

Sex Offenders Manipulate Social Media, Try a Safer Alternative

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On December 1, 2009 Attorney General Andrew Cuomo announced that over 3,500 registered New York sex offenders were removed from popular social networking sites, such as Facebook and Myspace, through the use of the law e-Stop.

The problem is, the success of e-Stop depends on sex offenders volunteering their identities on social networking accounts. “We can’t rely on a demographic that has already proven they cannot make the right decisions,” Mary Kay Hoal, founder of Yoursphere, said. With 100,000 sexual predators logged on to Myspace and thousands more on Facebook in 2009 alone, this is an issue that cannot be ignored. Hoal’s creation of Yoursphere, a social networking site for kids and teens only, has become a safe haven for young internet users who are looking to engage in social media.

Four years ago, Hoal’s daughter, who was then 12 years old, was determined to create her own Myspace account. Her daughter’s persistence motivated Hoal to immerse herself in social media. After researching about 11 popular social networking sites, Hoal

discovered “a culture that absolutely sexualized young girls.” This discovery prompted the creation of Yoursphere.

Yoursphere, which currently has about 1,000 members, goes the extra mile in protecting the safety of its users. Not only does the creation of a new account require parental consent, but the site takes the next step and verifies the parent’s identity and the age of the child. Also, a search for the parent’s name is done in a sex offender database. If the name is found, that person will be blocked from Yoursphere.

“We do everything we can do from a safety and social standpoint with a likening to the real world,” Hoal said. She emphasized that we should not engage in any activities online that are seen as inappropriate in everyday life. On her blog, Hoal puts it quite simply, “If we wouldn’t open up the door to our home to 29,000 registered sex offenders, why would we do it online?”

Yoursphere is a safe and fun environment for kids and teens. The site provides categories like sports, fashion and music, while users create their own sub-topics under these categories.

By joining a “sphere,” a user is able to interact with other members who share the same interest. The ability to join as many spheres as one would like allows kids and teens to showcase their talents and unique passions.

“I am concerned with the false sense of security given to the public,” Hoal said. While Hoal applauds all efforts taken by the government to protect young users of social media, she feels strongly that the responsibility should be left to the operators of social media sites. Instead of being concerned with membership and growth, these sites should utilize the technology available to protect their younger members, she said.

Staying safe online is all about education and awareness, Hoal explained. We are told not to talk to strangers in real life, that should not change when we are facing a computer screen.

[How to Stay Safe Online:](#)

Never accept friend requests from people you do not know

Do not post pictures you would not want your mom or grandmother to see

Do not post statuses or updates that tell your location

Remove all contact information from your account (address, phone number etc.)

Check out [Yoursphere](#) and create an account! **Receive a 3 month free membership, plus \$5.00 off annually and .50 off monthly when you continue your membership! Talk about a deal, girls!**

Use promotional code [YS09-RLTE](#) when you sign up for membership, and enjoy! Don't pass up this awesome opportunity to enjoy the Internet in a fun and secure way.

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