



Panel Summary: Apps: 1.2 Million and Growing

Moderator: Larry Magid, Journalist

Panelists: Tyler Droll, Yik Yak; Rebecca Newton, Mind Candy; Ryan Orbuch, Finish; Kathy Poplin, AT&T; Catherine Teitelbaum, Ask.fm; Dave Willner, Secret

Overview: What kinds of apps exist today and how does anonymity affect online behavior?

Dave Willner of Secret talked about the upside of how he sees anonymity play out on Secret. He said that many of their users use anonymity to share problem they may not otherwise talk about, such as addiction and eating disorders. Dave made the point that not only does anonymity allow users to post freely, but it also allows users to react to things without worrying if they look cool enough, such as sending kind words to someone in need. However, he did acknowledge that some people abuse anonymity.

Catherine Teitelbaum stated that 40% of Ask.fm users are ages 13-18. She acknowledged that there is abuse on Ask.fm, which is largely what makes headlines about that site. However, she said, she and others were brought on to Ask.fm to help make greater strides towards a safer community. Kathy Poplin spoke very briefly about AT&T's concern for protecting user data.

Tyler Droll walked through how Yik Yak relies on its community of users to report harmful content. He described how users can up-vote or down-vote posts. If a post gets more than five down-votes, then it is automatically removed. Relying on the community to vet content is how Yik Yak has been able to scale its reporting methods. In defense of anonymity on the app, he made the point that most people walk around publicly without others knowing who they are. For instance, when sitting on the subway, you don't have a Facebook profile floating above your head with your real name and details. Also, when Tyler was asked about high school students using Yik Yak, which the app's age rating prohibits, Tyler said that less than 5% of Yik Yak users are high school students. He then went on to describe how they set up geo-fencing around high schools to prevent kids from using it on school grounds.

In further defense of anonymity, Ryan of Finish made the point that anonymous apps do not necessarily inspire malicious behavior. He said that if people are mean offline they will find ways to be mean online. Larry also looked to Ryan for the youth perspective on privacy. Ryan said that people his age – high school kids, recent high school graduates, and those just going into college – aren't really concerned with privacy or safety. He said it would take several more incidents like the celebrity Snapchat leak to get teens his age thinking about these issues and acting accordingly.

Rebecca Newton of Mind Candy talked about their younger users for Moshi Monsters, and how they monitor and moderate their online community. For many of the kids using Moshi Monsters, this is their first experience participating in a virtual community. Rebecca said that Mind Candy has a very low tolerance for abuse on the site, and will delete user accounts instead of trying to reform or give them a second chance to improve behavior. If the user, who has been removed from the site for harassing other players, creates a new account, he or she will often be called out by other kids on the site when trying to rejoin.