

## Facebook's New Design Brings Back User's Past

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Remember those karaoke videos from three years ago that somehow wound up on Facebook? They were embarrassing for the few hours they spent at the top of your Facebook profile, and then they were buried under a cascade of new updates.

But on Thursday, Facebook started rolling out a revamped profile design called Timeline that makes a user's entire history of photos, links and other things shared on Facebook much more accessible with a single click. This may be the first moment that many of Facebook's 800 million members realize just how many digital breadcrumbs they've been leaving on the site — and on the Web in general.

For better or worse, the new format is likely to bring back a lot of old memories. But going forward, it could also make it harder to shed past identities — something that people growing up with Facebook might struggle with as they transition from high school to college, and from there to the working world.

"There's no act too small to record on your permanent record," said Jonathan Zittrain, a law professor at Harvard who studies how the Internet affects society. "All of the mouse droppings that appear as we migrate around the Web will be saved."

The old Facebook profile page shows the most recent items a user has posted, along with things like photos of them posted by others. But Timeline creates a scrapbook-like montage, assembling photos, links and updates for each month and year since they signed up for Facebook.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and chief executive of Facebook, introduced Timeline in late September during the company's annual developer conference. He described it as a way to get a more comprehensive portrait of a Facebook user than by simply reading updates or looking at a profile picture.

Facebook said in a blog post on Thursday that users could either wait to get a notification about Timeline on their pages, or go to [facebook.com/about/timeline](https://www.facebook.com/about/timeline) to activate it immediately. Eventually all profiles will be switched to the new look.

Some tech-minded users have been able to access Timeline early using a workaround meant for developers. They say that while the design may be attractive, it is unnerving to realize just how much information they've been feeding into Facebook over the past few years.

"We've all been dropping status updates and photos into a void," said Ben Werdmuller, the chief technology officer at Latakoo, a video service. "We knew we were sharing this much, of course, but it's weird to realize they've been keeping this information and can serve it up for anyone to see."

Mr. Wermuller, who lives in Berkeley, Calif., said that the experience of browsing through his social history on Facebook was emotionally evocative — not unlike unearthing an old yearbook or shoebox filled with photographs and letters.

But while those items would probably only live on a dusty shelf in a closet, these boxes of memories are freely available online, for anyone with access to your Facebook page to view.

"It's unsettling to see the past presented as clearly as the present," he said. "It's your life in context, all in one place."

Analysts say Timeline is a significant evolutionary shift for Facebook. For starters, by linking Facebook more closely to memories, it could make it harder for people to abandon the service should a younger, sleeker social networking rival come along.

To Facebook's credit, the site does let people decide which items from their Timeline to hide. And once they choose to activate the new design, they have seven days to review what will be displayed on the page before making it public.

But Nicole Ellison, a professor of information studies at Michigan State University who researches how people interact online, said average Facebook users might not know how to edit their page or want to be bothered with it.

"I think for someone who has been on the site for all five of its years," she said, referring to when Facebook's membership expanded to the general public in 2006, "that's a big undertaking."

**Fonte: The New York Times, New York, 15 Dec. 2011, Internacional, online.**

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