

The Lights Are On, But Nobody's Home

January 2010



ON CYBER PATROL



Your family's whereabouts are a military secret. Well, not really. However, treating them like they are can help keep you and your loved ones safe from the people who are constantly searching the internet looking for information that would allow them to take advantage of an empty house.

Military personnel are drilled on the need for operational security (OPSEC) and keep information about unit strength, deployments and missions to themselves. Unfortunately, the popularity of social networking often outweighs OPSEC concerns in our private lives. Personal travel information that can be exploited by bad guys can now be found with very little effort.

Look how much information is in this simple social network posting. "The family is head off to Florida tomorrow. Looking forward to a solid week of R&R. Our neighbors, Jim and Lucy, are joining us. Found a kennel for Sparky. Thanks again, Fred for agreeing to drop by on Wednesday to check on things. See ya Sunday!"

If I'm a bad guy who knows where you live, I'm going to be backing a truck up to your house on Thursday knowing I don't have to worry about you, Sparky, Fred or the neighbors. I might as well pay Jim and Lucy's house a visit as well.

It's one thing to mention your travel plans to a few close friends or office mates. It's entirely another thing to post it on the internet. Doing that is the same as putting a notice on the grocery store bulletin board or taking out an ad in the local paper. If only one bad guy picks up on the free intel, your personal property is suddenly at risk. The bad guy is probably annoyed that the information is so public, because he knows he's going to have plenty of competition in the race to steal your new HD flat screen TV

Here are a few social networking tips for talking about travel and vacations:

- Talk about vacations after they happen. Share pictures and stories after you have returned.
- Don't post details like flight info or exactly where you are staying.
- Guard travel information about family members and friends as well.
- Keep postings about personal activities limited to a small group of immediate family and friends. Don't share this info freely.

Enjoy your travels, but keep your upcoming plans to yourself. If you can hold onto your stories and pictures until you return, then you will likely come home to your HD flat screen TV sitting just where you left it.