Online ID-iocy

Don't jeopardize your job search or career by tripping over your own digital footprint.

What's in YOUR profile?

The Internet is a wonderful thing: Just about *anything* and *anyone* can be found online nowadays.

And that can work for OR against a job seeker.

The fact is the majority of recruiters and employers now use the Internet as a means to validate candidate qualifications and to form a more comprehensive picture of job seekers before they hire. And why is that important?

Because a significant percentage of candidates are canned before they are even interviewed.

Don't be an online twit.

The popularity of social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, has enabled millions to freely share -- and others to freely view -- personal and professional data on a public forum. This means anyone, including potential employers, can both learn of your humanitarian grant to digitize medical records in third world countries -- as well as view you revealing too much skin during Spring Break. Opinions formed and conclusions drawn, however inaccurate, can jeopardize your being hired or even get you fired.

Blogs show up in search engines, Tweets can be Googled, and that "friend" may actually be a recruiter on reconnaissance patrol. Online gaming rooms, dating profiles, virtual forums, even postings by your buddies are open to scrutiny by potential employers. (Ever hear of "guilt by association"?)

Take it offline.

Here's an incomplete list of what NOT to post:

-- inappropriate or questionable photos and videos;

-- negative comments about past/present/future employers, jobs, co-workers, and clients;

-- drinking habits, partying preferences, and unethical practices like bragging that you lied in a job interview (yes, people do post that!);

-- crude humor, offensive language and imagery;

-- mass requests for job leads while still at your current place of employment; your boss or company rep may come across them;

-- petty comments and dirty laundry;

-- failed drug test results and illegal behavior;

-- intimate details and sexual content;

-- discriminatory and defamatory comments;

-- company info, whether good, bad, sensitive, or confidential.

Clean up and update your Web profiles. Monitor what your friends have posted. And be wary of conducting job searches while at work; it's on your employer's time and dime.

Avoid digital dirt.

Use common sense and judgment. Don't post anything you wouldn't want an employer to see. Use the Internet to your favor: Create a profile or Web site that showcases your accomplishments and skills, as well as enhances your character and reputation. Highlighting your hobbies or interests here can work to your advantage. Include a link to it in your résumé or job search documents.

Review and proof *all* online content for inconsistencies, errors, spelling, and poor grammar. And don't lie. Remember, employers want people who fit in and bring value to the company, so build a professional reputation and use tasteful URLs and online IDs.

Google your name to see what others might be seeing. Use your middle name or initial to avoid misidentification. And make sure your résumé and other job search data and keywords are current and relevant. With so many candidates in the market, you only have one chance to make a good impression.

Be smart and discreet. Don't become the poster child for online idiocy.

In a nutshell:

Don't sabotage your own chances for career success:

- **Employers use social networking sites to screen candidates**

- **Emails can easily be copied and forwarded to anyone else**

- **Company computers and their contents belong to and can be viewed by your employer**

- **Familiarize yourself with company online policies**

- **Use security settings to make your profile selectively visible**

- **Texting thank you's is not considered professional**

- **Consider everything you post online to be "out there" forever—even if deleted**

When in doubt, leave it out.

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