



## Staying Connected with Family and Friends

Facebook is all the craze these days. Unless your computer is disconnected from the Internet, your email inbox is probably stuffed with Facebook invitations. If you signed up, you were most likely entranced by this “Social Networking Site” (SNS) for hours connecting with long lost friends. This online curiosity perhaps even grew to a full addiction, pulling you back to the site every day to read the customized “News Feed” which summarizes what your Facebook friends are doing. Facebook gives you “social peripheral vision,” often at a level of detail you really don't care about (Janey is sore from weight training class today) but occasionally uncovering something very interesting (Suzy is having a baby!).



Figure 1: Facebook connects you with friends

Facebook is a great example of a new crop of Internet tools that helps you deal with a common Expat problem: how to stay connected with friends and family. The telephone is fine... if you're ok with always initiating the call. When's the last time someone from home has called you? Internet's first “killer app” – email – works great for a quick note, but it falls short for sending large files (Cousin Tina's 9 megabyte email with pictures of her cute baby exploded mom's mailbox?) and collaborating with multiple people (try planning an event). And when's the last time you sent “snail mail” (i.e., a real letter)?

Facebook helps you stay in touch with friends - read their snippets of daily activity, see their pictures uploaded to one place instead of being sent to everyone's mailbox, and joining groups that they joined (Troy joined the group Official Facebook Triathlon Group).

However, for staying connected with family, Geni may be a better option than Facebook since it was designed specifically for that purpose. Greeted by 3 simple boxes (Mom, Dad, Me), you can quickly and intuitively build

your family tree by providing only the most minimal of information (name, gender, email optional). If you enter a relative's email, Geni sends a request on your behalf enlisting the family member to join in the tree building: “Many hands make light work.” With the tree as the basis for the family network, Cousin Cheryl can share pictures of her wedding in the family photo album; Aunt Rose can plan the Christmas family reunion on the family discussion board; and thanks to Geni's Events Reminder (e.g., birthdays and anniversaries), you can “remember” your parents' Golden Anniversary before it's too late.



Figure 2: Geni connects you with family

SNSs like Geni and Facebook make connecting, sharing, and collaborating much easier, but for more immediate and richer communication, voice is still the best. Like email, however, the telephone has its limitations: international calls are expensive; phone numbers are never handy; dialing internationally is tricky. Try using Skype. If you can get past the download, Skype is extremely easy to use; it even figures out how to dial internationally for you. But if you don't want any downloads and don't have a headset, try Jajah. Once you enter your phone number and the number you are calling on the Jajah's website, Jajah calls you back on your landline and asks you to hold as it connects you. Both of these services provide low cost international calling by using the Internet as the backbone. The quality does suffer a bit, depending on your Internet speed, but it is fine for casual conversations, or even group calls. Now if only the rest of the world could follow China's example and just use one timezone...

Being an expat can sometimes feel like you fell off the face of the earth to your friends and family back home. Clamber back into these relationships with Social Networking Sites Facebook and Geni, and phone home with Skype or Jajah.

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### Internet Tools

- Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) – connect with friends
- Geni ([www.geni.com](http://www.geni.com)) – connect with family
- Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)) or Jajah ([www.jajah.com](http://www.jajah.com)) – phone calls using the internet