

Adoption Advocate



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DOMESTIC ADOPTION, FACEBOOK, AND PRIVACY

By Hal Kaufman[†]



Introduction

Brian (not his real name) recently emailed me after he and his wife attended one of our adoption networking & advertising workshops. Brian and his wife were interested in setting up a Facebook account so they could more easily advertise their desire to adopt, but they were not current Facebook users and were worried about losing their anonymity with prospective birth families. They wanted to be sure that they shared confidential information thoughtfully and on their terms.

Brian decided to e-mail his sister-in-law, a Facebook user, to get her opinion about creating an adoption Facebook page. His sister-in-law replied that she had recently seen something similar: “One of my friends must have become a fan of some couple’s page or something because it popped up on my home page.” She sent Brian the link. After Brian and his wife clicked the link they immediately recognized the couple. This couple, who just happened to “pop up” on Brian’s sister-in-law’s page, actually sat right next to Brian and his wife during our company’s adoption workshop.

Small world? It sure is, and that is exactly why adoption networking and advertising are so powerful.

Brian and his wife are still considering their options, but the power of Facebook was certainly eye-opening for them. Brian’s sister-in-law did not even know this couple, but the information about them was “pushed” to her because a friend of hers “Liked” the couple’s adoption page.

Brian and his wife now face a question that many families who are pursuing a domestic adoption also struggle to answer when considering how best to leverage Facebook:

How do you spread the word using Facebook while simultaneously maintaining control of confidential information?

Facts About Facebook

Facebook has a poor reputation when it comes to privacy. In December 2009, Facebook revamped its privacy settings, and soon after 10

privacy and consumer groups filed a complaint with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.¹ Almost every day another article comes out deriding Facebook and its approach to privacy. In May 2010, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg unveiled,

¹For more information, see: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704238104574602262735234366.html>

Adoption Advocate

yet again, his company's revamped privacy tools to address the criticism.²

Facebook has two privacy-related challenges:

1. They need to keep some level of information public because the core of its business model rests on enabling friends to find each other – that's what social networking is. If users hide all of their identifying information, no one can find their friends.
2. Facebook also wants users to share information because the more they share, the easier it is for marketers to advertise to their target markets, and the more money Facebook can make as a result.

Facebook continues to search for the right balance and the right way to give users control. That said, Facebook's privacy settings are not an issue when it comes to creating a Facebook page similar to the one created by the family who sat next to Brian and his wife at our workshop. The reason? You don't want to limit who can see your information.

To understand this statement you need to know that Facebook offers two types of accounts:

- Personal "Profile" accounts
- More business-oriented "Page" accounts

Profile Accounts

Profile accounts are for individuals only, and, per Facebook policy, these accounts must contain the person's real first and last name. A profile account allows friends to find each other. The owner of a profile account decides whether to confirm or ignore another person's request to be their Facebook "friend." When you confirm a "friend" request, the new "friend" would typically gain access to more of your Facebook information. Those who are not yet "friends" may not be able to see anything except your most basic Facebook data.

Profile accounts offer a great way for prospective adoptive families to build and leverage their personal network and spread the word

about their plans to adopt. This is analogous in some ways to how one might leverage their network if they were searching for a new job.

Page Accounts

Page accounts, on the other hand, can represent the following: a business; a brand, product, or organization; or an artist, band, or public figure. Information from a page account is typically visible to anyone on the Internet (unlike a profile account, in which one would likely limit what everyone, especially "non-friends," can see). During our adoption networking and advertising training, we suggest that families consider creating an adoption page account, just as the family who sat next to Brian did.

If a Facebook user wants to follow a business or artist they can "Like" the page. (This was previously called "Become a Fan.") When you "Like" a business page you automatically see the business's posts, links, and other information on the home page that is tied to your personal profile account. Your friends will see in their News Feeds that you "Liked" that page. The link that Brian's sister-in-law saw and sent to him was visible to her because Facebook posted in her News Feed that her friend "Liked" that adoption page.

Similar to the way that the previously discussed profile accounts can help a prospective adoptive family network and spread the word about their plans to adopt, page accounts offer an excellent opportunity for free adoption advertising. As we learned from Brian, word spreads quickly. One person "Likes" your page and their friends see it. Some of them will check it out and hopefully some of those people will "Like" it, too.

The Bottom Line

Armed with the knowledge that Facebook's profile accounts (e.g., Tom Smith) are a great adoption networking tool, and that their page accounts (e.g., Tom & Sue are Hoping to Adopt) are a great adoption advertising tool, how do we answer the question originally posed in this arti-

²For the announcement of the changes, see: http://voices.washingtonpost.com/posttech/2010/05/facebook_ceo_zuckerberg_one_cl.html



Adoption Advocate

cle? How do prospective adoptive families spread the word using Facebook while simultaneously maintaining control of their confidential information?

For a personal profile account, the information a family shares with friends and non-friends is based on two things: what data the family decides to add to Facebook, and how they set their privacy settings to control what people can see.

For families who create adoption page accounts, however, it is even simpler. Facebook's privacy settings are unimportant for page accounts because most families will want the entire page available for anyone to find and read. All families need to do is to take care not to include confidential information on their page.

So here is our advice for prospective adoptive families:

- Don't share your last name on the account title, and don't publish an e-mail address that contains your last name.
- Don't "Like" your page from your personal profile account (which would contain your last name), or someone can match pictures and identify your last name from your profile account.

- Don't share your home phone number on your page. Anyone can do a reverse lookup on your phone number to find your last name, current address, previous cities that you have lived in, and relatives. And that's only the information that is available for free!
- Don't share your work e-mail address, since you do not want everyone to know where you work.
- Don't put confidential information in your posts.
- Don't forget to analyze closely any pictures that you post to your page. Do they communicate something you don't want to communicate?
- Don't forget to monitor what others post on your page. You want friends and others to post supporting information so expectant parents can learn a little more about you, but those who post may not think about what they are saying from a privacy or adoption perspective. It is your job to delete inappropriate posts on your page (which you have access to do).

A Facebook page is a free and powerful tool that is great for adoption networking and advertising purposes.

You control the content and what others can learn about you.

Don't let concerns about Facebook privacy settings prevent you from leveraging Facebook business/adoption pages.

†About the author: Hal Kaufman is an adoptive father, adoption advocate, frequent speaker on the topic of adoption, and founder of My Adoption Advisor (www.MyAdoptionAdvisor.com), an adoption training and personal coaching company that helps families adopt domestically more quickly.

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