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[Science & Space](#)

[April Holladay](#)

[Dan Vergano](#)

[This week in space](#)

Wireless Center

[Hotspot finder](#)

[Wi-Fi primer](#)

Columnists

[Columnists index](#)

[Andrew Kantor](#)

[Kevin Maney](#)

More Tech

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[Tech briefs](#)

[RSS feeds](#)

[Classifieds](#)

Marketplace

[Arcade](#)

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[Shopping](#)

[Special Offer](#)

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Teens hang out at MySpace

By Janet Kornblum, USA TODAY

Shanda Edstrom can't stop herself. Every day — pretty much no matter where she is — she's just gotta go to MySpace.



Teens post their pictures and profiles on their MySpace pages, and play music, just like in real life.

www.myspace.com

Her friends are there. Her former high school classmates hang out there. Heck, these days it seems like every teen and twentysomething in the USA is there.

"I'm on it every day for like two hours at a minimum," says Edstrom, 18, of Clackamas, Ore., who works at a Kinko's in Portland. "It's just crazy."

Forget the mall. Forget the movies. Forget school. Forget even AOL. If you're a teen in America today, the place to be is the social networking site MySpace, which has virtually exploded in the past few months. (**Related item:** [Adults question MySpace's safety](#))

Google just named it the top gainer for 2005, and, in only two years, MySpace has shot from zero to 47.3 million members, say founders Chris DeWolfe, 39, and Tom Anderson, 29. They launched MySpace in January 2004. In July Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. bought MySpace for \$580 million, but DeWolfe and Anderson still are CEO and president.

"This site caught us by surprise," says Pete Blackshaw of market researcher Intelliseek. "I honestly was flabbergasted by the numbers."

For those who didn't grow up with the Internet, it might seem strange to think of a mere website as an actual place. But for people like Edstrom and Michael Edwards, a high school senior from San Diego who can't remember when there was no Internet, cyberspace is a real place, even if the entry gates come in the form of a PC.

And at least these days, one's MySpace page is not just a home in that place, it's actually who they are online.



By Bob Riha, Jr., USA TODAY
Michael Edwards and Joyce Pace, high school seniors from San Diego,

"Your page is like your personality," Edwards, 17, says.

Judging from his, Edwards is a hip guy who is as much into music as he is into his family. (Two of his 10 pictures are family shots.) He likes open-minded and cool people but not nerds and liars. And he really likes Hilary Duff: He plays a song *Ode to Hilary Duff* on his page.

What do people do on MySpace?

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- [An ode to MySpace to the tune of the Black Eyed Peas' My Humps](#)

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recorded an ode to MySpace to the tune of the Black Eyed Peas' *My Humps*.

They redecorate their pages, adding new pictures (often sexy). They spruce up their surroundings with new colors, backgrounds and images. Serious MySpace users brag about knowing a thing or two

about HTML coding. They write poetry and put up their own art. They write about themselves.

They play music for friends and post music videos. Some are from well-known artists. Many are from virtual unknowns.

MySpace is fast becoming an avenue for musicians to reach out directly to fans and become stars.

Wired magazine recently featured the band Hawthorne Heights, which became a success after signing up with MySpace. And MySpace recently started its own record label with Hollywood Undead, a rap band that launched on MySpace in June and now has developed a MySpace following of 111,000 "friends" — people who have joined their network.

Edwards is so into MySpace that he and fellow high school senior Joyce Pace, 18, recorded an ode to MySpace — rewritten lyrics to the Black Eyed Peas' song *My Humps*— and posted it on the site.

How online hangouts stack up

In the past year, the number of visitors to MySpace (from homes, workplaces and colleges) has skyrocketed, making it the Web's top social networking site:

MySpace.com
Nov. 2004: 4.9 million
Nov. 2005: 26.7 million

Facebook.com
Nov. 2004: N/A
Nov. 2005: 11.1 million

Xanga.com
Nov. 2004: 5.8 million
Nov. 2005: 7.9 million

Bebo.com
Nov. 2004: N/A
Nov. 2005: 1.5 million

Friendster.com
Nov. 2004: 966,000
Nov. 2005: 1.5 million

Tribe Networks Inc.
Nov. 2004: 62,000
Nov. 2005: 515,000

LinkedIn.com
Nov. 2004: 123,000
Nov. 2005: 354,188

Orkut.com
Nov. 2004: N/A
Nov. 2005: 83,000

Source: comScore Media Metrix, a division of comScore Networks, Inc.

"Whatchu gonna do with all them friends, all them friends that's on your page," the song begins. "I'm m-m-m-m-make them comment, make them comment on MySpace, MySpace ... OMG (*Oh My God*) its MySpace, MySpace."

Then there's the purely social part of it: Instead of the antiquated teen ritual of talking on the phone for hours, MySpace members spend hour upon hour sending each other instant messages and short messages called bulletins.

But mostly what they do is cruise, big time, wandering from page to page in a tangled network that allows people to create links to one another's pages by naming each other a "friend."

The process of finding new friends — often complete strangers — is called "friending." And for many teens, it's the glue that makes them stick with MySpace.

"Teens are narcissistic and exhibitionist," says Anastasia Goodstein, who publishes online news and commentary site Ypulse, about Generation Y. "For teens, especially, who are going through this stage where they're constantly looking for that affirmation and validation and response for everything they are, it's just addictive."

Right place at the right time

MySpace users are often measured by the status of their friends, in the same way high school students are judged by whom they hang out with in the halls.

MySpace, says James Katz, a professor of communications at Rutgers University, "is the kind of place that in earlier generations, kids dreamed about — where they could go and be with their friends, meet new people with similar tastes and find out what's cool, what's hot and what's not."

Of course, MySpace isn't the only place for teens to hang out online. Other sites, such as the social site Facebook, aimed at college students, and blogging sites LiveJournal and Xanga, also are popular.

But thanks to its easy-to-use tools, and being at the right place at the right time, MySpace is by far the most popular, says Peter Klaus, a marketing strategist with

Fleishman-Hillard.

Web measurement company comScore Media Metrix ranked MySpace the 18th-most-visited site on the Web for November. When measured by the number of pages viewed, MySpace came in fourth, ahead of eBay and Google.

Supported through ads, MySpace is free to users, who are mostly ages 14 to 34. Membership is growing by 5 million a month, according to MySpace's numbers.

In addition to the record label, MySpace is expanding offline with local event planning — including large-scale concerts and festivals — and plans to bring MySpace to mobile devices and satellite radio.

Numbers aside, for hard evidence of MySpace's popularity, walk in on any teen using a PC with unrestricted Internet access and you're likely to see the chaotic world of MySpace splashed across the screen. Or turn on a popular radio station and hear the disc jockeys talk about MySpace.

It's now replacing the ritual of giving out phone numbers or even e-mail addresses.

"MySpace has gotten to the point where instead of 'What is your phone number?' it's like 'What is your MySpace profile?' " says Edwards. "Like every single person has one. It's like 'Oh, what's your MySpace page?' " "

Too popular?

Pace, Edwards' song partner, says she remembers when only the hippest were on MySpace.

"Now that it's gone all mainstream, it's kind of weird," she says. "A lot of people get profiles because they feel obligated to have one. Like 'Everybody in my class has a MySpace, so I should get one, too.' " But having a MySpace profile is still OK, even if it has caught on, she says.

"It's cool in a sense, because it does help you stay connected with people who you don't really talk to, especially if they live far away."

Edstrom, who also models on the side and posts provocative pictures of herself, says MySpace has totally changed her social life.

"I go to parties and a lot of people recognize me from MySpace," she says. "Which is weird. 'Hey, you're MySpace girl.' I've gotten a lot more friends from it.

"I wasn't the popular girl in high school. And now it's like when I see those people, they know me because they know me from my MySpace. They're more inclined to talk to me than they would be just seeing me on the street."

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