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Eating Facebook



Facebook is synonymous with privacy. Faced with 800 million user accounts, the business has a huge responsibility – and a challenge – in overcoming the innate tension between making friends, sharing materials between them, and privacy.

Philipp Teister aims to blow that tension wide open.

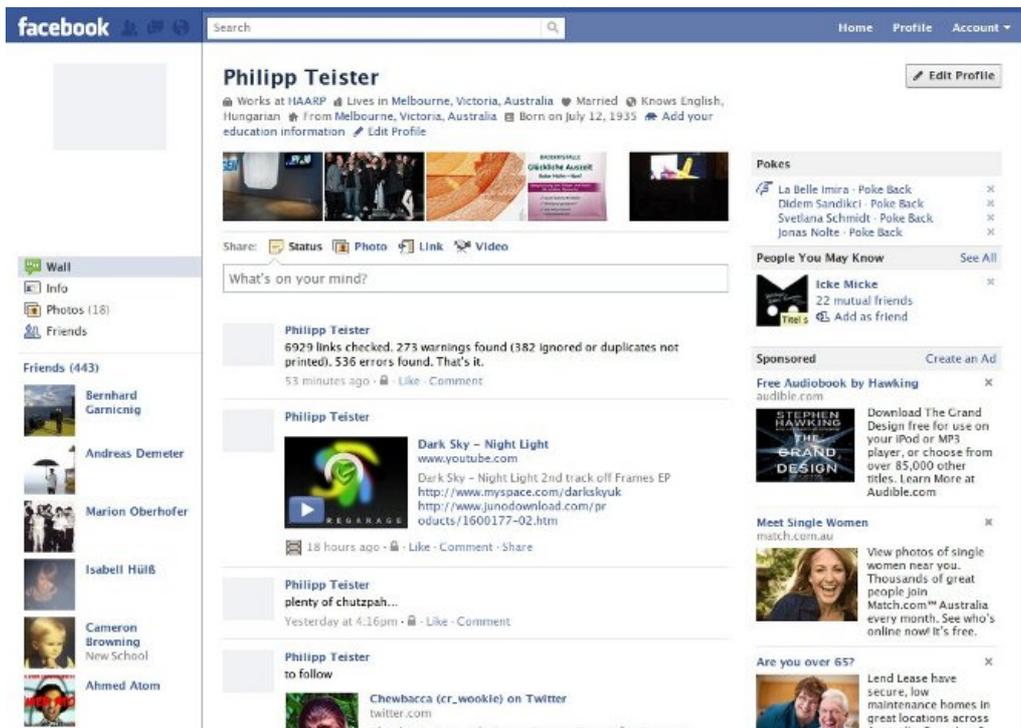
With his project *Facebook Life Sharing*, Teister has made his online identity "open source". It is possible for anyone to log into Teister's profile, update his status, review his recent activities, and see his list of friends. It is perhaps the ultimate spoken objective of social media – to have a profile that is so wide and so open, that it effectively cedes control to a community. If Wikipedia has achieved a free, community-moderated balance in content, then Teister is perhaps achieving the same effect with identity. The paradigm is consistent, even though the end result is perhaps far different.

As an artist, Teister enjoys working with something which is ostensibly functional, but with far-reaching emotional effects. *"Facebook is an ultimate sandbox, supporting all kinds of inappropriate privacy and anonymity experiments. Its privacy policy has grown significantly over time, and a huge list of concerns have come along. The most feared hijack for anyone must be identity theft."*

While the fear of identity theft is certainly true in the wider consciousness, Teister's project effectively allows his identity to be stolen by anyone. It is, of course, easy to create accounts as anyone in Facebook, which is where Teister started in his development of the project. However, as he claims, his project is not about someone else, but as himself: *"... for a desensitisation and clearance of inferiority and slavery"* to the rules, behaviours and requirements that social networks ask of crowds.

Inspired by Eva and Franco Mattes' 2000-2003 project [Life Sharing](#), which allowed anyone to log in and access their personal files, Teister started by considering the amount of time that he spends on social networks, and the outcome of this investment. Once his details were released, users posted links and pictures, and even chatting to his friends. Inevitably, his account details were occasionally changed by some users, leading Teister to add a recovery notice to his account information.

"I must admit, within the first hours after the start of Facebook Life Sharing, I felt a little uncomfortable with the idea of what I just had done to my digital persona. 'The re-invention of the self-made headshot', would best describe this feeling. My identity is now changing constantly, and it is in a transitional state."



A private world

Teister's project has two aspects. The first is for his account to become "remote controlled": for his online identity to be manipulated by others, and to examine the outcomes and feelings that unforeseen manipulation will bring – for his contacts as well as himself. The second is perhaps more idealistic, which is that he invites others to join him, and offer their details for all to see and use. Mathematically, Teister's endpoint is when half of Facebook's userbase is "closed" and producing content to the system, with the other half being "open" to exploit it.

Although Facebook Life Sharing is an extreme example, it is clear that millions of people have voluntarily and consciously offered certain facets of their identity for the world to see. Because social networks allow for a reframing of the concept of privacy, Teister considers that what we used to understand as "privacy" is no longer relevant. *"Privacy has become to a word used by critics or frightened politicians. Whenever this word is dropped it sounds to me just like something ancient, talking about things I do not have any connection to. There is still privacy, but it has to be determined on a complete different level than it is used at the moment."*

The term 'privacy' is not useful any more;
it refers to an age that we are no longer living in.

Philipp Teister

If it is possible for us to "come out of the other side" with a reframed definition of what privacy is and means, then it may also allow us to understand more about ourselves, as well as our relationship with other people. Teister believes that we should not see privacy as something which we can lose, any more than it is something that we expose, particularly as for many, "anti-privacy" is a default online

position. The language used around privacy is something that the project aims to address. *"The term 'privacy' is not useful any more; it refers to an age that we are no longer living in. The question is, what is it that makes us reveal? The change from privacy to anti-privacy has happened, and now we have 'the right to anti-privacy'."*

Given our desire to communicate and offer an identity online, the fear of potential data or identity loss is rather paradoxical. Teister uses the word "Slavery" to describe how we are consciously offering our data to social networks which are, in the cold light of day, businesses that make money in their targeting of advertising and other content to our profile. The desire to update and to share is part of the human desire to communicate to, and be with, others; but the amorphousness "stream" of networked content makes it harder to know when to stop updating and sharing. *"With every single day we spend on a social service, we are bound to this non-existing kind of matter. We are facing the fear of losing something precious or some part of our own 'body'. But, how can you fear something that's neither tactile nor made of anything material? You cannot put it into your closet and take it out whenever you need it."* Teister argues that social updates are "invisible slave-drivers". We do it out of the goodness of our heart, but ultimately feel chained to the obligation to do so, even when the content that we share has low Like or RT volumes.

Facebook Life Streaming is a project that is designed to reestablish a sense of what privacy means, both at mass and individual scale. In a world that is opening up to social networks, the belief in their power – as recently demonstrated in Egypt – can only be truly effective when the fears about their power are understood and addressed.

Further information on Philipp Teister's Facebook Life Sharing project – including his Facebook login details – are available at his website, [Local data eats the machine](#).

Philipp is based in Vienna, and is [@p_teister](#) on Twitter.

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