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We know that real estate is all about location, location, location and it seems that this motto is taking over cyber real estate as well. Mobile devices are becoming increasingly popular in Australia which means that the internet can be accessed from virtually anywhere and friends can always be connected. According to Nielsen, 43% of online Australians own a smartphone and mobile social networking is most popular amongst younger consumers (under 35 years of age). In the past 12 months, we’ve seen a number of location-based services emerge in the social media landscape and some experts predict these types of apps will only continue to rise in popularity.

What are location-based services?

Location-based services enable smartphone users to identify their current location through geo-tagging and then share this location with others in their network. It differs from simply updating your status or tweeting that you are “at the movies” in that the exact location of your smart device is identified through geo-tagging and you can see the names of business and public places in your vicinity which you can then choose to “check in” at.

Earlier location-based services such as Gowalla focussed more on users simply sharing their location rather than connecting with their social networks. More recent players in the location-based services arena, such as Foursquare and Facebook Places, encourage more connections with friends and form part of the new “geosocial networking”.

These services are most relevant to adult users who are more likely to own a smart device and also frequent establishment allowing check-ins such as pubs, clubs, gyms and cultural locations. However, as

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

Do you or any of your friends use location-based services such as Foursquare or Facebook places?

Can you think of any benefits of these types of services?

Are there any risks associated with letting people know your exact location?

How would you manage your privacy whilst using these types of services?

The actions of your friends who use these services can also impact upon your privacy and reputation. For instance, if you’ve called in sick for a shift at work and then a friend checks you in at the movies and a fellow employee can see this, you can imagine what your boss might think! On the upside, if parents are friends with their children on Facebook they can easily see where their kids are, even if it’s not where they said they were going!

As a default, Facebook Places allows friends to check you into locations, similar to tagging a friend in a photo but tagging a friend in the same location. This can be changed by accessing the Privacy Settings>Customise settings>Things others share section on Facebook. The options available are the blanket choices of allowing all friends or none of your friends to check you into places. However, users can remove
with many other apps designed for adults, the intended audience is not always the only audience.

**Are there any risks?**

Whilst we don’t have accurate statistics on how young Australians are utilising these location-based and geosocial networking services, it is important to discuss with young people the potential risks and how they can best protect themselves.

As with any other online communication, it is important not to reveal too much personal information and sharing your exact physical location with others may not be the safest (or smartest) thing to do. Users need to be careful who they share their location with, that is, making sure the privacy settings for the application in use are locked down to “friends only” or to specific friends only. The default privacy settings are not always the safest so it is important to check the settings. This is also another opportunity to discuss the importance of only having online friends who you actually know and trust to protect your information and content.

They themselves from a check-in by a friend in the same way they can remove a tag of themselves in a photo.

There are also concerns around the use of data related to checking in being used to market specific goods and services to you. By regularly checking in from a certain street, users may find themselves receiving targeted advertising about other companies in that vicinity. Whilst this may be useful to some extent, there are some risks that young people may be vulnerable to over-exposure to marketing messages which may adversely affect their consumption habits.

Other risks include the development of apps based on location-based services which may be used to stalk or mine data from users. For example, PlacePop is an app which allows users to see what places are popular with their friends, track their friends in real time and observe statistics about their own check-ins.

We will have to wait and see how these services are utilised by young people but the time to start talking with them about the benefits and risks is now!