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Eve Yap
Copy Editor

There are friends and 'friends'

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Evelyn Yap says, don't list 'All' as buddies, choose your Facebook pals carefully.

WHERE the intensity of posts are concerned, Australians are the world's biggest social butterflies.

Figures released from research firm Nielsen last week found that the folks Down Under led the hook-up-with-friends craze – posting and poking nearly seven hours a month, ahead of people in the United States, Britain and Japan. For the record, the global average is five-and-a-half hours a month.

For those who are old hands at playing the social utility games – Facebooking, Twittering and, um, MySpace-ing? – allow some spelling licence here – please stop reading. Lest you think that in your networking smarts, you have seen it all.

For the rest who would take this journey with me and, perhaps, offer a tip or two, please be my guest.

So, back to Facebook: What do I care about it? After all, I'm not thrilled about following the crowd. And with 400 million active members – half of whom log on to the site on any given day – that's a whole lot of crowd to follow.

Well, I'm in two minds about relaunching into the world of pithy postings. Things like these: "Cool, you look good" or "I'm tagging you, yo!", or "So and So has just commented on So and So's wall."

Though I shunned Facebook in its early years, I find myself drawn to it again. It's partly because my colleagues who send succinct postings on Twitter and Facebook via their smartphones look so smart.

So, though I shunned a smartphone – after an infuriating experience with a lemon, a long-dead O2 Xda Atom – I'm dithering about buying one again.

So I, too, can make up-to-the-minute updates to Twitter or Facebook via my smartphone – and, yes, look so smart.

But like the low risk-taker that I am, I shall approach with caution. Specifically, in specifying who to let in within my social circle. (The people who are already on my pages, thank you for being there.)

No illusions here: Ordinary as they come, I don't expect people beating a path to my Facebook door. (Confession: I had to persuade my daughter somewhat vigorously to admit me as her Friend.)

Certainly, there won't be a similar case of FannWong1971 – a fan who set up a phony site, pretending to be the Mediacorp artiste last month.

But so what if the number of friends I list on my Facebook account can be numbered – rather than run into the hundreds.

Better to go with a few who can be trusted than have a statistic for a boast.

Certainly, I don't think that the former Singapore Airlines stewardess, whose sex video clips were circulated online early last month counted on someone finding a link to that clip through a Facebook friend's profile.

Truth be told, I can see the ego value of Facebook. Post a question and friends reply. Feels good to be read. It's an extension of what journalists call "byline ego".

So, ordinary folk "broadcast personal information – like we're our own celebrities," said Michael Stefanone, an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University at Buffalo.

Commenting in an article titled The Evolution of Social Networking on the campus' e-newsletter of March 3, he added: "This is consistent with the celebrity culture we live in now."

But here's the kicker.

"But don't forget – only a small fraction of your Facebook network are actually friends of yours."

I am glad I have chosen wisely.

Tags: facebook, online, singapore, social media, social networking

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March 10, 2010 Wednesday

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