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# Keep your Facebook profile private

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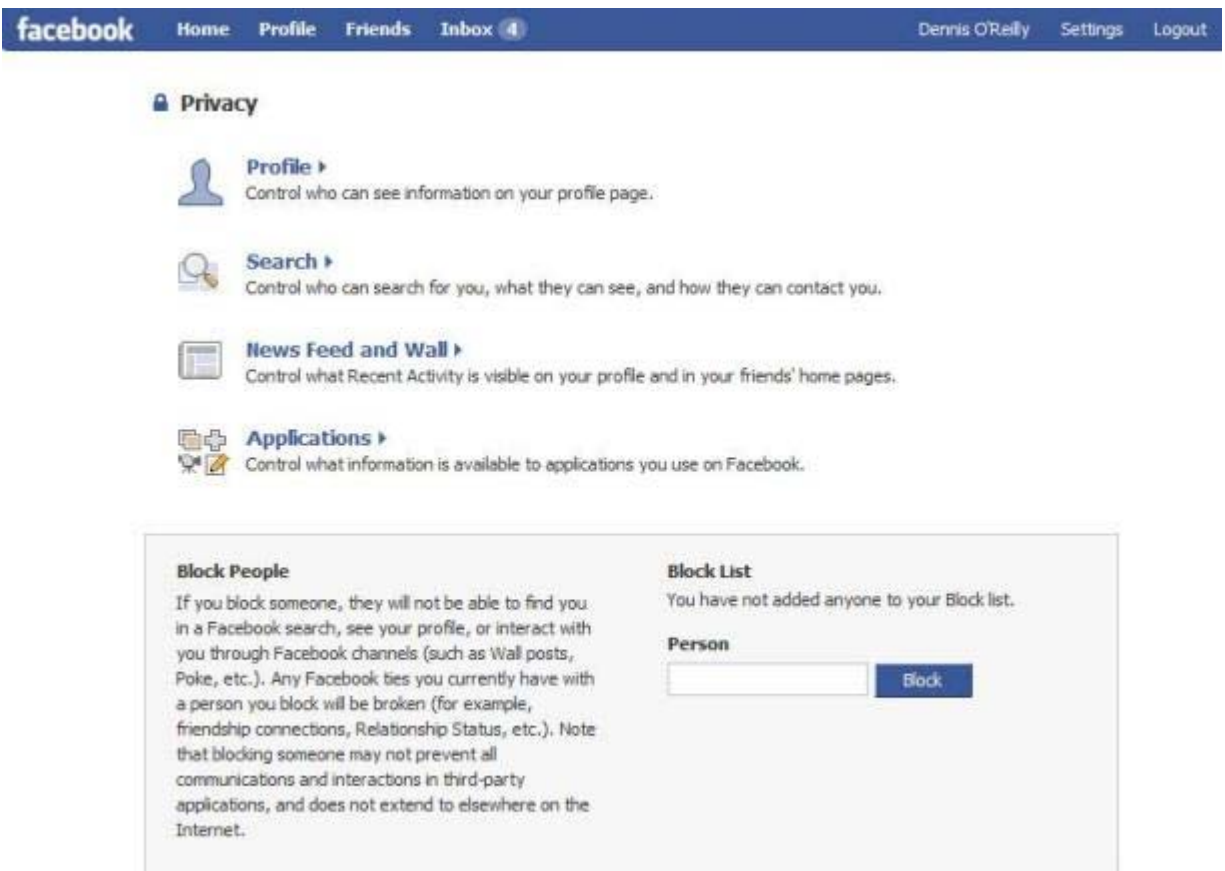
Earlier this month, an 82-year-old man in Auburn, Calif., was [scammed out of \\$5,200](#) because his Facebook profile was too forthcoming. The first thing I did after reading his tale of woe on the Auburn Journal site was to examine my own Facebook profile from a stranger's perspective.

I didn't like what I saw.

What I saw was too much, so the second thing I did was edit my Facebook profile to remove some personal information and further restrict access to it. Unfortunately, the process took longer than I expected.

A Facebook privacy makeover begins by hovering the cursor over Settings and choosing Account Settings. The Settings tab shows your name, contact e-mail address, and other basic information. The Networks, Notifications, Mobile, Language, and Payments tabs are self-explanatory, although I unchecked several of the Notifications options that were selected by default.

The real work begins when you rework Facebook's privacy settings. Hover the cursor over Settings and choose Privacy Settings to open the service's Privacy Overview. Your privacy options are presented in four categories: Profile, Search, News Feed and Wall, and Applications. You can also add someone to your Block List by entering his or her name in the text box near the bottom of the page and clicking Block.



The screenshot shows the Facebook Privacy Settings page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Facebook logo and links for Home, Profile, Friends, and Inbox (with a notification icon). On the right side of the navigation bar, the user's name "Dennis O'Reilly" is displayed along with links for Settings and Logout.

The main content area is titled "Privacy" and contains four categories of settings:

- Profile**: Control who can see information on your profile page.
- Search**: Control who can search for you, what they can see, and how they can contact you.
- News Feed and Wall**: Control what Recent Activity is visible on your profile and in your friends' home pages.
- Applications**: Control what information is available to applications you use on Facebook.

Below these categories is a section for blocking people, which is divided into two parts:

- Block People**: A text box explaining that blocking someone prevents them from finding you in searches, seeing your profile, or interacting with you through Facebook channels. It also notes that blocking someone may not prevent all communications and interactions in third-party applications.
- Block List**: A section indicating that no one has been added to the block list. It includes a "Person" input field and a "Block" button.

Facebook's Privacy Settings are listed in four categories along with a tool for adding names to your Block List.

(Credit: Facebook)

Click Profile to view your personal and contact information. Your options in each category are everyone, people in your networks and friends, friends of friends, only friends, and a Customize dialog box, which provides a bit more granularity to your options. Click the Save Changes button at the bottom of the page once you've finished making your selections.

The screenshot shows the 'Profile' privacy settings interface. At the top, there is a blue header with the word 'Profile'. Below it is a section titled 'Who Can See This?' with a lock icon. The first option is 'Everyone on Facebook' with an unchecked checkbox. The next section is 'Friends', which includes two radio button options: 'Friends of Friends' (with the subtext 'My friends and their friends can see this.') and 'Only Friends' (with the subtext 'Only friends can see this.'). The 'Only Friends' option is selected. Below this is the 'Networks' section with a dropdown menu currently set to 'None of My Networks'. The final section is 'Which types of people?' with the label 'Michigan' and five unchecked checkboxes: 'Undergrad', 'Grads', 'Alumni', 'Faculty', and 'Staff'. At the bottom of the settings area are two buttons: 'Okay' (in a blue box) and 'Cancel' (in a white box with a grey border).

The custom options in the Facebook privacy settings let you limit access to your personal info.

(Credit: Facebook)

I reset each privacy option to Only Friends, with the exception of the Basic Info category, which is viewable by everyone. To see your profile as your friends do, enter the name of a friend in the text box at the top of this page. (You can view and edit the entries in your Basic Info by clicking Info on your profile page and choosing Edit Information.)

You might be surprised by the amount of information about you that Facebook's search function makes available. To change Facebook's search settings, click Search on the Privacy Overview page. The default option under Search Visibility is Everyone, but you can change this to Friends of Friends, Only Friends, or a custom setting for people in your networks.

I chose to show in search results only a link to send me a message. I also unchecked the option at the bottom of the screen to create a public search listing for me to submit to Web search engines. When you're done, click Save Changes.

## Privacy > Search

### Search Discovery

Use this setting below to control who on Facebook can find you through search. Your Friends will always be able to find you.

Search Visibility  Everyone

### Search Result Content

People who can find you in search can click through to a very limited version of your profile. Use these checkboxes to control what people can see in addition to your name.

People who can see me in search can see:

- My profile picture
- My friend list
- A link to add me as a friend
- A link to send me a message
- Pages I am a fan of

### Public Search Listing

Use this setting to control whether your search result is available outside of Facebook.

- Create a public search listing for me and submit it for search engine indexing ([see preview](#))

Please note that minors do not have public search listings - listings created by minors will activate only when they are no longer minors.

Save Changes

Cancel

Uncheck options on the Facebook Search Privacy page to restrict your personal information shown in search results.

(Credit: Facebook)

The default selections in Facebook's privacy settings for News Feed and Wall are similarly too open for my liking. It wasn't so much the options under Actions within Facebook, although I did uncheck several of these. The settings under Facebook Ads were a bigger concern to me.

There are two options on this page: "Allow ads on platform pages to show my information to" and "Show my social actions in Facebook Ads to." You can choose either "Only my friends" or "No one." Opting for the latter choice was a no-brainer for me.

More unpleasant surprises awaited on the Applications Privacy page. What your friends do affects how far afield your personal information travels. You can read about it under the Overview tab, which concludes by promising that Facebook won't sell your personal information and that "(y)our contact information is not exposed by the Facebook Platform."

I'm sure the Facebook Platform offers some real benefits, but until I have a better understanding of those benefits and their potential risks to my privacy, I'm opting out. To do so, choose "Do not share any information about me through the Facebook API." Take that a step further by selecting the other two options on this page, which block friends from viewing memberships in Facebook Connect sites and prevent Beacon sites from posting stories to your profile.

These days, I spend more time in Facebook than any other Web service except Gmail, and Facebook is gaining fast on that top spot. Of course, the bad guys are spending a lot more time there, too. Minimize your chances of catching their eye by lowering your profile.



Dennis O'Reilly has covered PCs and other technologies in print and online since 1985. Along with more than a decade as editor for Ziff-Davis's Computer Select, Dennis edited PC World's award-winning Here's How section for more than seven years. He is a member of the CNET blog Network, and is not an employee of CNET.