



# MySpace.com explodes with teens

 Matt Franklin and Dawn Jones



## Site allows teens to explore blogs, profiles and more

MID MICHIGAN (WJRT) - (05/18/06)--Chances are you or someone you know is on it. With more than 70 million registered users worldwide since its creation two years ago, MySpace.com has exploded into the new phenomena on the Internet.

Many of those taking to the popular site are teens. It started off as a place on the Internet where artist could showcase their music.

In just a matter of time, MySpace.com grew into something bigger and has changed the way many of us -- particularly teenagers -- communicate.

For nearly three hours a day, Retha Horton clicks her way through hundreds of profiles, virtual bulletin boards called blogs and pictures on MySpace.com.

It took the 14-year-old Atherton Middle School student only a few days to make up her own personal home on the World Wide Web.

"You make a page, you can have pictures, you can have comments and stuff, and you can have video, music," she said.

Right now there are bout 177 friends that have access to Horton's site. She says the site is the popular new way of staying in touch with friends.

"Sometimes you can't be on the phone if your parents are on the phone, so it's just easier," she said. And "leet speak," a new computer slang, has changed the way teens are communicating over the Web.

"Instead of typing, 'Well, I'll talk to you later,' you can put in, 'TTYL,'" Horton said. "There's LYLASCEO. That's, 'Love You Like A Sister Could Ever Love,' like when you say goodbye to your friends."

We pulled some other examples from [NetLingo.com](#). There is also "F2F," or "Face to Face," meaning meeting someone in real life.

And "POS," or "Parent Over Shoulder," that term is commonly used to alert the other person that a parent is nearby.

So what's the appeal? Why are so many teens so quick to sign up and take part in this popular form of virtual communication?

Some teens say it's the privacy the 'Net provides, and also freedom of self expression -- both a local psychologist says are normal teen behaviors.

Pediatric Psychologist Dr. Elizabeth Outman says cyber sites like MySpace serve as a platform for teens.

"Teenage years are years when they are searching for their identity," she said.

"They really don't know who they are, and they may be trying on lots of different hats. The Internet can mask as a pretty safe place where they can be who they want to be."

Horton has her page locked, and only she can grant outsiders permission to view it. She knows that too much of a good thing could eventually bring out the bad.

"I didn't want people that I didn't know looking at my profile and stuff, and knowing stuff about me that my friends know," she said.

Telephone numbers are becoming a thing of the past as many teens these days prefer to exchange MySpace profiles.

But there's a darker side to MySpace. Just recently a 24-year-old Ferndale, Mich., man was arrested for trying to pick up a 15 year old he allegedly met on the popular site.

Horton has had her account for seven months and although her site is marked private, which means no one can access her personal information unless invited in as a friend, her mom has warned her of the dangers of Internet predators.

For Kristie and Fidel Carino of Lake Fenton, MySpace is not an option for their 12-year-old twin daughters. "I'm sure when they are 16 or 17 ... and 13 are like dog years," Kristie said. "You learn so much and at some point are we going to cut that apron string and let them venture? Absolutely, but at 12 and 13, no way."

Psychologists say parents should have some reservations about chat rooms and online social networking Web sites like MySpace.com, but also says they shouldn't be too alarmed.

"They should regard it as something natural," said Dr. Elizabeth Outman. "Kids -- especially teenagers -- have been doing networking stuff for as long as they've been alive." Outman says parents should be aware the warning signs.

"Being extremely secretive (is a sign)," Outman said. "Erasing sites they've been to before. Whenever mom walks in the room, closing the windows so mom can't see where they have been."

In the Carino home, Addison and Madeline have limited access to the family's computers. They are allowed to send e-mails and instant messages. For now, that's enough for them and their parents.

MySpace offers safety tips for its members and parents. All registered users must be at least 14 years old. They can never lie about their age, and never post information like phone numbers or addresses.

If you want more information on what you can do, you can go to:

<http://www.netlingo.com>, <http://www.netsmartz.org>, <http://www.safeteens.com>, and <http://www.wiredwithwisdom.org> for some Internet parent safety tips.

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