computer science. I commend the owners of Facebook for that." –**Sasha Sproch** (Age 20, 11 years computer experience, Student of Electrical and Computer Engineering Summer Intern for NASA – Goddard)

"Facebook is a convenient way for me to stay in touch with friends and acquaintances from all over the world....*But*, people post WAY too much about their personal life, and far too often. If you are a part of a circle or community on Facebook, it is too risky to put too much about yourself up, because suddenly everyone knows, or thinks they know everything about you and your life." –**Maya Goody** (Age 19, 15 years computer experience, Student: Production for Level Studios.)

"I don't use Facebook because: (1) Don't have time to read others' status updates/keep mine up to date, (2) don't want to feel bad about not accepting people's invites that I think would post unprofessional/ questionable content, (3) I only use online networking for professional purposes, so I use LinkedIn." –**Kris Hamner** (Age 37, 30 years computer experience, Profession: Executive Director, HR at Hewlett-Packard)

"While I'm not a big Facebook user, I think it can be a useful tool: (A) One can get a quick sense of what others in one's circle of friends/family are doing. (B) It can be a good way to reconnect with past friends with whom one may have lost touch. (C) One can get a sense about what is important to others in one's circle based on what they share. *But*, part of what I don't like about Facebook is that one can get a sense about others, but not necessarily act on that knowledge or engage. So in this respect, I think it fosters a kind of passive observation of friends, family, and contacts without necessarily supporting deepening connections with them. It's tantamount to two friends being in the same room, but speaking to each other via a mobile phone or email. In this respect, I think that it may promote a kind of interactional 'short-hand' that, when used too frequently, can erode one's real-time conversational/interactional skills. This is more of a concern for the younger generations, in my opinion, as they may not have developed strong skills if our modern technologies have been the primary ways they are used to interacting with others." –**Noah Harris** (Age 38, 25 years computer experience, Certified Business Advisor & Certified NxLevel Instructor with Small Business Development Center.)

"I enjoyed Facebook primarily because it allowed an easy method to maintain contact with a large group of acquaintances—people with whom I would not otherwise have communicated with. As a social organizer in the

name of causes, it was an easy organizational tool: it allowed me to organize a student protest against changes at my old school, advocate blood donation when my local center had low supply, and donate to an old friend's AIDS/Lifecycle fundraising drive. But, I no longer use Facebook. *What I hate about Facebook*: Privacy concerns. Attempting to maintain any layer of privacy was an enterprise in neurosis and constant vigilance. Moreover, Facebook advocated for or forced its more invasive practices: the labeling of sexuality and listing of relationships became a commonality, so that even choosing not to list these things became a statement; the news feed, which included conversations between people in your friends list even when you were not participant, seemed voyeuristic; at one point, I even recall Facebook attempting to claim copyright/usage right to pictures posted on its site. From a standpoint of integrity and customer service, Facebook was an absolute nightmare. *About Security*: In my view, issues of security on Facebook strike primarily the most vulnerable—those too young, too unfamiliar with technology, or too shortsighted to realize what information is safe to post. There are other concerns, however: popular ‘surveys’ that users tend to post answering questions about themselves sometimes fish for the kind of information that can be used to retrieve passwords, etc. Facebook posts identify empty houses (vacation posts) and common habits of people in a cinch. Moreover, it seems Facebook accounts can be invaded with some ease: at orientation for her college of engineering, one of my best friends sat in on a lecture about how easy hacking a Facebook account really is. The only true measure of security on Facebook is personal choice: users must choose to be careful about personal information.” –**Amber Clark**, (Age 21, 12 years computer experience, College Student)

“I do not have a Facebook page. I am not interested in joining this social media. I simply do not wish to devote any time to this communication tool. While I do have several friends who hound me about joining, I resist. I prefer the (old-fashioned) telephone contact, where voice and inflection and privacy all enrich the conversation. I have viewed other people's Facebook pages, and was perplexed by the running stream of inane and mundane commentary that dominated the majority of the print. Items such as: "Suzy is going to Whole Foods to buy expensive produce." Is this meant to be funny? An insult to Whole Foods? A comment about her judgment? A lot is lost without that voice inflection and the well-timed chuckle. We all managed to live well and function without it (many folks have lost sight of that fact), so I will continue to do so. It seems that Facebook can be a great option to stay in touch with a social circle that may spread far & wide, but it is also a media that makes it easy for many to incriminate themselves, embarrass themselves, and provide way too much information about themselves. No thanks. (And don't get me started on the ridiculous, bad, and inappropriate photos either!--ughh!) –**Lianne Ospital**, (Age 50, 10 years computer experience, Registered Nurse)

My Assessment of *Facebook Me!*

This is one book I read from cover-to-cover. It addressed many of the issues that were brought up in my survey. It is an easy read: the layout and graphic designs are casual but artistic with side bar comments that invite you to read so as not to miss any tidbits. This book is a must if you want to join Facebook but are a computer novice. But, even experienced users will benefit reading this book. Before you join, read it first to learn about the extremely important privacy protections and security issues.

In addition to the how-to's of writing on the “wall” and uploading (attaching) pictures, it also helps you navigate and use the different features, including cautionary tales of whom to “friend” or “unfriend,” along with how to “hide” postings and block “app” requests from others (applications: stupid time-consuming group games), *Facebook Me!* answered many of my questions and solved some mysteries, including how Facebook's “Friend Finder” can access your Email address books in order to send invitations to everyone therein to join you on Facebook. —you don't want to do this. Be thoughtful in your invitation, make it personal, and consider the technical expertise of the person you are inviting to be a “friend” so that you don't strain your real friendship.

The *Facebook Me!* book is a great resource to use to help you register, set up your profile, and adjust your privacy settings. It also covers full descriptions of the various pages you can visit or use on Facebook as well as business uses of Facebook and using it at work with care. I really acquired a better understanding about Facebook by reading this book.

Star Rating: 4 (from 1 to 4)

As for: “Is Facebook a meaningful way to communicate?” It all depends on the users. Personally, email has expanded my relationships with others and I like the privacy. But, Facebook appears to be one way to connect with long-lost friends and family, so it appears it has its place. Only time will tell as to how it will evolve.