

Rules for making 'friends' from faces

By DEANNA LEE

PRAGUE — I'm embarrassed to say that after reading Newsweek's recent cover story on Facebook, I joined. The majority of the social networking site's new members are people over 35: oldies like me. Still, it's uncool — and supposedly "old school" — to join because of pieces in "old media" like Newsweek. And what's the point of joining Facebook if not to be cool?

In my defense, I work in new media, plus I come from a Web-savvy family; my 72-year-father recently answered the phone saying "Can't talk, in Second Life!" (the online virtual world).

And I'm delighted with my first "friendships." It's great to see people I'd known professionally in a more informal light, with family photos and droll daily updates (who knew an oldie journalist I really admire could recommend new tunes by The Hysterics and Rilo Kiley?).

Less delightful was the reaction of my younger friends. Alex, my 23-year-old *consigliere* on all things new media, wrote "As one of the first 10,000 users of Facebook, I'm officially uncomfortable with John Pomfret [a respected Washington Post reporter] et al . . . having 'profiles.' "

He was jokingly referring to some of my new Facebook friends; but here's the point: Young people do feel somewhat uncomfortable with established and "establishment" people, aka "older" people, on their social networking site.

A 20-year-old friend then forwarded me an article called "omg my mom joined facebook!!" Hmm — not so subtle.

So, to all my young friends, let me first say: We're not trying to encroach on your territory.

We oldies arguably need ways to stay in touch with each other more than you do. For us, having any social life is a challenge, with kids, workaholism, etc. Already I'm back in

touch with friends now living in China, Lebanon and Britain. And, like you, we love meeting new friends and networking.

Some say LinkedIn is good networking for oldies. But that's a professional network, and frankly, not much fun. Facebook is more like a "play network." Any chance for a middle-aged mom to "play" is well worth it!

Now, I know youngsters are concerned about what we'll see about you. But take it from me, we don't necessarily want to see it either. A number of my young colleagues are on Facebook; it's doubtful I'll "friend" them.

Do I really want to know whom they're getting blitzed with this weekend? No. Do I want them to know whom I'm getting blitzed with this weekend (OK, all the things I'm not doing this weekend)? No.

So don't worry about not wanting to be my Facebook friend if it makes you feel awkward.

My young friend Eric is a sort of new media guru who blogs for CBS News and the Huffington Post. He says "If a boss Facebook-friended me, I would be put in a hard position. You don't want to say no, because that would be bad, but you don't really want to say yes either. So — I could compromise, and say yes, but 'block' some of my profile."

I could do that too (after I learn how), but doesn't that kind of defeat the purpose? It also feels funny — I can tell when I've been blocked from certain areas of others' lives — er, profiles. Should I feel offended? Should I do the same to others?

Clearly, there's a social networking etiquette still being worked out, especially now that, as the home page says, "anyone can join" (not just college students).

Here's an even dicier issue: What about "friending" your friends' kids or even your own? If you ask me, any parent who's just on Facebook to learn about their kids, is both missing out on most of the fun, and probably overstepping some parenting boundaries.

I believe kids have to be able to work through many social issues, online and off, in their own ways and time. This is particularly important now that Facebook includes high schoolers. Maybe this is easy for me to say since my

daughter's not that old yet (she'll probably call me on this later).

Eric it turns out, is friends on Facebook with friends of his mother. But, he says, "you have to know that moms gossip with moms. It is almost like breathing for them!"

So here's my message to young people — let us have fun too. After all, you'll be "old" one day, and probably still on something like Facebook. And to oldies — if you join, join for yourselves, not to keep tabs on your kids. Oh, and remember . . . it's really uncool to "poke."

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The Japan Times: Tuesday, Sept. 25, 2007
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