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# Friending Strangers On Fakebook

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**D**o you still think you need to be connecting to everyone in Social Media? After Farmville and Mafia Wars, the biggest games on Facebook involve your data.

Audio clip: Adobe Flash Player (version 9 or above) is required to play this audio clip. Download the latest version [here](#). You also need to have JavaScript enabled in your browser.

## Identity Crises

I'm connected to many different circles of people from different times in my life. I've got connections to work, to church, to hobbies, and to places I've lived and gone to school. Also, because I spent so many years on the air as a TV reporter, I'm fairly recognized in the area where I live.

When I get requests to connect on Facebook, I can tell pretty much at a glance how I might know someone. If I have 40 mutual friends who are all classmates of mine from Idaho, then I can figure out who it is quickly. If it's 20 mutual friends all from one of my TV employers, I can also zero in.



I've turned down hundreds of requests in the last couple of years, and I've been called nasty names for doing so. In all of these instances, it's been a blind approach from someone I've never met, who just happens to be connected to 30 of my friends in the media. It's clear that they don't know any of these anchors, reporters, editors or columnists — they are just grabbing as many "local celebrities" as they can. (While I am flattered to be a "local celebrity," I'm also a little insulted that I would have no value other than being another digit in someone's online Pokemon collection.) NOTE: If you just say "Hello," that makes a world of difference.

Maiden names are also an issue. When a friend from high school sends an invitation, with a picture of her kid and an unfamiliar surname in the profile, I can be lost. That's where the personal introduction can help, and lacking that, the Mutual Friends comparison for context.

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### Ghosts From My Past



About a year ago, I got a friend request from a woman named [Cindy Robertson](#). I didn't remember her, but she and I shared more than 30 friends, all of whom were movers and shakers in Birmingham. They were not all media people, so it wasn't the "Pokemon Syndrome." I went ahead and added her.

Over time, I noticed she was adding a lot of friends. I'd get notifications that she was friends with 20 more people, all here in Birmingham. Many were friends of mine.

A couple of times, I clicked on her name to see if I could figure out a little more about who she was. Oddly, she never added new links, or commented on other people's items.

I started to get paranoid, so I created a new Friend List called "UnTrust." People on my UnTrust list would get even less access than people who weren't even logged into Facebook. I locked her out of everything I could. Including the list of my friends.

Then I went back through her timeline. All the way back. And in months of activity, I found exactly FOUR times when she made a comment. It was always in response to something another person had placed on her wall, and it always included a little "(:)" at the end.

I wondered about who this is, and what he/she is up to.

### Project Sherlock



Click on any pic to enlarge

I spent some time cataloging what I could of this profile.

The more I saw, the dumber I felt for not seeing it earlier.

But before I outright accused someone of being a fraud, I wanted some other opinions. I reached out to six of my "common friends" with Cindy, and I picked six that I knew didn't know each other. I asked them if anyone knew her personally, or had met her. And I asked them to look at the profile with the same rigor. Nobody knew her.

I also told them about my UnTrust list, and I'm pretty sure they quickly created that privacy setting for themselves.

I then confronted "Cindy Robertson" through email, Facebook Chat and the Facebook Inbox. I got no answers, but was instead blocked from seeing her profile.

### The Evidence

Fortunately, I'd already compiled an archive of screen captures.

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Let's start with that status update:

**Cindy Robertson** is training for a series of marathons over the next 12 months dont know what i was thinking(Going to Atlanta tomorrow to have lunch with some old girlfriends and hopefully get to see the movie blind side! I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas and has a happy New Year!) see more...

Her profile does indicate that she likes to run. Look at her personal information. (Remember, these screen caps were taken several months ago, prior to Facebook changing all the rules about "Likes.")

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Activities: Running, Reading, Going out to eat, Shopping, Real Estate Investing, Modeling  
 Interests: Alabama Football, Motivational Seminars, Hipping Houses  
 Favorite Music: PussyCat Dolls, Leona Lewis, Kid Rock,  
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 Favorite Movies: Forest Gump, Steele Magnolias  
 Favorite Books: Anything by Zig Ziglar  
 About Me: People Person.Love Church Of Thre Highlands

I found it highly interesting at the time, as she listed "Alabama Football" as an interest, yet went through the entire period from the SEC Championship Game to Alabama's BCS National Championship without mentioning it at least once.

Let's look a little closer at her personal life, as reflected in the stream.

**Cindy Robertson** It is a gorgeous day!Headed to Atlanta for professional seminar:)  
 November 16, 2009 at 8:45am · Comment · Like

Suzie Barnes likes this.

Write a comment...

### RECENT ACTIVITY

- Cindy edited her Activities, TV Shows and Religious Views. · Comment · Like
- Cindy and Brian Scott Teasley are now friends. · Comment · Like
- Cindy and Marco Morosini are now friends. · Comment · Like
- 8 more similar stories

**Cindy Robertson** I am Decorating my new loft downtown!Headed to Target:)  
 November 14, 2009 at 1:52pm · Comment · Like · Share

**Jenny Holloway** Very Cute!  
 December 13, 2009 at 5:19pm

Write a comment...

### RECENT ACTIVITY

- Cindy edited her Work Info, Interests and Looking For. · Comment · Like
- Cindy is single. · Comment · Like
- Cindy added a new job as Sales at Texas Instruments. · Comment · Like
- Cindy added a new job at Texas Instruments. · Comment · Like

Shortly after joining Facebook, Cindy listed herself as single and mentioned her job working for Texas Instruments.

Then she started decorating her downtown Birmingham loft.

Please note the gratuitous use of the smiley-as-period-replacement. We'll see that again later, such as in this very rare update, indicating a rather masculine pursuit:

**Cindy Robertson** is freezing in deer stand with notta deer in the greenfield:)  
 December 12, 2009 at 3:05pm · Comment · Like

**Scott Gilliland** Make sure you slay until it is just about too dark to see.  
 December 12, 2009 at 4:24pm

**Chris Perry Hawkins** Girl, what were u thinking? :o)  
 December 12, 2009 at 5:45pm

**Jerry Spencer** cool  
 December 13, 2009 at 11:28pm

Write a comment...

Click here to send your feedback



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A female football fan who doesn't mention football, but goes hunting instead? There's really no evidence she was out much of anywhere, save for a couple of Facebook Events she clicked on. (Look at the descriptions of the parties below tell me if they're indicative of compatible interests then hold on to that thought, because we'll stitch it all together shortly.)



### Information

Relationship Status:  
In a Relationship

Birthday:  
April 9, 1980

Political Views:  
conservative

Religious Views:  
for god has not given us a spirit of fear but of power love & a sound mind:)

Website:  
<http://texasinstruments.com>  
<http://running.com>  
<http://cosmopolitan.com>

### Every Picture Tells a Fiction

Her photo albums were quite revealing.

We'll start with her good fortune in getting "In a Relationship" even though she's been hard at work for Texas Instruments, traveling to Atlanta for seminars, going to late night Mayhem with the Naked Eskimos Concerts, followed by another Friday night of Latin dancing.

Or maybe she met her beloved while not watching Alabama football, or while freezing her butt off in the deer stand.

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Do you think he sits at the end of her bearskin rug, massaging her feet while she reads him the Cosmo quiz?

No. She's got to take care of her kids. To the Albums!



That "Kids and Family:)" album shows some promise. What would we find in there?



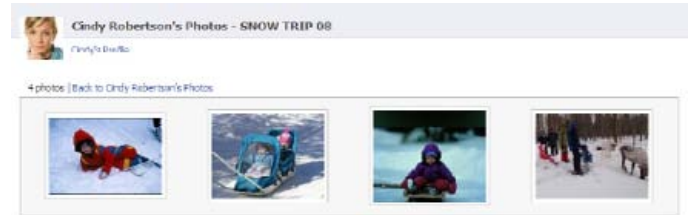
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Maybe she's making some side income on the residuals from her children's pictures.

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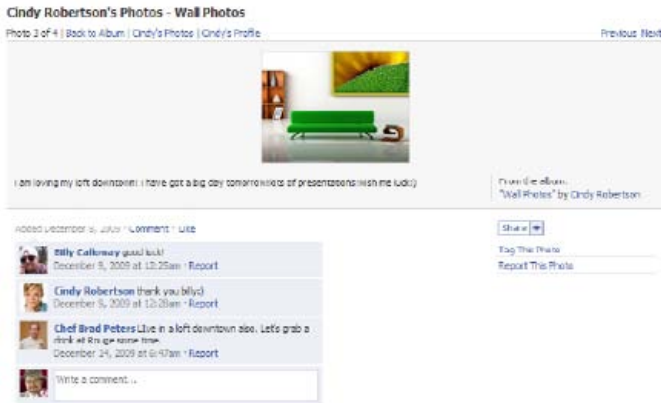
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Also, why all the pictures in the snow? I'll buy a trip to see grandma and grandpa up in Buffalo, but how come there's no indication in any of the pictures about where they were taken? (We didn't get THAT much snow in Birmingham.)

As an aggregate lie, these little lies add up to at least four children for this under-30 single mom who has time to hunt, date, go to parties and out of town on business. It's a good thing she's always on the go, too, because her digs are looking rather sparse.

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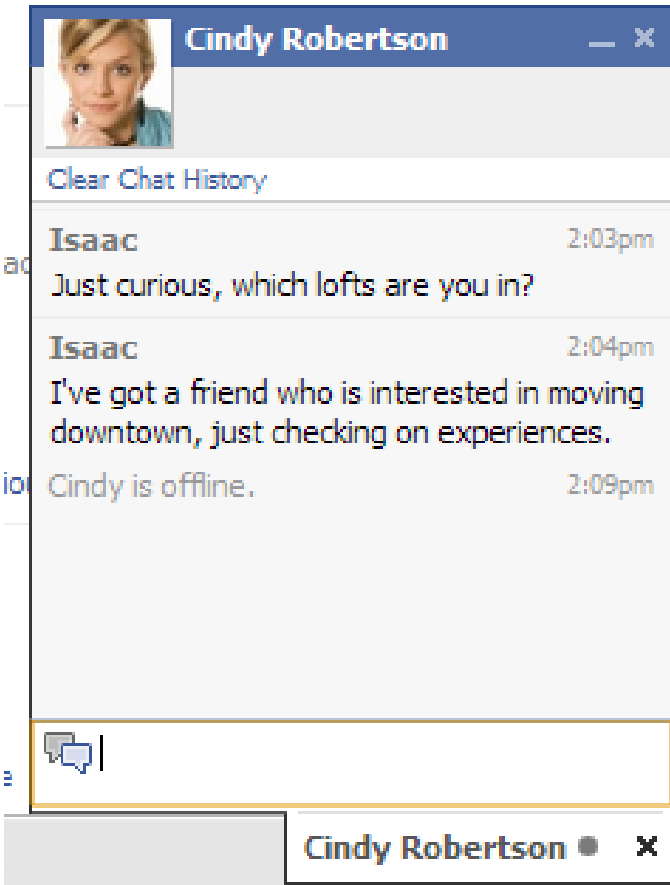
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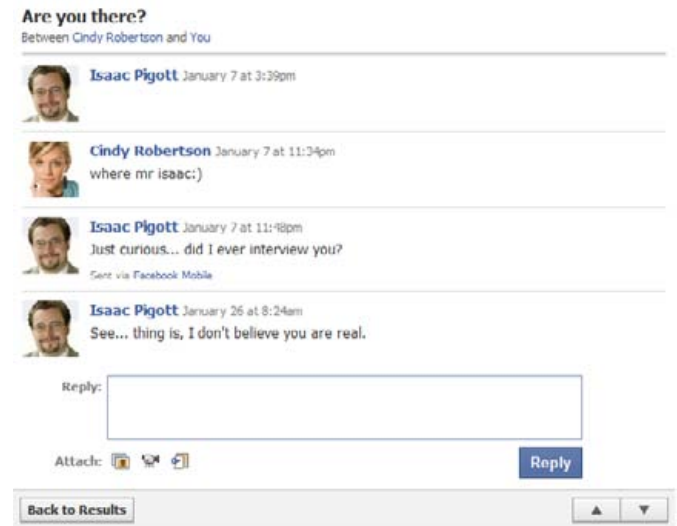
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in between things. I initiated a thread on January 7th, just before Alabama's national championship game. She answered late that night, but didn't respond to my follow-up. (Note she also didn't talk about the results of that game, anytime between January 8th and January 26th, at a time when many female Bama fans were so giddy, they wrote they'd gladly leave their husbands for Nick Saban.)



After several innocuous inquiries spread over several days with no response, I caught the little green dot that meant she was online and available on Facebook Chat.

I figured that she'd respond to a question about living in the lofts downtown. After all, she had been so kind as to share her home with us in pictures, and listed several hobbies and interests that would indicate she might know something.

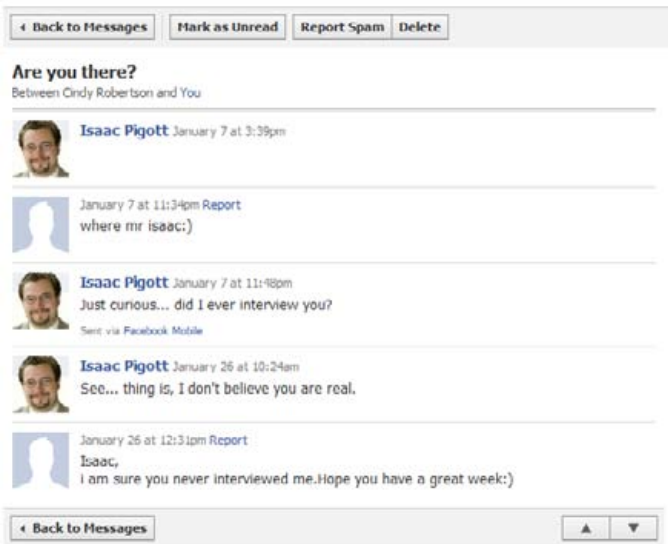
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As you can see, she bailed on the chat session without a response.

Finally, I resorted to Facebook's Inbox. Maybe if she's just too busy, I can catch her for a volley of messages

Notice the nice, thoughtful and pensive picture on her avatar. It's there in the morning. But a couple of hours later, she responds and then blocks me. (At the time, I was getting time-stamp discrepancies when posting with my mobile phone.)

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What is this perpetrator after? Information. Not identity theft stuff. Here's my theory. We're looking for a man in the Birmingham metro area who is involved in real estate. Look again at the interests to the right. We have both "Real Estate Investing" and "Flipping Houses" listed. One presumes the sort of money an under-30 single mother would likely NOT possess, the other is expressed in a very masculine way. Women tend to refurbish or restore homes. Men "flip" them.

I'm pretty sure she'd never been interviewed, either. Until now. And the last thing I saw was the smiley.

### The Game of Access

I'll never know for sure who is behind the fake Cindy Robertson account. But I have some educated guesses, based on the clues presented.

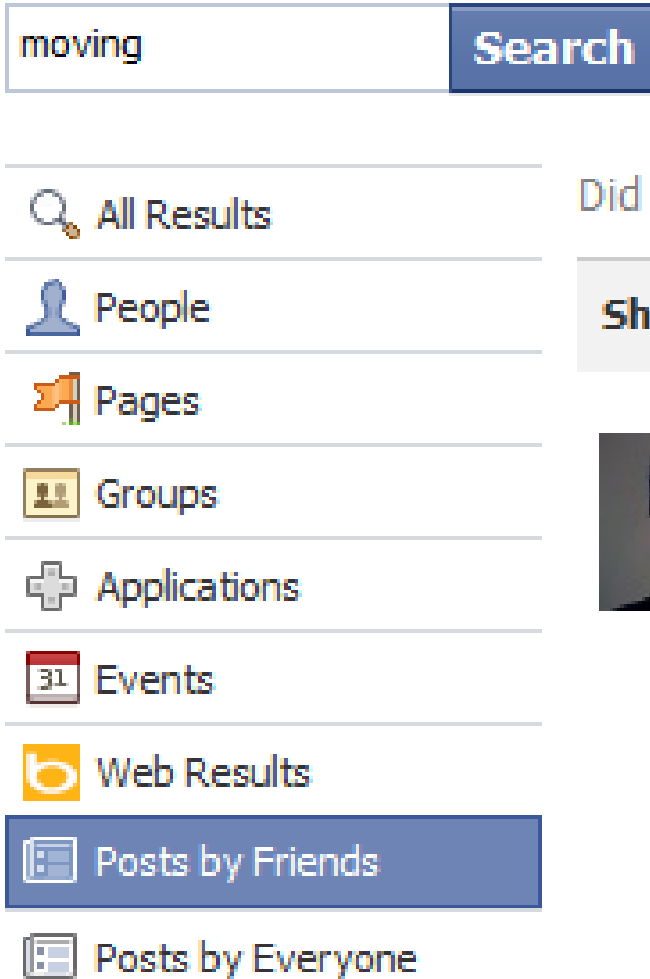
First, if you're going to do a bogus profile, it's got to be a woman. You can parlay that maiden-married name confusion into a lot of additional Friend Request acceptances from people who just aren't quite sure, or can't turn down a girl with a pretty face.

Second, it helps to leverage existing friends. Fake Cindy reeled me in, then went through my friend list to seek out others. **In doing so, he/she was trucking on my reputation to get others to accept.** I don't know how many people clicked "Yes" simply because my face was there along with other friends in common. (And if you're one of them, I'm sorry.)

Also not to sound terribly sexist here, but "Motivational Seminars" and "Anything by Zig Ziglar" are not in the XX-Chromosome camp. She/he might as well have included Rush under the Favorite Music. (Although, having been to see Rush recently, I'd bet the concert was less of a sausage-fest than a Zig Ziglar book signing.)

Add it all up, and the profile points to a male in his 40s or 50s, who works in real estate and can't spell either "Forrest Gump" or "Steel Magolias." He also thinks women should end all of their sentences with smiley faces:)

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You know that rich database of thousands of well-off, upwardly-mobile people in your target demographic and exact geographic location. That network you worked so hard to build.

Every day, you go in and you mine that network for keywords like “moving,” “yard too small,” “new job,” “relocation,” “real estate,” and God only knows what else works. When you find those people, you mail them a flier, or some other seemingly innocent contact that just by fate happens to land in their laps at the exact moment when they might actually want to find a competent real estate agent.

It’s brutal in its genius, as it is ruthless in its ethics.

So, you want to know why I stopped accepting each and every generic invitation on Facebook and LinkedIn? You want to know why I am a little suspect about “mutual openness” and “reciprocity” and the Kumbaya Chorus of Social Media? You want to know why I think Mark Zuckerberg is a child, playing around with incredibly powerful technologies while harboring ridiculous idealistic fantasies about Total Transparency and a post-Privacy culture?

I won’t answer those questions. Go ask Cindy.

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Why would he bother creating a fake profile and becoming friends with literally thousands of middle-to-upper income people in Birmingham?

Wait, did you really just ask that question?

Most people aren’t aware of Facebook’s quite robust search feature. You can search for people, pages, applications, and posts across all of Facebook.

Or, you can narrow your search results to the network of Friends you have built.

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many years on the air as a TV reporter, I'm fairly recognized in the area where I live.

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A female football fan who doesn't mention football, but goes hunting instead? There's really no evidence she was out much of anywhere, save for a couple of Facebook Events she clicked on. (Look at the descriptions of the parties below tell me if they're indicative of compatible interests then hold on to that thought, because we'll stitch it all together shortly.)



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Then she started decorating her downtown Birmingham loft.

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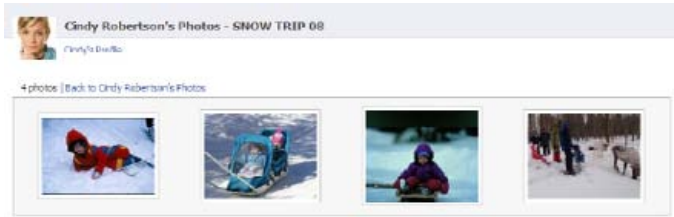


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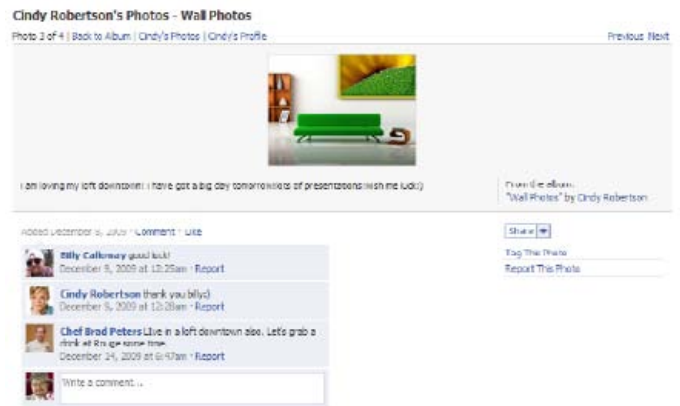
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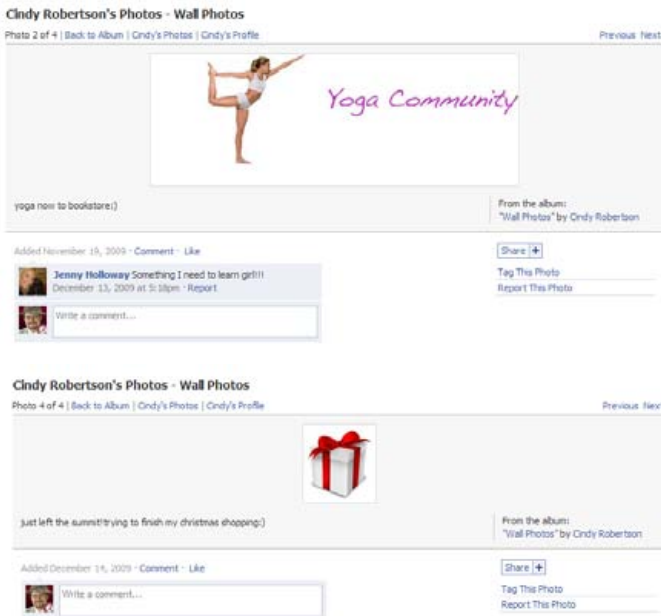
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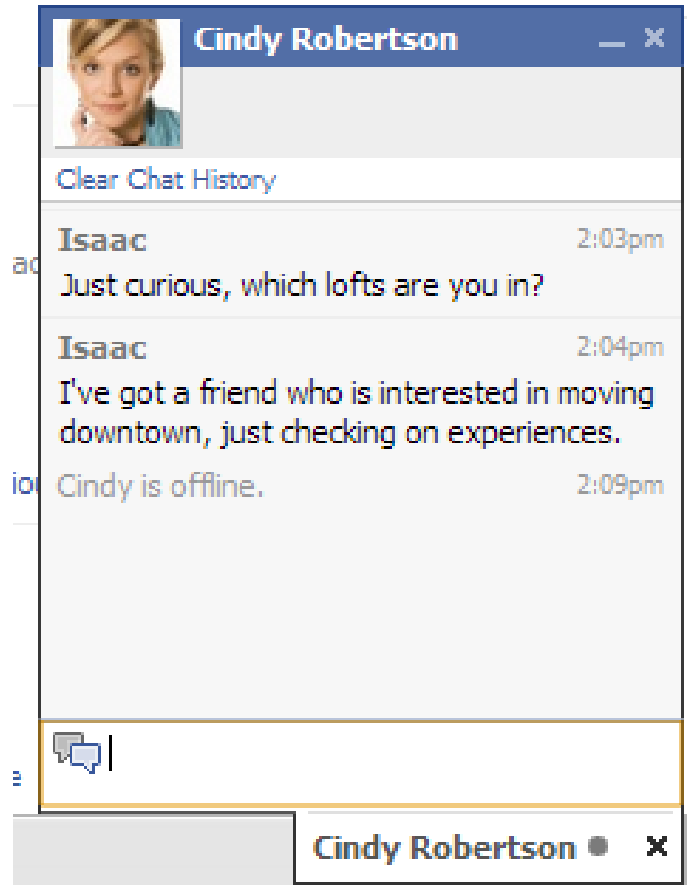
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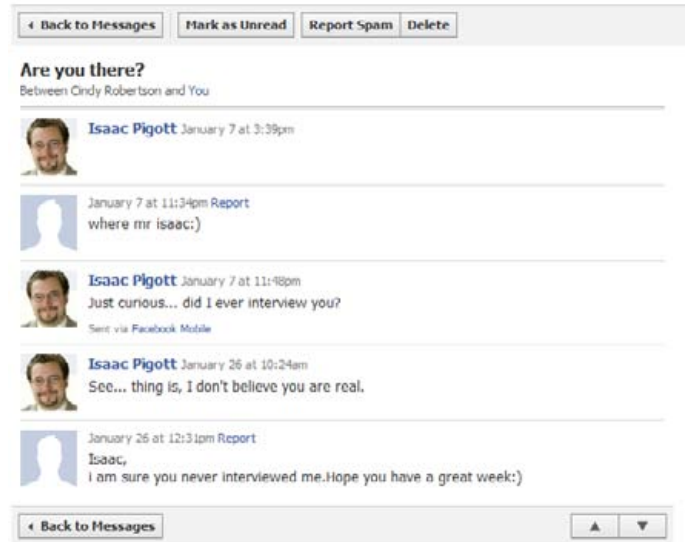
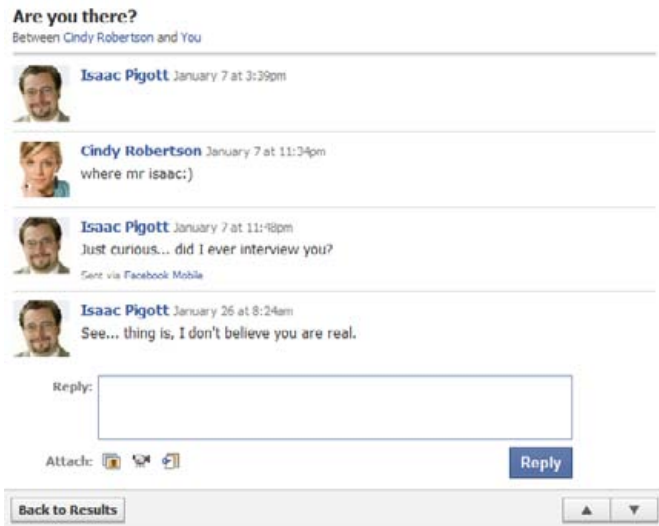
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Activities: Running, Reading, Going out to eat, Shopping, Real Estate Investing, Modeling  
 Interests: Alabama Football, Motivational Seminars, Flipping Houses  
 Favorite Music: PussyCat Dolls, Leona Lewis, Kid Rock,  
 Favorite TV Shows: Oprah, Ellen, Desperate Housewives, Sex in the City  
 Favorite Movies: Forrest Gump, Steele Magnolias  
 Favorite Books: Anything by Zig Ziglar  
 About Me: People Person, Love Church Of The Highlands

What is this perpetrator after? Information. Not identity theft stuff. Here's my theory. We're looking for a man in the Birmingham metro area who is involved in real estate. Look again at the interests to the right. We have both "Real Estate Investing" and "Flipping Houses" listed. One presumes the sort of money an under-30 single mother would likely NOT possess, the other is expressed in a very masculine way. Women tend to refurbish or restore homes. Men "flip" them.

Also not to sound terribly sexist here, but "Motivational Seminars" and "Anything by Zig Ziglar" are not in the XX-Chromosome camp. She/he might as well have included Rush under the Favorite Music. (Although, having been to see Rush recently, I'd bet the concert was less of a sausage-fest than a Zig Ziglar book signing.)

Add it all up, and the profile points to a male in his 40s or 50s, who works in real estate and can't spell either "Forrest Gump" or "Steel Magolias." He also thinks women should end all of their sentences with smiley faces:)

moving

All Results Did  


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 People Sh  


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 Pages  


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 Groups  


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 Applications  


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 Events  


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 Web Results

Why would he bother creating a fake profile and becoming friends with literally thousands of middle-to-upper income people in Birmingham?

Wait, did you really just ask that question?

Most people aren't aware of Facebook's quite robust search feature. You can search for people, pages, applications, and posts across all of Facebook.

Or, you can narrow your search results to the network of Friends you have built.

Click here to send your feedback



Printed with

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## Friending Strangers On Fakebook

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You know that rich database of thousands of well-off, upwardly-mobile people in your target demographic and exact geographic location. That network you worked so hard to build.

Every day, you go in and you mine that network for keywords like “moving,” “yard too small,” “new job,” “relocation,” “real estate,” and God only knows what else works. When you find those people, you mail them a flier, or some other seemingly innocent contact that just by fate happens to land in their laps at the exact moment when they might actually want to find a competent real estate agent.

It’s brutal in its genius, as it is ruthless in its ethics.

So, you want to know why I stopped accepting each and every generic invitation on Facebook and LinkedIn? You want to know why I am a little suspect about “mutual openness” and “reciprocity” and the Kumbaya Chorus of Social Media? You want to know why I think Mark Zuckerberg is a child, playing around with incredibly powerful technologies while harboring ridiculous idealistic fantasies about Total Transparency and a post-Privacy culture?

I won’t answer those questions. Go ask Cindy.