



# AS SEEN IN ambassador

feature

## OVER CONNECTED

EXPANSION OF SOCIAL MEDIA CREATES A  
NEW NORMAL IN RELATIONSHIPS



Hajj E. Flemings



Jeffrey MacKie-Mason



"It's not a virtual world. It is the real world."

That's how Jeffrey MacKie-Mason, dean of University of Michigan's School of Information, describes our social networking universe.

After all, who doesn't tweet, update their Facebook page, blog or have a LinkedIn profile?

Today we all have a voice, to share details of our lives, to offer opinions, to define ourselves, to learn what's going on around the world or down the street ... all in the blink of an eye.

"Universal authorship is at our fingertips," MacKie-Mason says. "All you need is public library access."

That accessibility is facilitating change. "The digital landscape is altering the way we consume our news, build relationships, purchase products, and how we engage in conversations," says Hajj E. Flemings, personal brand strategist and founder of Brand Camp University.

He added that we live in a global village where social media and social sharing are redefining relationships. Social media is growing unimaginably fast. It took radio 38 years to reach 50 million users, television 13 years, and iPods 4.5 years to reach that same milestone, according to MacKie-Mason, adding that the monster of social media, Facebook added 200 million users in less than a year.

"Our network consists of a mix of friends that we know in real life and e-acquaintances that we have connected with online. A lot of where we go can be tied to our footprint online," Flemings says.

Socializing online has become a bigger and bigger part of our day. Flemings cites a Nielsen study that says we spend more time on social networks than on e-mail.

"Nothing in the world will ever beat face-to-face interaction," Flemings says, adding that social networking can be a springboard to forming real-world relationships.

"In this connected world the line is blurring between the digital and real, professional and personal, public and private," Flemings says.

With that comes some caveats. "We have an explosion of access to different types of information," MacKie-Mason says.

Social media provides access to the wisdom, assistance and active collaboration of the world's people, sometimes called "crowdsourcing," according to MacKie-Mason.

We are conditioned to believe if it's published, that it must be true, but now that anyone can be published we have to take things with an added grain of salt. "Learning to make good judgments is challenging," he adds. But it's not impossible. We have new methods for evaluation with reputation systems. Two good examples are Amazon reviews or eBay feedback. People care about reputations, MacKie-Mason adds. And despite the deluge of information, "good ideas tend to percolate up."

There are plenty of bad ideas swimming around with the good, however, including ways to damage your own reputation.

"We don't know who's watching. A lot of us aren't used to that," MacKie-Mason says. But, he gives advice: "If you want to put something out there, think three or four times about it."

"Those heat-of-the-moment impulses," Flemings says, "you can't take them back." And consider privacy or lack of it ... "People tend to think they have more control than they do," MacKie-Mason adds.

"Use common sense," Flemings says, "even though it's not that common. Think: Would you be embarrassed if your mom read what you were posting? And use discretion: 'Talk' online the same way you would speak with someone in real life."

Oversharing has its risks besides social gaffes. Letting people know you're out of town is probably not a good idea as it could make you vulnerable to a break-in.

You could say Big Brother is always watching, or at least he has an army of watchers. With security cameras and phones that can record video at the touch of a button, "all space will be public space."

👑 - Heidi Bitsoli