How to Effectively Search MySpace.com:
# A Guide for Investigators

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Social networking Web sites have experienced exponential growth in recent years, with some of these sites containing upwards of 195 million profiles. Teenagers post pictures and blogs, graduates reunite with classmates, bands post their new music – the possibilities are endless.

With this much activity and information tied to one particular Web site, some user profiles are bound to contain information critical to a law enforcement investigations or evidence of criminal activity. Social networking sites like MySpace.com potentially contain evidence of sexual solicitation, stalking, fraud, gang activity, and more. The trick is to learn how to effectively search these millions of profiles in order to find what you are really looking for and harness this information for your investigation.

MySpace.com is the most popular social networking Web site in the United States. Because of its popularity, it is often the best place to start when you are specifically searching for information on a social networking Web site. However, it can be difficult to find what you are looking for on these sites because users can establish profiles using nicknames or other identities, or can otherwise choose to keep their information anonymous. This anonymity can be achieved through the use of a private profile or by using false information when signing up for an account.
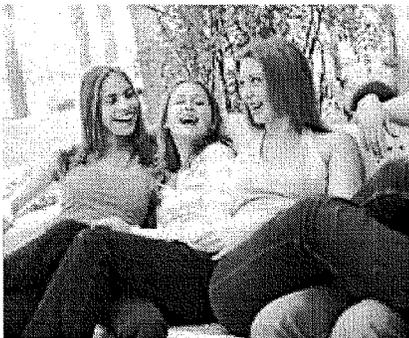
MySpace Search Features

MySpace makes searching for people easy. Simply click on Search on the menu bar (Figure 1), and if you know the person's full name, display name, or email address, you can search using any of these options on MySpace's "Find a Friend" search (Figure 2). However keep these caveats in mind:

*   As a privacy option within the site, members can select to not allow people to find them using a MySpace search of their name.
*   There is no verification that any of the information members record in their profiles must be correct.
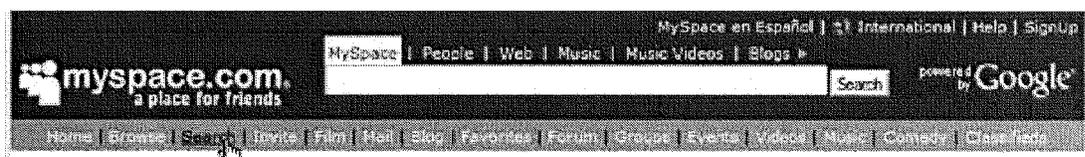

Figure 1: MySpace search feature

Find Someone You Know

Find a Friend

Select search by: ⦿ Name ○ Display Name ○ Email

[   ] [Find]

Example: Tom Jones or Tom or tjones@hotmail.com

Figure 2: MySpace "Find a Friend" search using name, display name, or email address

The general search engine provided by MySpace (Figure 3) is not particularly useful to investigators who try to find a particular profile based on a keyword. The results of the MySpace search engine are sorted by *popularity*, not subject relevancy like other search engines. Therefore, the first result will not be the profile that is the most relevant result based on the search terms, but rather the profile with the most "hits" that has one of the search terms in it. A hit is defined as a view of a particular profile. It is most likely that profiles with the most hits will be a popular band or singer or other famous person.

MySpace | People | Web | Music | Music Videos | Blogs | Video | Events ▶

[   ] [Search] powered by Google
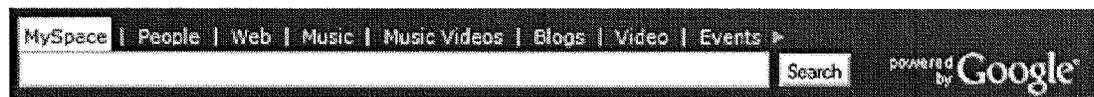
Figure 3: The general MySpace search engine

Other Search Engines

To combat this problem, other search engines have been designed specifically to search MySpace. The most popular of these search engines is IceRocket.com (Figure 4). While IceRocket sorts the hits by relevancy rather than popularity, it is still not the best way to search MySpace for specific information. This is because, as of this time, you cannot pick which section of a MySpace profile you want the search terms to be included in (for example, blogs). You can, however, search for specific phrases and include or exclude certain words.

EVERY SEARCH IS A DIRECT HIT

ICEROCKET.com

Blogs Web MySpace News Images

[   ] Preferences
                                 Search History

☐ Exact Phrase [Search MySpace]
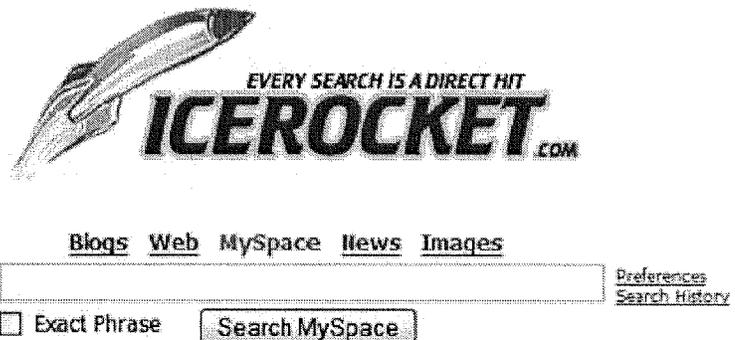
The quick and easy way to find anyone or anything on MySpace!

Figure 4: Search engine at www.IceRocket.com

The best way to comb MySpace for relevant information for an investigation is to use Google.com with Boolean and advanced operators (Figure 5). You can search all of MySpace, only blogs on MySpace, or only profiles on MySpace. You can search for particular phrases, include or exclude specific words, and more. See Table 1 for methods you can employ to search MySpace.com using Google.
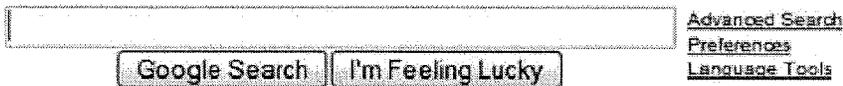

Figure 5: Search engine at www.Google.com

Using Google to search MySpace using Boolean operators	
To search for a specific phrase, use	" " (quotation marks)
To include a specific word, use	+ (a plus sign)
To exclude a specific word, use	- (a minus sign or hyphen)
Using Google to search MySpace using advanced operators	
To search MySpace.com, use	*site:* The protocol to use this advanced operator is to enter your search terms (possibly narrowed down using Boolean operators), then a space, then **site:** followed by the site you wish to search (be sure there is no space between **site:** and the site you wish to search). You can pick which section of MySpace you want to search, as shown in the last two rows below.
» To search all of MySpace, use	*site:myspace.com* This will search profiles, blogs, friends' names, comments, and more.
» To search *only* the profiles in MySpace, use	*site:profile.myspace.com*
» To search *only* the blogs in MySpace, use	*site:blog.myspace.com*

Table 1: MySpace search methods on Google.com

For example, the search *skinbyrd +sacramento site:myspace.com* provides the results shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Results of a MySpace search using Google

Sifting the Search Results
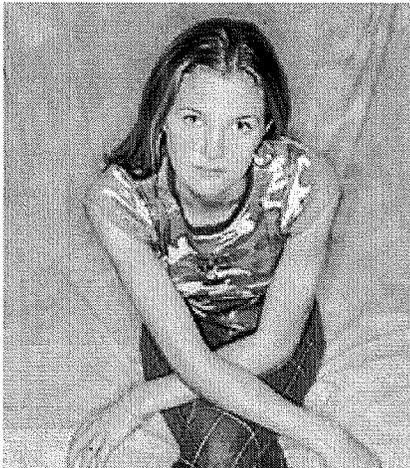
When you click on a link from Google, it takes you to the active page for that Web site. However, when Google searches for the search term, it is searching *cached* versions of Web sites from its spiders. Therefore, the search term you are looking for may not be on the current version on the Web site. It may have been in an old or deleted comment or a past version of a person's profile. If you look through the current MySpace site and do not find the search term you are looking for, return to your Google search results. To search the cached version (the version with the search term included), click the **Cached** link from the Google search results. Auto-archive sites, like **www.archive.org**, do not capture previous versions of MySpace pages. Google cache is your best bet of finding an old version of a MySpace page. Remember that you can use the "Find" keystroke (CTRL + F) to search the page for the term you are looking for.

If a MySpace profile is set to "Private," the only way to view that profile is to be added as that person's friend. To do that, you have to request to be their friend and then you will have access to view their profile. There used to be several backdoor hacks to get into a profile, but MySpace is very vigilant at finding these backdoors and closing them down.

NOTE: Without a search warrant or subpoena, MySpace will not give law enforcement access to view private profiles.

In conclusion, MySpace is a powerful tool investigators can use to assist them in investigations of criminal activity. The best way to use MySpace as a tool in your investigations is to learn how to search it most effectively.