

## Is It Time to Break Up With Facebook?

A colleague once dubbed me “Little Miss Cyber-Privacy.” The moniker didn’t sting, even though I work in digital media and have been ribbed before for my reluctance to share. Truth is, I’ve guarded my privacy long before my journeys in cyberspace — since I was a child — and I see no reason to stop now. Especially now. But social media keeps growing in popularity, and it gets harder and harder to avoid divulging the kind of information we privacy freaks would rather keep to ourselves.

With [Facebook Timeline](#), the social network’s revamped profile design, those concerned about privacy should ponder what they’re willing to share and whether connection trumps privacy in this brave new world. That’s because Timeline is not just a catalogue of your online experiences, or even of your education and work history (as on [LinkedIn](#)). It is really, truly, and I would add *madly*, a timeline of your life starting with where and on what date you were born.

Facebook Timeline is the latest dilemma of my love-hate relationship with technological progress and communication tools. I’m smack in the middle of the twenty-somethings, who share everything and text all day, and the sixty-year-olds, who think we’ve all lost our heads, preferring the old-fashioned telephone or — *oh horror!* — face-to-face. Still favoring email over texts, I adopt shiny new technological toys because my career mandates it, and because I’m genuinely interested, but I try to do so on my own terms.

Long before GPS was embedded in our devices, I didn’t like the idea of being tracked down. I held out before getting a cell phone, and when I got one, I didn’t widely distribute the number, using it primarily for outgoing calls. I was an early BlackBerry user for work and managed to supply only my email address until the White House requested my cell number for a 2007 piece we were doing at [iVillage.com](#) on First Lady Laura Bush. I reluctantly obliged. (Consoling me, a

colleague said, “Don’t worry — they probably already had it.”)

When I went through a personally challenging time, I wrote an anonymous blog, obscuring my identity to freely write about my experience and connect with a community that would relate. This proved invaluable. In more joyous times, I had fun impersonating my dog on his blog and social media channels (“[Why Bark When You Can Blog? Confessions of a Portuguese Water Dog](#)”). He ignored the strong scent of [Foursquare](#), finding no reason to broadcast his whereabouts or declare himself “mayor” of his favorite spot. He *is* my alter ego after all.

More recently, I applied the same considered approach to my Facebook Timeline, but it was tricky, and here’s why. Even though I chose to leave off such personally identifiable information as my birthday and school graduation dates and to hide some other information I’d already supplied, I quickly realized that the new profile display was as telling for what was omitted as for what was included. I asked myself, “Do I really want to spell out the personal details of my life on my Facebook Timeline — the milestones that happened and when, the milestones that didn’t happen, the milestones that are in the process of happening?” I concluded, no, I did not.

Who doesn’t have periods in their lives that they’d rather gloss over? Fortunately, I’ve had steady work during tough economic times, but many can’t say that. And I well understand the apprehension of my friend Monica (pseudonym) who anticipated a Facebook Timeline looking like this: January 2008: “Married.” February 2009: “Single.” March 2009: “It’s complicated.” April 2009: “Single.” You get the idea.

A filled-in Timeline captures a fairly complete picture of you, in snapshot view, optionally including what you’re listening to, reading, or watching, thanks to the new social apps. True to form, I decided not to embrace them all. [Pinterest](#), the hot online pinboard, ensnared me in its visually addictive clutches as did [Spotify](#), where “music is social,” but I opted to keep the news

readers at bay, preferring not to share what I was reading in real time with my 500 Facebook friends. (As a case in point, I learned from Facebook that a colleague had read a *Washington Post* article about what liquid substance was traveling down Christina Aguilera's leg. My day was none the richer for that discovery.)

“Enough whining,” you might say. “No one's forcing you to be on Facebook.” That's true. Facebook is like a lover who's not good for you but whom you can't quite renounce. What to do? I could leave Facebook — but who's kidding who? — or take a break and see how much we miss each other. I could delete my old posts — but who has the time? For now, I've adjusted my privacy settings, friend list, and “liked” pages, and occasionally enabled Spotify's private sessions. (No need to telegraph a blue mood to 500 people based on my music selections.)

I'm still engaged in a battle of wills between my unwavering desire for privacy and Facebook's decree that we share every aspect of our lives on their platform. But let's get past me, since I am a bit of a contradiction (more wired than many, more private than most). Has Facebook finally alienated your affection, or do you find Facebook as irresistible as ever?

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