

Criticizing the Mirror

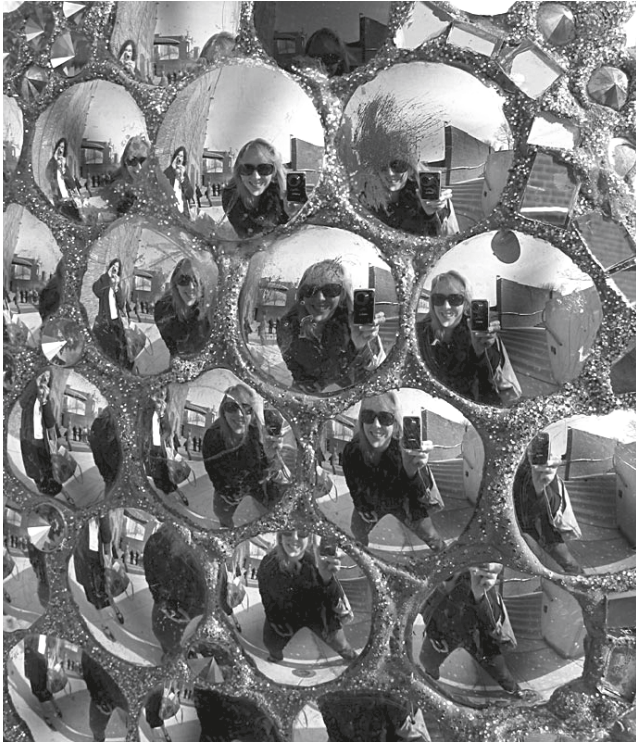


Photo credit: LollyKnit at Flickr

By Andrew Sharp

People like to belittle Facebook, but I would like to come to its defense. This may shock some of the people I know, because I have often criticized it as being shallow and a big time waster. I even took a break from it for about a year. It was really refreshing to be away from it, actually. (And I still had friends!)

I have waded tentatively back into Facebook, but it was good to step outside the foaming tide of daily typing and uploading and gain a different perspective than when I was drowning in it. And as I said, I do think Facebook has faced some unfair criticisms.

One of the biggest criticisms is that it's so shallow. We learn that people are eating oatmeal right now, or what they think of pigeons, even though this information does little to enrich us. People chatter all day about this sort of thing. You'll often hear this kind of communication called

narcissistic. You wouldn't mail people a postcard saying "I am going to go do some vacuuming, then maybe go to Chipotle." Because you know they don't care. You probably would be embarrassed to even e-mail them about that.

I don't think that's a completely fair comparison, though. Facebook is less like a postcard or letter, and more like spoken words. Listen carefully to your own daily conversation and it will be full of what even your mother, in her most encouraging mood, might not call groundbreaking material. Facebook is like the talking we do every day—frequently shallow.

It's a very strange conversation, don't get me wrong. You'll be talking with one of your friends, and suddenly another person that you don't know might step out of the crowd and chip in. Soon a whole group of people might be there, laughing and talking. Others, whom you don't see, will lurk around in a big circle, just taking it in.

Instead of the back-and-forth dialogue we know in face-to-face speech, Facebook is a shattered conversation, a swirl of disorganized fragments, as if our daily interaction were packed into a bomb and then exploded, sending bits out everywhere. So if you want to spend every day in a massive crowd, trolling around for short conversations to join (or snoop on), Facebook is for you.

Maybe the social media conversation will eventually get more organized and people will be more careful what they share. It could be that we are still figuring out the chaos these rapid changes in communication have caused. We've had thousands of years to come up with rules about

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5 Ways to Get More Likes/Comments on Facebook

By Ben J. Herr

Like • Comment • Sunday June 10 at 3:48pm

Do you feel that you're not popular enough on Facebook? Does it make you mad when your friend's lame-O statuses get more likes than your own? Reaching your full ego potential in the Facebook world can be a tricky task. Simply being good isn't enough; you have to know the tricks of the trade. Fortunately for you, I'm about to give you five sure-fire ways to increase your Facebook footprint and get the recognition you deserve!

1. Rework a popular saying: Let's face it. People are lazy. They don't like to think through an entire status. Thus your brilliance will probably fall unnoticed if it's an entirely original thought. The good news is that society has accumulated a plethora of sayings and quotes that people will instantly recognize and connect with. Reworking this saying to mean something slightly different will help you say what you want while making it an easy read. For example, instead of saying "Finally! A chance to sleep in," say "I guess I won't be healthy, wealthy, and wise today," or better yet, "If all the early bird gets is a worm, then I'll pass." The second one is especially good because it gives people an excuse to cheer laziness.

2. Incomplete story: It's a rookie mistake to give all of the facts. When people have heard everything, their curiosity is satisfied, and they will scroll down. But if you withhold information, they're hooked. Have you been in a four-wheeler crash that left you with a nice-looking gash on your forehead? This is the perfect time! Post a picture of the injury with no explanation, or maybe just an "Ouch!" or "How's it look?" for the caption. Now be prepared for a storm of comments saying, "WHAT HAPPENED???" and "ARE YOU OKAY???"

Now, sit back and be patient. Don't settle for the first few comments, because more will come. Either because they think the previous comments didn't get your attention, or because they want to be notified when you do comment again, people will keep leaving comments. Once you have obtained a good number of comments, give a teaser. "Yeah, I was in an accident. I'll be okay" is the perfect follow-up comment: 1) it leaves the nature of the accident still a mystery, which ...See More

what's polite to say in public. Social media is an entirely new kind of public, and we've only had a few years with it.

Kids using social media in the future may be taught as they grow up that sharing about how you're going to mow the lawn is boring and no one wants to hear about it. Or that anything you type in a news feed is tantamount to speaking into a microphone in front of a vast audience of all the people you've ever met. "Excuse me, is this thing on? Testing...what I want to say is my boss is an idiot and that makes me feel better about stealing from the company."

Even without these rules, I suggest that social media is not the problem. It has simply tricked us into revealing who we are, in ways we have learned to hide in face-to-face interaction. The flaws we criticize in Facebook maybe aren't Facebook's at all, but our own.

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I heard somewhere recently that instead of Facebook, we should just have a site that tells us every day, "You're important to me. You have valuable things to say. I like you." That kind of hits close to home for me. I have to admit, I used Facebook to get validation.

This gets right back to Facebook's original purpose, which was to show how popular you were by how many friends you had. It's just a lot more sophisticated now. Instead of simply counting our importance by our friends tally, we can keep score on how many people cared enough about our post to comment on it, how many people "liked" our photo, and so on.

Shallow, narcissistic, vulnerable and desperate for validation. A time waster. All too often, full of rudeness and hate.

Denouncing Facebook for all these things is criticizing the mirror.



Andrew Sharp lives in London, Ohio, where he works as the staff writer for Rosedale Mennonite Missions, does freelance writing, and serves as a child-raising consultant for his wife Stephanie.

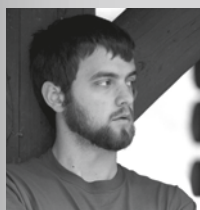
is sure to draw more inquiries; 2) it implies that you are not okay right NOW, which is sure to draw more inquiries; and 3) it sounds like a bona fide attempt at answering their questions.

YOU'RE NOT DONE! At this point, it is a rookie mistake NOT to log off and leave the computer for several hours. For when people see that you have answered, they will know that you are back at the computer. And since they will be unfulfilled by your answer, they will want to know all the more. So they may try to Facebook chat with you. Chats are nice, but don't result in numbers of likes or comments that you can boast about. So get out, get away from the computer. Make them comment. Run up your totals. After this, give the full story.

3. Limited reference: Make a reference to an inside joke that a fairly large, but select, group of people will understand. Maybe a joke from your church, your job, your sports team, whatever. When they see it, they'll feel obligated to like or comment because they feel that the status is directed at them. You will have a limited target field, but a high success rate.

4. Start dating someone, or better yet, break up: Little explanation needed here. Suddenly everyone is your best friend and excited for the new development (or thrilled that Facebook now allows them to know everything), or they are suddenly your closest confidant if things don't work out. Either way, you'll draw a lot of attention to yourself.

5. Hijack someone else's status: Hover over the most recent updates and look for a good status. When you see one, be the first one to comment. But don't just comment, make a follow-up joke that's better than the status itself. You'll find your comment getting liked by people you don't even know! And no one will pay any attention to the original status, only to your great comment. You now own that post!



Ben Herr is currently an RA at Lancaster Mennonite High School's Resident Hall, working with and getting to know the international students. He attends Mountville Mennonite Church, has spent the past three summers involved with the summer camp ministry of Black Rock Retreat.



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in the Old and New Testaments, my mind goes immediately to Micah 6:8 and Matthew 22. In both cases the Lord clearly declares the values he wants for our lives. In Micah we are told to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." In Matthew, Jesus sums up the law and the prophets with the command to love God and love others. In other words, the values that should define us as followers of Jesus are our relationship with God and our service to others. Everything else, including our financial security, should exist in support of these core values.

Don't get me wrong, I understand the need to solve our economic challenges in order to put bread on the table. I just want to remind us to guard our values carefully during these days, and avoid buying into the prevailing idea that we live by bread alone. We know better.

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