MONITORING & CREATING AN ONLINE PERSONA

You know the drill: a strong resume and a targeted cover letter are essential starters for any internship or job search.

Today, your “second life”—the one you live online—is an equally important part of the overall process. ExecuNet, a high-end provider of private job search services, has surveyed recruiting and “digital dirt” since 2006. Their latest findings? Over 85% of recruiters conduct internet searches on candidates, and 44% of them have rescinded offers based on what they found online. Expect to be “Googled” and to have your search results analyzed. Employers will be checking you out to see how your search results are relevant to the job you wish to do, and whether your online profile is clean enough to make a hire.

Online reputation management is a “must-do;” cultivating an online presence is optional. You need to know how you’ll be found online, and to monitor your own “digital dirt.” The question of “to be or not to be” public with your career interests is a trickier issue—and is, in many ways, dependent on your career goals and aspirations. A strong online presence that showcases your command of social media may strengthen your candidacy for positions in media, communications, or marketing; if you seek to work for a public figure, law firm, or government office (such as the CIA or the NSA)—your online presence could potentially hinder your job search. Career coaches, contacts, and working professionals in your area of interest can help you determine whether an online persona can complement—or hinder—your job search strategies. Don’t be afraid to ask for advice on how should you present yourself; a great way to start is to surf and observe—watch how others do it and borrow strategies from the sites you admire most.

ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

FIVE WAYS EMPLOYERS WILL FIND YOU

1. “Googling You.” Employers “Google” to source for candidates, check out your “g-cred,” and make sure you are “hire worthy.”

2. Deliberately. Many employers use search technologies that include pre-programmed keywords and “targets.” (Tip: You can often find these keywords in a job description.)

3. Through social media platforms—
   LinkedIn has many searchable fields—especially in summary and specialties section.
   Twitter has it’s own search engine—and also allows search results to show up on Google and
4. **Through online tracking systems.** What’s your relevance rating? When you apply on jobs for positions, employers can “size you up” on your relevance for the position based on their pre-set keywords. Many times, you get a score on how well you fit the job before your resume is ever seen by humans.

5. **Through your network.** Referrals and suggested hires are a common way to find the “best people.” Growing communities through sites including LinkedIn and Twitter can help increase your odds of such “serendipitous happenstance.”

Even when you’re among friends on Facebook with privacy settings locked, the information you post and share online has all the confidentiality of a postcard. Assume anything you post or—are tagged by—is visible to the world-at-large, and may be viewed in the job search process.  

**Don’t assume you are safe.** Here are five strategies to manage your online reputation:

1. **Know what’s out there.** Establish a baseline knowledge of what information is available about you online—as well as others who share your name. A great way to get started is to use the Reach Branding Online ID Calculator: [http://www.onlineidcalculator.com/](http://www.onlineidcalculator.com/) to gauge your search results on Google.

2. **Monitor Your Digital Dirt**
   
a. **Set up an “Ego Search”:** Establish a Google News Alert ([http://www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) on your name so that you receive results of any mention of you (or those who share your name) that hits the Internet.

   b. **Untag yourself in non-flattering Facebook photos or status updates** that would make your mother blush.

3. **Research how other people you know with similar interests present themselves online.** Finding others with similar interests, conducting informational interviews with alumni in PACNET, and asking questions of current employees in your intended field can help you answer the question: What should my online presence goal be?

   a. **Aim to have content on the web be “professional” not “confessional”**

4. **Have a conversation with your employer about their comfort level with your online presence, find out company policies about using social media, and be conscientious:** Don’t
share information that reflects poorly on you or your employer. Maintain privacy and don’t go on the record with information they would not want shared.

5. **Be aware that personal information can “float.”** Try to keep any mention of your professional interests relatively consistent...

It’s okay to go on the record saying, “I’m exploring possibilities in which I could combine my knowledge in ______________ and ______________. It’s less okay to say “I’ll do anything as long as I can live in San Francisco.”

**DEVELOPING AN ONLINE PRESENCE**

You can influence your own online presence in a myriad of ways and on a wide array of platforms.

**Social networking sites:** e.g. Linkedin, Google Profiles, Plaxo, ZoomInfo and even Facebook

**Social Bookmarking:** Share insights, initiate and participate in discussions, and “DUG” important topics. Sites for social bookmarking include Delicious, DIGG, ShareThis, and StumbleUpon

**Blogs:** You can comment on other people’s postings, write your own as a “guest” or host your own through sites including Blogger, TypePad, or WordPress. Twitter is a popular micro-blogging site.

**Electronic Portfolio/Personal Website:** While there’s no guarantee employers will look at your personal website or portfolio, you can create a site to showcase your skills and provide samples of your work.

**Developing an online presence is a process—not a transaction.** As such, you may find it’s easiest to start with tools that are easy to use and highly visible. One such tool is LinkedIn, which has been called the “Facebook” of the business world. LinkedIn features include tools to network and grow relationships “within three degrees” of connection to you, a question and answer forum, and a people search function that you can use to see how others present themselves—and find new potential contacts for informational interviews.

**General Netiquette Tips**

1. **Don’t Flame Out.** If you disagree with someone, always do so respectfully—especially if you are commenting in an online forum and use your own name. “Flames” and profanity can help you strike out in the job search.
2. **A customized approach always trumps an “automated” one.** Personalizing invitations and sending messages tailored to meet the needs and interests of your audience will result in a higher return. This is true on applications from LinkedIn to Twitter—especially with regard to invitations.

3. **“Do as the Romans do.”** If you are trying your hand at a new technology application or platform, watch how seasoned users of the technology before actively using it yourself.

   **Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and there are unspoken conventions for many social media applications.** For example, the micro-blog Twitter is commonly used by job seekers and business owners who wish to develop and strengthen their online reputation. On Twitter, users post “tweets” (messages of 140 characters or less) and can follow streams of other users and “be followed.” Twitter Netiquette guidelines: You’re more interesting to the community if some of your messages are “on brand” (i.e. commenting on areas you wish to be known for) and other messages share personal interests and preferences. If your material is consistently “all about you,” your followers may become “qwitters” (Twitter term for individuals who stop following you).

   You can find how-to guides for getting started with many social media applications. Read up on the technology before you start, and you’ll be ahead of the game when you develop your online profile.

4. **Consider everything you write as mini-writing sample.** As you never know what employers are going to find, you want to present yourself well. Good spelling and grammar can provide the tipping point in a hiring decision. Show you have what it takes.

5. **Sound bites are in; strive to be brief, concise, and specific.**

   Conventional wisdom maintains that employers spend 30 seconds or less on a resume. With social media, expect a quicker pass. Develop your materials so that they can be reviewed in an “eyeball”: Is your message easy to digest? Can I tell what you are looking for or talking about within the first ten seconds? Or in 140 characters?

**ACTION STEPS**

- Assess your online identity through the Online ID Calculator:
  www.onlineidcalculator.com
What ‘s your G.Q. or g-cred? Define a goal for yourself based on your search results. How do you want to be known online? Create goals for short and long-term growth.

- **Reduce unwanted information about you online.**
  Use Pipl.com and ZoomInfo to find what’s out there. Whois.com let’s you take some of it off...

- **Check out your competition.** Scout out peers in your “ideal job” and research how others are presenting themselves. Conduct an “Advanced People Search” in LinkedIn by keyword, title, and area of expertise. (In addition to providing you with networking leads, you may get some new ideas for your resume or CV)

- **Set up accounts on LinkedIn (highly recommended) and Twitter (optional)**