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What Is That Again?

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Families are discovering that adult supervision and involvement is vital to living safely with advancing communication technology. Children and adolescents are probably well-acquainted with most of the following information. Are you?

Avatar: A computer user's representation of themselves or their alter ego. For example, computer game users create their own avatar as they role play in the imaginary game world.

Blog: A type of Web site where a person posts regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, personal diaries or material such as graphics or video. "Blog" can be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

Facebook: A free-access social networking Web site. Networks are organized by city, workplace, school and region to connect and interact with others. People can add friends, send them messages and update their personal profiles regularly. Modeled after the paper facebooks that colleges and universities use to acquaint students, it has crossed over into the business world. So much so that it's banned at many workplaces to discourage employees from wasting time.

IMVU: A new way to hang out and have fun with friends online. Like text-based messages, you download IMVU's software onto a PC and create avatars who chat in animated 3D scenes. New users are encouraged to be the person you want to be and to create your own virtual reality.

MPEG: A collection of methods that compress audio and visual digital data. Introduced in late 1998, it is now in the fourth generation (MPEG-4). It delivers audio and video streams over a wide range of bandwidths, from cell phones to broadband and beyond.

MySpace: An online social networking service developed before the similar Facebook. Some users describe MySpace as more for kids and teens, with more advertising, music and movie information.

Nutuber: A nutuber spends so much time browsing

YouTube.com videos that they take root, so to speak. A nutuber is the couch potato of the new millennium.

Podcast: A series of either digital audio or video media files that can be downloaded via the Web. You don't need an iPod to use podcasts. The term comes from "personal on demand broadcast" and came into use in 2004.

Skype: A software application that allows people to make and receive telephone calls over the Internet, often for free. It can include instant messaging, file transfers and video conferencing, and is available in many countries.

YouTube: A video sharing Web site on which users can upload and share videos they've created or copied from others.

Twitter: A free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read others' updates known as "tweets" via the Twitter Web site. Short messages are conversational and informal. Senders can limit delivery to their circle of friends or, by default, allow anybody to access them.

Wikipedia.com: A grass-roots generated Web encyclopedia that is gaining acceptance as possibly the most current and accurate source. Look up more information on cyberzines, ezines, hangtags, hyperzines, neologisms, podcatchers, streaming, webinars and *Zimbio*.

Consider using this information to engage in important conversations about some of the safety and spiritual implications of such easy access to information, connecting with individuals who are not known by us, the moral and ethical issues in a virtual reality, as well as some of the positive aspects of new communications technology.

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.