



Is Facebook secretly sharing what you are reading and watching?

During a recent phone call with one of my colleagues, we had a bit of a chuckle over a rather risqué and NSFW (not suitable for work) article that one of our mutual friends had apparently just read online. Think clothing-optional antics by a celebrity in Vegas. As it happened, a few minutes before our call, we had both seen a Facebook update telling us that our friend had just read this particular article.

The critical fact here is not what happened in Vegas, but rather that our friend likely had no idea that the articles he is reading are being shared with the world via Facebook. And our friend is certainly not the only person unknowingly embarrassing himself in front of all his Facebook friends and acquaintances. More and more people are unknowingly sharing embarrassing information about what they are reading and watching on Facebook and other social media tools.

Remember, some sites will automatically share your online activities with your Facebook friends. These sites may warn you about this sharing the first time you visit them, usually when you click through to look at an article or video that someone you know has shared. A little window will pop up with a vague warning before the article you want to read appears. You frequently consent to the sharing simply by proceeding to the article, although occasionally you will be asked to consent by clicking a checkbox. In most cases, this will be the one and only warning you get. From that point forward, an update will automatically be posted to your Facebook

page with a description and link to every item you watch or read on that site. Yikes!!

This is called “frictionless” sharing. The number of sites using frictionless sharing is growing very quickly. At first it was mainstream media and sites such as Netflix and Spotify, but now there are many more, and the list is growing longer on a daily basis. There are now more than 60 including: Ticketmaster, Autotrader, Kobo, TripAdvisor, Urbanspoon, Pinterest, Branchout and FourSquare.

Do any of the apps on this list look familiar? Are you using any of them?

Go to your Facebook Privacy settings page and review the list of apps you have installed and what they are sharing. Do it now. Right now. I am guessing you are sharing information that you don't realize you are sharing.

And while you're at it, don't stop at just checking your Facebook settings. Check the privacy and sharing settings on the other social media tools you use. MyPermissions.org is a great tool to help you do this.

MyPermissions (mypermissions.org) will help you systematically review the permissions you have granted in the various social media tools you use. And the simplicity of MyPermissions is brilliant – it doesn't require any access to your accounts. It's basically a collection of bookmarks that directly link to the permissions pages for Facebook, Twitter, Google, Yahoo, LinkedIn, Dropbox, Instagram, and Flickr. If you are logged into one of these sites, clicking on the relevant link on the MyPermissions homepage will take you right to the permissions page for that site.

I encourage you to take the time to review the permissions you have given in the various social media tools you use. Many of you will be surprised at the permissions you have granted. Revoke the ones you don't think are necessary or appropriate.

Lastly, put a reminder on your “to do” list or calendar to review your permissions once a quarter, every few months or even monthly. Remember that checking your permissions helps protect your privacy. ■

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