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Facebook Places: How it works, and how to turn it off

Facebook Places lets users announce where they are and who they're hanging out with – whether real or made-up.

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In other words, “If I tag my friend at a bar (before they get there) and say 'Come join me!,' the story will show them at The Bar, not where they actually are,” explains Ms. Chin.

Facebook can share your check-in info with third-party apps, but only if you agree to let the website do so.

For now, the service is exclusive to the US and only accessible through the Facebook iPhone app or on the mobile version of the site, touch.facebook.com. But Facebook Places will start to expand soon. (To access the mobile site, your browser must support HTML 5 and geolocation.)

How to turn it off

For some the new feature boasts an array of potential uses. For others, however, Places may have too much of a stalking-on-the-go feel.

So, for those who want to limit what they share, here’s how:

1. Log-in to your Facebook account.
2. In the top right-hand corner it should say “Account.” Click on that drop-down menu and select “Privacy Settings.”
3. In the middle of this “Choose Your Privacy Settings” page, there's a little pencil symbol next to “Customize settings.” Click that link.

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4. Here, you'll find all the settings. The first is “Places I check in.” To the right of that, there is a drop down menu with four choices on who may see your location updates. If you don’t want anyone to be able to see where you check in, or if you’d like to specifically pick friends that can or cannot see your check-ins, select “Customize.” A pop-up menu will appear allowing you to customize the privacy settings. Included is an option for “Only Me,” which essentially shuts off the check-in feature. (Note: Turning this off does not keep friends from tagging you using Facebook Places. To do that, see step five.)
5. Below that setting is “Include me in ‘People Here Now’ after I check in.” Uncheck "Enable" to turn off the feature. When this feature is enabled, you will be visible to friends and other Facebook users who are checked in to the same place you are checked in to. Finally, you can "Disable" the feature called “Friends can check me in to Places.” Note: Even if you remove the option for friends to check you in, they can still tag you. (Note: Though it does not explicitly state that disabling this turns off tagging, according to Chin, it does.)
6. Almost there. Once you’ve adjusted all the settings according to your preferences, click the gray “Back to Privacy” button on the top left of the page.
7. Once you've returned to the “Choose Your Privacy Settings” page, look in the lower-left under “Applications and Websites” for “Edit your settings.”
8. On this page, click the “Edit Settings” button next to “Info accessible through your friends.” This setting allows users “to control which of your information is available to applications, games and websites when your friends use them.” In the lower right, you can check the box next to “Places I’ve Visited” to allow that information about you to be shared with third-party apps, games and websites that your might friends use. If the box is left unchecked, that information will not be shared.

[Editor's note: This article has been updated from its original form.]

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