

## What Are We to Do with MySpace.com?

By Steve Hewitt

ACCORDING TO MYSPACE.COM OFFICIALS, more than 65 million people have set up personal websites and blogs using its service. And it has been reported that MySpace.com receives more visits each day than any other site on the Internet, including Google or Yahoo. AOL and others have announced they are, or soon will be, launching “myspace” types of services.

What is Myspace.com? It’s many things to many different people. I believe it’s evolving into a new way to communicate, and something many in the church need to check out. The good news is that *if* it is a reflection of the world (and it appears to be), Christian sites are being created by the thousands by Christian young people, who are using Myspace.com to share their faith, talk with other Christians, and much more.

The bad news is that it’s a reflection of the world, so you’ll eventually run into content that might be offensive. However, if we’re to “go” out into the world, we’re going to have to stand in the midst of worldliness to proclaim the truth of the Gospel.

If you don’t know what MySpace.com is, your young people most likely do. People of all ages can set up a MySpace.com blog site (both of my sons have sites, and they’re in their 20s.) Because it’s free, it has become *the* place to be if you’re a teenager. You can post your picture(s), a video, your favorite music, your personal information (age, sex, etc.) and blog about whatever you desire.

If you want to express yourself, gripe about your parents, school or little brother, or if you want a place where you can remain anonymous and ask probing questions about life, MySpace.com is where you’ll set up a site. People visiting your site can respond with comments, pictures (if you wish to post them) and links. Grouping with other MySpace.com sites is popular.

MySpace.com provides a combination of message board, list serves and Instant Message technology into one site. Coming soon, EarthLink and Korea’s SK Telecom have partnered up to offer a new device on the American market from Helio, which will look like a cell phone but, more importantly, is a MySpace.com interface device. You can read comments on your site, take a picture and post it to your site, and browse other sites. You can respond and participate in an ongoing discussion on a MySpace.com site even when you’re away from your computer.

The content on MySpace.com is varied. While there are many Christian sites, there are many sites promoting other religions, and those that are anti-religious. Many people have talked about the inappropriate materials on MySpace.com,

but frankly, after spending more than 12 hours searching through profiles, I found very little objectionable material. However, I wasn’t looking for inappropriate material.

Of course, security concerns exist. Because it’s a place for young people to communicate on the Internet, predators will be watching and trying to contact young people through the service. While MySpace.com has an age limit (you’re supposed to be at least 14), it has no way to enforce it, and many children are setting up sites, claiming to be much older than they are, which is dangerous.

However, there are also things parents can do to protect their children. There are many programs available that allow you to monitor what your child is typing (including passwords). Or check out the new service from Covenant Eyes that will provide accountability for MySpace.com, so even if you’re browsing or viewing inappropriate sites, you can set up a support person to help you keep on the right track.

Parents must take an active role in monitoring what their children are doing on the Internet, including MySpace.com.

MySpace.com is a mission field. In my opinion, it’s a place we need to rush into – instead of running

away from. I was very excited and inspired to find and browse many sites set up by Christian young people. These sites were set up and run by teenagers. Yet, there was some refreshing maturity in their discussions as they searched for solutions to real problems they were facing as young Christians.

### Imagine

Imagine how a youth minister could use MySpace.com. With young people in his church most likely already using it, he could have a meeting for parents and educate them on the tools they could use to monitor their children and help keep them safe.

He could disciple his young people on how to share their testimony, and then encourage them to post their testimony on how Christ has influenced their lives.

Imagine a youth minister or mature Christian youth searching for blogs and sites in their community, and posting messages within the ongoing discussions that reflect a Christian viewpoint!

Imagine a youth minister who looks through Christian blogs and uses some of the honest questions and discussions there as discussion starters for his own youth meetings. Imagine him partnering with young people within his church and setting goals to use MySpace.com as a mission field to reach their own community, their city, their state, the nation, and even others around the world.

Sounds like a “great commission,” doesn’t it?

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