

Association of Fraternity Advisors
Essentials

A Review of Webshots.com
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As technology changes, so do our students. Gone are the days of photo albums and photo-marts. Today's student can simply take a digital photo and download it straight to a photo printer or hard drive. Even better, we have the ability to upload our photos onto a website, such as Webshots.com, and share them freely with friends and family. Webshots.com allows users to create a personal account and profile that can be personalized in a number of ways, including creating digital photo albums that are sorted by date and event. Users can update these albums as often as they like. They can also copy the albums and folders that others have taken into their own albums.

According to their web site, Webshots.com provides consumers with a variety of ways to enjoy photos: on their computer desktops as wallpaper and screensavers, on their wireless phones, and in their own homes and offices as prints (About Webshots, n.d.). Webshots.com also offers a number of ways for friends and family members to share photos with one another, such as photo messages, online photo albums, and custom prints and gifts. Through its offering of free homepages and *Favorite Members Network*, consumers can connect with friends, family members and millions of others worldwide.

With millions of Webshots.com members and a collection over 218 million photos, Webshots.com is the world's largest photo sharing network. Free membership allows members to download any Webshots.com photo to their computer and also upload and share their own photos. Premium features, such as high-resolution downloads, additional image storage and advertisement-free browsing on Webshots.com, are available with the Webshots Premium service (About Webshots, n.d.).

Webshots' personal profile and account, *My Photos*, allows members to upload photos to personal albums using their Webshots Desktop - or, if they prefer, through an easy web interface - so they can show off their new baby, highlight a recent vacation, or commemorate a special event. Once photos are uploaded, members can send individual photo messages (much like text messages on a mobile telephone) or invitations to view their entire album collection. They can also choose to list their albums publicly in the *Webshots Community Directory* and *Photo Search*. Within the user's personal profile and account, *My Photos*, members can note how many people are viewing their photos by tracking the download and view statistics of those photos. They can also order prints, photo frames, and a variety of customized gifts such as t-shirts, mugs, and mouse pads. Of the more than 218 million member photos available on Webshots.com, an average of over 750,000 new images are uploaded each day. Over 10 billion Webshots.com *Gallery Photos* have been downloaded to date and over 1.5 million Webshots.com *Gallery Photos* are downloaded daily (About Webshots, n.d.).

Webshots.com is a very popular web site, especially among college students. Many users utilize this free site to post photographs of events they attend, their friends, and their parties. It is also a

popular website for fraternity and sorority members to post photographs of their latest events including philanthropic events, mixers, and date parties. Unfortunately, some of these events and photos do not portray the individuals or the fraternal community in a positive light.

A simple search by the author on Webshots.com on December 20, 2005 reveals staggering numbers of photographs depicting college students and fraternity and sorority life. By simply typing in one keyword, thousands of photographs were identified in the public forums.

For example: College = 2,672,018 photos
University = 766,917 photos
Kappa = 265,046 photos
Alpha = 317,670 photos
Frat = 97,060 photos
Fraternity = 30,715 photos
Sorority = 86,427 photos
Hazing or Haze = 19,275 photos

Some other startling examples include:

Drunk = 1,496,253
Pre-Game = 172,309
Stoned = 253,558
Mixer = 175,699
Party = 11,670,160
Date party = 174,468

While most of these photographs are not directly related to fraternity and sorority activities, many can be traced back to certain chapters or chapter members. Students are increasingly posting links to their Webshots.com albums, on their personal Facebook.com or Myspace.com sites. Many students also post links to their sites on their instant messenger profiles.

Webshots.com is not alone in the digital photography world. Many other sites are also frequently used by students: flickr.com, photobucket.com, shutterfly.com, and smugmug.com are just a few examples. Students can also use a Yahoo.com or similar sites to post photographs.

With all of these public forums depicting scenes of college and fraternity and sorority life, comes a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the student that many do not yet understand. Shippensburg University, for one, has experienced this first hand in their fraternity and sorority community. In their case, photographs that were posted on Webshots.com led to the discovery of serious hazing violations. Similar circumstances have arisen across the nation for other fraternity/sorority communities as well as non-fraternal organizations. One varsity men's lacrosse team was found to have allegations of hazing as well when photos found on Webshots.com were sent to local papers and news stations.

Many students believe that these photographs are protected material and not available to the general public. They believe that posts on other sites such as Facebook.com and Myspace.com are not public, but they are. Eugene Volokh, a professor at the University of California Los

Angeles, states, “from a legal standpoint, students have no right to protest disciplinary action taken over information they voluntarily put on a web site accessible to other people...If you choose to make something public, you can't turn around and say you have privacy rights” (Morgan, 2005). There will be many teachable moments in the near future as students learn and understand how what they post on the internet can affect their organizations, careers, friends, and others.

References

About Webshots. (n.d). Retrieved on December 20, 2005 from
<http://www.webshots.com/corporate/index.cgi>

Morgan, L. (2005, October 5). *Facebook profiles under scrutiny at UCSB: School officials' announcement raises issues at UCLA's campus*. Daily Bruin. Retrieved on December 20, 2005 at <http://www.dailybruin.ucla.edu/news/articles.asp?id=34334>