

News Release  
EMBARGO – 10:00am EDT, May 30, 2008  
Ottawa, ON

## **CIPPIC files privacy complaint against Facebook**

The Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC), based at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law, has asked the Privacy Commissioner of Canada to investigate alleged violations of Canadian privacy law by the popular social networking site, Facebook.

CIPPIC's 35-page complaint alleges 22 separate violations by Facebook, including its failure to inform Facebook members of how their personal information is disclosed to third parties for advertising and other profit-making activities and its failure to obtain permission from Facebook members to such uses and disclosures of their personal information.

A team of law students, some of whom are dedicated Facebook users, analysed the company's policies and practices as part of a clinic course this past winter and identified specific practices that appear to violate the Canadian *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* ("PIPEDA").

"Social networking online is growing phenomenon," said Clinic Director Philippa Lawson. "It is proving to be a tremendous tool for community-building and social change, but at the same time, a minefield of privacy invasion. We chose to focus on Facebook because it is the most popular social networking site in Canada and because it appeals to young teens who may not appreciate the risks involved in exposing their personal details online."

Facebook has more than seven million Canadian members, with more joining every day. This makes Canada the third largest user base, after the U.S.A. and the U.K.

"Facebook purports to provide users with a high level of control over their data," said Harley Finkelstein, one of the law students who lodged the complaint. "But our investigation found that this is not entirely true – for example, even if you select the strongest privacy settings, your information may be shared more widely if your Facebook Friends have lower privacy settings. As well, if you add a third party application offered on Facebook, you have no choice but to let the application developer access all your information even if they don't need it".

Jordan Plener, another law student who worked on the complaint, noted that "although Facebook has taken steps to allow for more control over sharing one's information on the site, its default settings are for sharing in most cases. Changing those settings requires a high level of aptitude and experience with the site. We believe that many Facebook Users, especially young people, don't appreciate the extent to which their often sensitive personal information is being shared beyond their social circle."

"We're concerned that Facebook is deceiving its users," said Lisa Feinberg, another law student behind the Complaint. "Facebook promotes itself as a social utility, but it's also involved in

commercial activities like targeted advertising. Facebook users need to know that when they're signing up to Facebook, they're signing up to share their information with advertisers.”

Under PIPEDA, the Privacy Commissioner has up to a year to investigate and render her findings on the complaint.

- 30 -

For a copy of the complaint and more information, see [www.cippic.ca](http://www.cippic.ca) under “CIPPIC News” and “Projects – Privacy – PIPEDA complaints”.

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