

## Introduction

Social networking is a way of connecting and communicating with people that you know. It also allows you to see who your friends know, so that you build up a network of connected individuals with some kind of link back to yourself. Users create profiles about themselves, which generally contain details about them. This can range from details about their occupation, to a list of their interests. It is possible to keep your profile hidden from people that you don't directly know, in order to increase privacy. Social networks can comprise of friends, colleagues, prospective employers, members of similar organisations etc.

## Considerations

- **The choice of social networking service is important.** Many social networks have signup forms which use CAPTCHAs, which provide accessibility issues for screen reader users who want to use the service. If you are starting a social network, then choose a service that is as easy to use and accessible as possible. Be aware that the rich text editors used may also fail to have keyboard access.
- **Describe images.** Any pictures that are uploaded to be shared with your network should have adequate descriptions through the use of captions so that screen reader users can understand what the image is showing. Images on social networking sites usually lack alt tags as they are uploaded by users, so it is essential that captions describe the image sufficiently.
- **Be careful how you customise your profile.** Some social networking services allow you to change the colour schemes and layout of your personal profile page. Ensure that the colours chosen have a high contrast ratio between foreground text and the background, so that reading is as comfortable as possible for anyone that might want to view your profile.

## Additional Resources

- Web2Access can help you decide which social network to use, by analysing the accessibility of each.  
<http://www.web2access.org.uk>
- Common Craft provides an explanation of what social networking is, and how it can be used.  
<http://www.commoncraft.com/video-social-networking>
- AbilityNet examined the accessibility of five social networking sites in January 2008 and found that there were many issues to be resolved.  
<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/enation85>
- The American Foundation for the Blind reviewed the accessibility of Facebook.  
<http://www.afb.org/afbpres/pub.asp?DocID=aw100204>