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Hitting the road to meet Facebook friends in real-life

Putting friends on the map



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Greg Moutenay's Facebook road trip

IMAGE: 1 OF 9



Greg Moutenay, a Trent graduate who's about to start his career as a teacher, is about to set off on a cross-Canada adventure sponsored by Canadian Tire. (Kennedy Gordon/QMI AGENCY)

Some people plan a road trip around visiting different places; Greg Moutenay has planned one around visiting as many of his 1,200 Facebook friends as possible.

During Moutenay's Great Canadian Roadtrip 2.0, the 23-year-old plans to see more than 300 of them. That's a lot of friends to the litre.

"I'm trying to share it all through social media so my friends can all be in the passenger seat for my trip," says the recent university grad.

And it looks like he's getting more efficient friend economy than originally anticipated.

"Typically, when I meet up with one of my Facebook friends on this trip, I'm also introduced to several of their friends as well.

“From this, like searching through mutual friends on Facebook, I’ve actually had the opportunity to meet some really amazing people, who are now new Facebook — and real life — friends to me,” says Mountenay.

But what’s the difference between a Facebook friend and a real-life friend? Today, networking bleeds into friend-making, and accumulating friends becomes more important than curating them.

Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg has redefined “friend,” subjugating it to a profile, while paradoxically encouraging it to thrive.

On Facebook, “friends” can describe people you’ve just met, people you’ve reconnected with (sometimes only to lose touch again), parents who spy on their kids, friends who spy on (“creep”) old friends or fake friends, and people who constantly take profile pictures in the washroom using their cellphone.

And don’t forget, any friend of yours is a suggested friend of mine.

The site uses a lot of words that don’t mean what they mean.

When someone posts a status about a loved one who just died of cancer, many of us will click “Like.” No one likes such a status, but the “Like” symbolizes condolences. In other situations, a “Like” can be a virtual high-five, or even a dislike of sorts.

Then there’s the business of unfriending. Only with Facebook do we use the word unfriending.

When you were a kid and stopped hanging out with someone, did you say I unfriended Scott? Or I deleted Sue from my friend list? Did you even have a friend list?

When someone unfriends you, do you know who it is? Do you realize you’ve been unfriended? Is there suddenly one less person who “Likes” those food pictures you post?

A Cornell University study finds that with all of our Facebook friends, we have fewer friends than ever, but a Pew report suggests Facebook users have closer relationships than other people.

Dr. Jan Yager is the author of *Friendshifts* and is writing a book about the impact of the social network on friendships. Her research has found that we average one to two best friends and four to six close ones, and while before Facebook we averaged 10 to 20 casual friends, those numbers have soared somewhere between 100 and 500 “friends.”

“What used to make friendship or non-FBFs (non-Facebook friends) special was that the information was shared with just those few in one’s inner circle, one’s very elite group of true friends,” says Yager.

She explains that as information is shared with more people it becomes less valuable, which can contaminate the exclusivity of a relationship and lead to resentment. “And wow is the friend who announces on Facebook that she’s just gotten promoted instead of telling her BFF about that promotion first!”

And really, what does BFF even mean these days? Before Facebook friends? Best friends faux-ever?

“... Not only does our definition of a friend change as we go through life, but who we consider our friends may change, as well as what we need from our friends,” says Yager.

So perhaps there’s more to friends than meets the Face(book). Want to find out?

Road trip!

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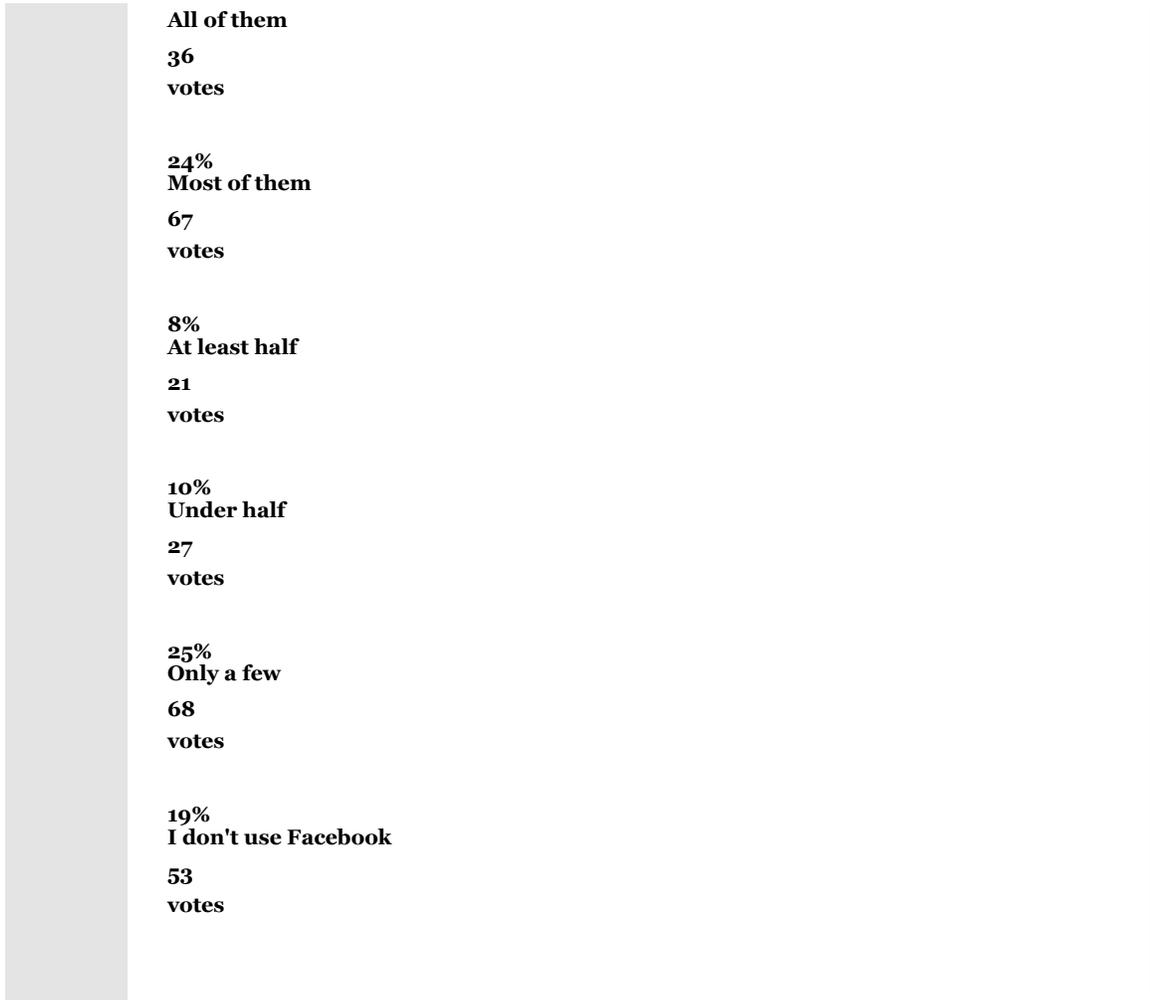
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