

Has Online Etiquette Gone Out the Door?

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Online etiquette or “Netiquette” is defined by Wikipedia as a set of social conventions that facilitate interaction over networks, ranging from Usenet and mailing lists to blogs and forums.

Some of these rules have been in use since 1983, and a lot of it is common sense so why don't the rules of real life interaction apply online? Is it because we are for the most part anonymous or hidden behind an online nickname that we feel we can slam somebody, their ideas or worse?

How about replying to email or online messages in a timely manner? This article was not meant to be a commentary on our lack of online etiquette per say, but rather I wanted to focus on a couple of observations I've made while using Facebook.

For the one or two of you out there who doesn't know what facebook is, it's a social networking website that allows you to communicate with and keep in touch with friends, by posting pictures, writing on walls, and essentially sharing information. The site has over 300 million users, and continues to grow rapidly.

Facebook is a great platform to stay in touch – by adding friends and sharing information. But I think most would agree that the vast majority of our Facebook “friends” are merely acquaintances or old friends you used to know – not good friends that we actually still hang out with, or even speak to for that matter.

I'm sure most of us are guilty of adding friends of friends we don't really know (perhaps to chat up later?) and for some it even seems to have become a contest for who has the most friends. I know I've received friend requests from people I don't know and I've even dated a few girls I met on Facebook, who added me because I was a friend of friend.

But do I really want to see daily updates from someone I knew in high school and haven't seen since, or share information with people I don't really know? Which poses a question – is it ok to delete Facebook friends? Should this be considered rude, or a slap in the face?

Personally I haven't bothered to spend my time going through my list of 400 or so to figure out who I really want to be friends with and who needs to go. But sometimes I find that I get a little miffed when my number of “friends” goes down -- I can't help but think to myself, “who the hell deleted me?”

And then the odd time I've been strolling through someone's pictures and click on the link of another "friend" in the picture and suddenly realize they aren't my Facebook friend anymore, or some other scenario. Is it ok to feel insulted when you get dumped by a Facebook friend? Or is this what we do all the time in real life – just without the proof? I suppose we shouldn't take it too seriously.

Another online pet peeve of mine is when you invite people to an event on Facebook -- a party for example, and they don't seem to have the time or courtesy to respond with a simple "yes, no or maybe"! I liken this to receiving a wedding invitation in the mail...we request your response by a certain date. Common courtesy dictates that whether you plan to attend or not – you will check off a box and drop it in the mail. Certainly this takes more effort than simply replying to a check box in your online invitation. But invariably there are several people who just don't respond at all online. I suppose we perceive online activity as somewhat less formal, and maybe I am expecting too much. If most people on Facebook are like me, then they receive lots of invites to see live bands, and other events – and don't bother responding because it is similar to an email blast. But a personal invite to a party – I think that is different.

As Facebook continues to grow, we have learned to live with the fact that we see advertisements on the right side of our screen, and businesses are definitely jumping on the band wagon by setting up their own groups and allowing people to join. But another trend I am starting to see, which probably goes against proper netiquette, is individuals using Facebook to market products or services they personally sell.

Where else can you blast information to hundreds or thousands of "friends" for free? I've also seen people use their "status" update to push products on their friends. I don't think there is anything wrong with a business or other group inviting their followers to events such as a bar or club sending information about upcoming concerts – because you have joined that group specifically to get information, but I find it rather annoying to see advertisements via status updates every other day.

So as our online world continues to evolve I don't think our online etiquette is quite keeping up. For today's youth, online social networks, chatting and texting are just a part of life. Facebooking too might be a big part of their social life. I sometimes wonder if this lack of etiquette – either real or perceived, which seems to be the norm online will eventually transfer over into real life or has it already begun?