

Common Sites and Apps Used by Teens

SOCIAL NETWORKING:



Facebook is the top social network on the web as it is used by more than 1 billion people each month. You can access this service using an app on a mobile device or internet service for a computer. People set up a profile and accept “friend requests.” There is a timeline to post events and share “status updates.” Certain groups can be set up as private or public. Users can be referenced in someone else’s text or picture (tagged). Teens are moving away from fb because many parents and grandparents are on the site. Officially, individuals should be 13 years of age to create an account but students in elementary schools report using this social networking site.



Like Facebook, **Twitter** is a social network centered on microblogging with a 140-character text limit. An uploaded picture or text message is called a “Tweet.” The public can “follow” friends, celebrities, causes, businesses or tv shows. You can “tweet” live during a show by using # (hashtag). Students report concerning “subtweets,” which are comments intended for someone to see without mentioning their username, usually with a derogatory tone.



Ask.fm is another popular pre-teen social networking website where users can ask other users questions. Users have to create an account to leave or receive comments. Ask.Fm is different than Facebook and Twitter because users can ask questions or leave comments anonymously. However, there is the option for users to not receive comments unless a sender identifies himself. This has been a popular venue for cyber-bullying.



Whisper, an app that lets people broadcast their thoughts with the world anonymously, estimates that 90% of its population is 18 to 24 years old. This app appeals to a younger demographic who report having a “strong desire to share thoughts more freely without worrying about online identities and accountability” – unlike Facebook and Twitter. It is predicted that users will leave Facebook and Twitter for this social networking site. Messages and photos do not self-destruct after they are read (like SnapChat). Whisper does automatically filter for trigger words or for proper names in an attempt to create a “safe place” for users. However, pictures of peers can still be posted without names attached.



Tinder is a simple-to-use dating app. The app finds a person’s location by GPS then links to his/her Facebook profile to access user information - first name, age, photos (by user choice) and some Facebook preferences. It will then find potential matches near the user’s physical location. Users scroll through pictures of “matches” selecting “like” or “nope” to other user profiles. Tinder is well known for allowing users to judge other users based on appearance and criticized for facilitating “hookups.”



Yik Yak originated similarly to Facebook on a college campus and intended for college-age users but is becoming increasingly popular among high school students. This social media app can be considered a “local, virtual bulletin board.” Posts or comments (“yaks” up to 200 characters) are made anonymously and can be viewed by fellow “Yakkers” in a 10 mile radius. Users don’t have a photo or avatar distinguishing themselves. Posts are “upvoted” or “downvoted,” allowing users to earn reputation points. High potential for cyber-bullying, sexually explicit content, and derogatory language.

PICTURE SHARING:



Tumblr is another form of microblogging, but unlike Twitter, it is heavily influenced by image sharing. You can follow other users and be followed back. “Reblogging” and “liking” is a popular way to interact and to see how many followers you can attract. Users can make their site private so others cannot see it without becoming a follower by permission. Features are accessed from the “dashboard.” Tumblr is noted by critics as having a sizable amount of pornographic content.



Instagram is a photo app designed for the iPhone and a mobile social network. Users take a picture with their phones and then edit instantly or apply photo filters. You can follow other Instagram users to view their photos and interact by “liking” their photos or commenting on them. It is easy to share your photos on other popular social networks. GPS attaches to photos.



SnapChat is a popular app among teens and younger users. It allows users to take a photo or a video and chat back and forth with somebody through the app. The photo or video self-destructs automatically in just a few seconds (1-10 seconds) after the recipient has viewed it. However, the pictures can be captured by screenshot or downloading. A writing tool can be used to embellish a photo. It is possible for someone to take “screen-shot” of the received photo. There’s been quite a bit of controversy surrounding how teens are using this app for sexting and cyber-bullying.

VIDEO SHARING:



YouTube is used mostly for video sharing and revolves entirely around video production, vlogging, movie-making and music sharing. Individuals can upload their own videos, or view others. Users are able to subscribe to “channels” that are videos from the same source. The terms of service state that offensive content such as sexually explicit material, and types of abuse, are forbidden. However, the video must be flagged as inappropriate by other users for the site management to become aware and remove it.



Vine is a video creation app owned by Twitter where all the videos are 6 seconds or less. The videos, or “vines,” play in an endless loop. Twitter guidelines state that users are allowed to post pornographic images on their sites. Therefore, Vine has a 17+ rating but there is no age verification when creating an account. All profiles are public.

INSTANT MESSAGING:



Kik Messenger is a free app-based alternative to “old-fashioned” texting as well as a social networking app for mobile devices. It only needs a Wi-Fi connection or data plan to send and receive messages so a phone texting plan is not necessary. Kik requires users to register a username as a form of identification. The service is used for sharing text, pictures, voice messages and sketches. One criticism is that adult-content can easily be shared by linking to other sources, such as YouTube. Safety and privacy issues can also be of concern.