Is your Facebook page dictating your life?
by Brian McAleer

When Facebook started in 2004, the creators of it had no idea what it would become. What was originally a page for college students to connect and share pictures soon spread across America, into the UK and then out into the world. It was about 2007/08 when Facebook really took off in Australia. Some of us jumped on it straight way, sceptical of this new site, comparing it to the awesome MySpace. Haha! Poor MySpace. Those who didn't want to join eventually joined the ranks as almost everyone else was on it. Over the years it grew and grew, becoming a fun way to let others know what you were up to, see what your friends were doing, share ideas and photos and capture your life on a site for everyone to see.

One of the most regular features of Facebook to evolve during it's years has been the "Status Update". In 2008, the Facebook status prompt started with "John is _____", permitting you to talk about what you were doing right now or in the near future. Then it dropped the 'is' and had your name and a space to write. Eventually, your name vanished and the status update became a blank space to write as much as you wanted. Unlike Twitter that limits you to 140 characters or less, Facebook gave us the ability to write a whole story if we wanted to. Then, the floodgates began to open…

The most tempting allure of Facebook that has set the stage for the legions of other social networking sites to launch since its inception is the addiction of instant response or gratification. You can now post a thought, complaint, review, summary, observation, issue, problem, story or simply have a bitch and get a response within seconds. And best of all, it comes from the people who's opinion you care about the most – your friends and family. With this lighting paced reaction from the world to your brain's activity, gone are the days of writing things in journals or waiting to get home to speak to someone about what you would now post about. The amount of time we spend on Facebook, and the large number of people we're connected to, means any one of your 257 "friends" will be on there to click Like, give a Thumbs Up or share a few words to either compliment you if your post is positive, or reinforce you if it's negative.

This immediate reply to your posts of Facebook can be used in a positive way. Who doesn't love to share some positive news, such as getting a new job, graduating from Uni, buying a house or sharing that we're expecting our first child to our friends and getting swamped with likes and nice words? But when you share something negative, you either get no response because people don't care or you will get some kind of message that reinforces your predicament, sympathising with you and reinforcing the negativity. Of course, there are some fine lines here. If you want to let your friends know of some sad news, such as a relative or loved one passing away, you can do this on Facebook respectfully and it takes away the effort and pain of telling everyone individually. But what I'm referring to is sharing something negative, like being woken up in the night by a loud car or your crying baby, being pushed or shoved in line at the supermarket or complaining about what the co-worker said to that other co-worker at work about you, which you overheard, etc, etc. Focusing on these kind of trivial things victimises you. By sharing a negative post like this on Facebook comes across as a cry for help, a call for attention or a plea for sympathy, which you hope will get a comforting response make you feel better, as this is also easier than dealing with the negativity itself, or better yet, turning it into a positive.

One of the laws of the Universe is that whatever you put out into the world, you get back in some way. For example, have you noticed that people with negative attitudes regularly

speak about negative things or seem to regularly attract negative people and circumstances back towards them? This is simply because the more your project a certain type of attitude or perspective outward from within you, you start to see it more in your environment. What you're focusing on may not be negative at all, depending on how you look at it. but the more you label something as negative, in any form, the more you will *see* negative in your environment, thus the more you will feel and think negative, and with Facebook at your disposal whenever you want, go ahead unleash that negativity onto your wall and get it out of your system. Sure, you may have released it from inside you, but once it's on Facebook its there forever… for everyone to see. And what you put on your Facebook pages is being used as a way for others to judge you, and make assumptions about you and how you live your life.

Aside from your thoughts living on the internet forever (unless you delete them straight away of course) is that communication is complex and gets muddled and misinterpreted in text format. What we write is congruent with our thoughts, or our "Inner Voice". But what we share of our thoughts when we talk to people verbally is said differently than how we *write* our thoughts. When we speak to others, we're not even aware of about a third of the words we actually say as there is a slight delay between our thoughts and our mouth that misses some words or puts out others that may not be what we're thinking, or to compensate for a word we can't think of in the moment as we speak. But when we post something on Facebook, every word we write is predetermined and captures our thought exactly, because we're all now faster typists or experts at writing text on our phones, so that thought is exemplified perfectly in words and once you click 'Share' it's on its way!

With most people posting anywhere between 1-5 things a day on their Facebook wall, we get the attention we want, when we want it. And when we're not getting enough attention from those closest to us, any attention is good attention, even it it's bad. Of course, some of us are limited in our capacity to see those closest to us, due to the distance between us and our overly-busy lives in today's hectic world, so getting attention from our best mates and loved ones in a moment's notice has its perks, and I don't deny that. But when your posts are negative, you will get some level of attention, but it should never compensate from the attention of face to face contact, speaking to others in person and giving yourself the attention you deserve – which is to stop and think about what you're writing on Facebook before you share it. Take a moment and think twice. In the heat of the moment, many people have posted things that made them so angry, infuriated or unhappy it went onto to cause more problems for them. And you can't control who reads your posts, and many people have learnt the hard way on Facebook not to bitch about their boss or slag their company after being fired, as that gets back to them in some way and can follow them for a while.

I guess the point I want to make amongst all of this is that Facebook was originally conceived as a tool to connect and share, but as the creators set no boundaries on what that was, it's been left to The People to use it in anyway they want. And being free, on our phones and so tempting to check multiple times per day, a world without Facebook today would be hard to imagine. However hard it may be to distance yourself from it, I believe Facebook should only be a reflection of your life; a display – not a place for you live *on* and certainly not something to live through vicariously.

If this article has opened your eyes and helped you realise that maybe you've been using Facebook in the more negative way, and you're aware of the consequences that has had for you, try this…

Post nothing but positive or humorous content on your wall for 30 days. Start small. Say something positive about a TV show you just watched a good book you read. Post about something positive coming up, like a birthday, holiday or concert you're going to. It's near impossible to avoid the negative stuff in life and we all have bad days, but you can choose what you share about that and how you share it. You can turn a positive into a negative. For example, most of my quotes, motivational stories and poems come from something negative, i.e. a bad day, something that angers me, frustrates me or I would like to see changed in the world. Try that on for size.

When you look back over your Facebook wall and years gone by, you will refer to that scrolling collection of stories and images, in part, as a reflection of your life. How do you want it to read? Negatively or positively? Your choice.

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