This piece was composed with excerpts from an article by Andrew Heller on the nonprofit technology support site, NTEN ([www.nten.org](http://www.nten.org))

**Social Media and Privacy: Best Practices for Managing Your Personal and Professional Identities**

Can we completely separate our personal life from our professional life online? The answer: it's a huge gray area.

So what can we do? In the wild west of social networking and online privacy perhaps the best thing one can do is simply *be prepared*.

Check out these best practices to help protect both yourself and your organization.

**Know the Risks**

The ramifications of "oversharing" or using misjudgment online can be serious and lead to employment termination. In August of 2009, the following exchange occurred between an employee known only as "Lindsay" and her boss, "Brian":

*[Lindsay]*  
*"OMG [oh my God] I HATE MY JOB!!" "My boss is... always making me do s\*\*t stuff just to p\*\*s me off!!... "*

*[Brian]*  
*"Hi Lindsay, I guess you forgot about adding me on here?" [He continued with] "... that s\*\*t stuff' is called your 'job', you know, what I pay you to do. But the fact that you seem to be able to f\*\*k up the simplest of tasks might contribute to how you feel about it. And lastly, you also seem to have forgotten that you have 2 weeks left on your 6 month trial period. Don't bother coming in tomorrow."*

Insulting your boss with such colorful language isn't the only thing we need to be careful of. Employees are being terminated or pressured to resign due to social media instances ranging from criticizing a customer's hometown, surfing Facebook while calling in sick, and posting pictures of drinking alcohol at social events.

And, of course, if your organization has a disclaimer about revealing private donor / client information or trade secrets, be careful not to divulge this information online, either intentionally or accidently.

**Privacy Settings**

Whatever social media site you use -- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn -- read the privacy settings on the website. Then read them again. These can be your life-lines. Here are a few tips that can help:

**Facebook**

* Create lists to organize personal and professional contacts to control what they can or cannot see.
* Know how to untag yourself from embarrassing photos.
* Watch for being a fan of groups that might offend someone.
* Be aware that participating in quizzes will reveal information about you to others.
* Learn how to block someone from seeing anything about you.

**Twitter**

* *Tweet responsibly***.** Avoid "oversharing". For example, try to avoid tweeting about a screaming match you're having with a significant other. But if your organization is global, sharing information about a recent travel adventure could be helpful.
* *Find a connection.* Use common themes that everyone can identify with. Twitter isn't as much about sharing your daily happenings, but more about what you have in common with others.
* *Post a Disclaimer***.** If want to separate your personal and professional tweets as much as possible use a disclaimer such as the following, "This is a personal Twitter feed. The opinions expressed here represent my own and not those of my employer."

**LinkedIn**

Though the purpose of LinkedIn is for professional networking, some personal information may inadvertently seep in. Try to include information in your profile and activities that focus only on your professional endeavors.

* *Public profile.* Be aware of the information made available on your public profile, as this can be visible to everyone who searches for you, not just your "private" connections.
* *Personal Information.* Under the "Additional Information" section, be aware of any personal tidbits you might not want professional contacts to be aware of, such as some interests, website links, groups, birthdate, and marital status.
* *Twitter and WordPress Feeds.* LinkedIn allows you to automatically feed tweets from your twitter account to your profile page. If you want to avoid personal tweets being posted, add the hastag #in and only those tweets will appear on your status.