True story: an acquaintance was in a conversation and someone commented about Facebook’s new round of changes. His immediate response: “I HATE when Facebook does that! They change just because they can and won’t leave alone something that isn’t broken.”

It seems to have become the latest fad to start a virtual hate mail campaign against Facebook before actually trying whatever has changed on the site. Few people take a moment to consider that the changes may actually be a significant improvement—which is the case of the September 2011 changes. Here’s why.

Facebook must update its interface from time to time. Otherwise, it becomes stagnant and irrelevant. Stagnancy kills a brand, and Facebook knows this. There’s a looming threat to the Facebook brand, and its name is Google+.

Facebook’s bottom line is to make money—not to blindly appease users with its interface. Advertisers pay the bills, and if Facebook users leave in droves to start using Google+ instead, that’s lost revenue. Clearly, Facebook must keep tabs on what the Google+ appeal is and come up with a way to provide the same—if not better—appeal for its own users.

What did Facebook find? Circles. Perhaps an oversimplistic answer, but essentially, the reason why people like Google+ better is Circles.

Guess what. The very thing that entices people to Google+ is the very thing Facebook incorporated into the latest update. Facebook just isn’t using a cool, jargon name for it.
Lists are the big new addition that’s getting everyone into a fit. Facebook addressed the popularity of Circles and implemented its own version.

Circles allow you to catch up on content posted only from people in those Circles. Likewise, you can post content which only those in specified circles can view. It sounds like a generous amount of privacy control on the part of Google+.

Facebook Lists are the exact same thing. Add whomever you like into various Lists, then choose a List to filter News Feed content only from those people. Likewise, photos, status updates, etc., can be directed to only those in specified Lists.

The only area where Facebook may have missed the mark is addressing the two permanent, self-populating Circles in Google+. One represents every friend connection. The other, Extended Circles, represents all friend connections plus friends connected to those friends. Observe: Google+ Extended Circles = Facebook Friends of Friends.

Although you can’t create a Friends of Friends List, you can make your own List with all your friends in it. Name it All, or All Friends. You may even want to name it Most Recent because viewing your News Feed with this List of all your friends selected as the filter is equivalent to the “Most Recent” view mode that many people miss from the old Facebook.

The only caveat to this comes for those with hundreds of friends (or more) such as myself. Creating a List and manually adding all my friends into it is a daunting task. Advantage: Google+

But, Facebook Lists are actually better than Google+ Circles. Those Circles only manage groupings of people. I haven’t yet found a convenient way to browse only photos that all my friends have posted to Google+.

This is one of my favorite ways for browsing Facebook, as those Circles only manage groupings of people. I haven’t yet found a convenient way to browse only photos that all my friends have posted to Google+.

The logic escapes me.

Here’s the best way to take advantage of the improvement. There are categories of links in the left column of the News Feed page. Favorites is at the top. All the links in other categories may be moved up into Favorites.

Within the Lists category is where you’ll find the equivalent of Google+ Circles. Hover a desired List, click the edit pencil that appears, then click the popup menu item to add that List to Favorites. If you don’t see a List that should be there, click the More link next to the category header to reveal a page with every List that has been created, each with the same edit pencil that allows you to move that List to your Favorites.

If, like me, you enjoy skimming the News Feed filtered to only show pictures, repeat the above process for adding a favorite List, but instead look for Photos under the Apps category. You can also add Groups, Pages, and Games to your Favorites.

To put your Favorites in a more logical order, click an edit pencil icon next to any of the favorites, select Rearrange, then move them around as desired.

Prior to the redesign, in order to view a filtered News Feed of only photos, it was a three-click process. The old News Feed generally opened with Top Posts activated. So, I first had to click Most Recent at the top of the feed, click Most Recent a second time to access a popup menu, and click a third time to select Photos.

It’s now just a one-click process! Just click Photos in the left column, and you’re immediately viewing all recent photo posts. Advantage: Facebook

What about that live-updating list of activity on the right side? Why have the duplication of updates there as well as from the main feed in the middle column? Isn’t it just a rip-off of Twitter?

Yes, that’s sort of true. But
that live feed can actually be very useful, especially since it remains visible even while you’re scrolling through the News Feed. If your main News Feed is filtered to only display Photos, the live feed lets you keep tabs on what people are doing right now while still browsing pictures.

Even if the News Feed is displaying all activity, suppose you’ve scrolled down and are looking at posts from many hours (or even days) ago. The live feed is still there giving you a heads up of what’s getting added to the top of the main feed. For the third time, Advantage: Facebook.

There’s another change Facebook made prior to the recent Lists and Favorites update. By default, Facebook no longer sends e-mail notifications on a wide range of activity. Facebook touted this as a positive change in that it reduced e-mail inbox clutter by offering summary e-mails instead of individual messages for every notification.

It’s no surprise that Facebook wishes to keep as much activity on their Web site as possible rather than e-mail. There’s lots of advertising revenue generated by visiting the site. But also consider how many e-mails were generated every second of every day. By making this change, Facebook instantly relieved strain and made the e-mail server more efficient.

Although it’s unfortunate that Facebook suspended a feature some people may have used routinely, the good news is that e-mails can be easily reactivated. While you’re at it, it’s a good time to prune exactly what types of notifications get e-mailed to you.

Click the little triangle on the right side of the blue header next to the Home link. Select Account Settings. Then, on the left, select Notifications. Back over on the right side in the gray box, turn off the E-mail Frequency selection. Scroll down the page to All Notifications and click the Edit link on each category of notifications. Enable or disable the checkbox next to each individual notification for which you do or do not want to receive by e-mail.

There you have it. You’re now informed and can move on. Remember, give a good look at what Facebook changes before complaining about it. You may actually like what you see!

Lee Bennett is Associate Director of Communication at Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Winter Park, Florida.

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• Creating a List and manually adding all my friends into it is a daunting task. Advantage: Google+

• It’s possible to filter the News Feed to see only photos, only links, only notes, etc. I don’t find this capability on Google+. Advantage: Facebook

• Just click Photos in the left column, and you’re immediately viewing all recent photo posts. Advantage: Facebook

• The live feed is still there, giving you a heads up of what’s getting added to the top of the main feed. Advantage: Facebook
SAC 2011
Convention Tips

Frank Sinatra is known for his rendition of “Chicago.” People actually believed he’d like to show them around that toddling town. He claimed one would lose the blues on the streets of Chicago.

It would not be surprising if some who are attending the Society of Adventist Communicator’s Conference this year in Chicagoland might be planning to arrive a day early or stay a day longer to take in the many sights and sounds of the windy city. The Sears Tower, Navy Pier at sunset, your favorite museum, Wrigley Field or shopping along Michigan Avenue may be calling your name.

A slight change in the program schedule this year will allow a little more free time for adventure and sightseeing. The usual Sonscreen event on Thursday evening has been canceled due to administrative changes. The SAC business meeting has been moved from Thursday evening to Friday noon. These two adjustments will allow time after the opening reception, where your favorite sports team jersey and cap will not be out of place, to catch up with SAC friends, meet new ones, run across the parking lot to the mall, or take in some of the area points of interest.

Just a reminder that there are two tours on Thursday, both of which need pre-registration. There is limited opportunity for participation, so reserve your spot today.

On Sabbath afternoon we’ll be visiting Wheaton College to see the Billy Graham museum returning in time to attend the Gala Awards Banquet. I promise you a fun evening, having heard the guest speaker earlier this year. The banquet theme is “Puttin’ on the Glitz,” so pull out your party wear and prepare for a good time!

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