

## **Report: Facebook nears privacy settlement with FTC**

The Associated Press

Facebook is nearing a settlement with federal regulators that would require the world's most popular online hangout to obtain approval from its users before making changes that expose their profiles and activities to a wider audience, according to a report published Thursday.

Citing people familiar with the situation that it did not name, The Wall Street Journal said Facebook has agreed to make the changes to resolve a nearly 2-year-old investigation by the Federal Trade Commission.

Both Facebook and the FTC declined to comment to The Associated Press.

If the settlement is approved by FTC's commissioners, it would require Facebook to get explicit consent from its 800 million users before changing its privacy settings, according to the Journal.

Seeking a user's prior consent is known as an "opt in." Facebook sometimes makes changes that it believes will improve its social network and then leaves it to users to reset the things that they don't like — a process known as "opting out." Companies introducing a feature or service generally prefer an "opt out" system because fewer people take the steps required to get out of the changes.

The FTC opened its probe into Facebook after the website made changes that automatically showed users' names, pictures, hometowns and other personal information available for anyone on the Web to see. That upset people who had deliberately programmed their privacy settings to confine that information to a specific group of friends or family.

As part of its proposed settlement, Facebook would also submit to government reviews of its privacy practices for 20 years, according to the Journal.

The audits are similar to the scrutiny that Internet search leader Google Inc. agreed to undergo earlier this year. That agreement settled an FTC investigation into Google's handling of people's personal information in February 2010 when it launched a service called Buzz to counter Facebook. Buzz exposed the email contacts of unwitting users, a breach that the FTC considered to be a deceptive practice.

Google is now in the process of closing Buzz to focus on another social network called Plus that debuted in June.

In an interview with Charlie Rose shown earlier this week, Facebook CEO Mark

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Zuckerberg said he believes the website's changes over the past year have given users greater control over their privacy.

"I think we're going to need to keep on making it easier and easier, but that's our mission, right?" Zuckerberg told Rose. "I mean, we have to do that because now, if people feel like they don't have control over how they're sharing things, then we're failing them."

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