Online Social Networking

Online networking and branding have added an additional piece to traditional networking. The Internet can be used to increase your employment possibilities by cultivating your network, demonstrating your projects and work experiences, and developing a complete "profile" for potential employers to see. However, your online profile can also prove detrimental in your job search if not managed properly.

It is becoming increasingly important to proactively manage your Internet image. A growing number of recruiters Google an applicant's name when deciding whether or not to interview a candidate. This search may lead an employer to your profile on numerous websites, newspaper articles, blog postings, or other information containing your name. The information can be either helpful or harmful depending on the content.

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There are a multitude of websites on which you can create profiles. A good place to start is on LinkedIn, a professional networking site. This differs from social networking sites such as Facebook. LinkedIn allows you to create a profile discussing previous work, volunteer, and educational experiences. There is also discussion space and an "Answers" section where you can post questions to other members and learn from their advice and expertise. In addition to social networking, you can develop your network and portfolio further by using Twitter, blogging, creating a website, or maintaining a Flickr or Photobucket account for creative fields. When joining any networking site, carefully read the Privacy Statement to understand how the company will use your profile information.

When you create a profile on any website, look to join "groups" which will expand your network. This may include any group for the Northern Kentucky Alumni Association or professional association relevant to your career field.

Update your profile often, especially if it has a "status" section. An example could be "currently searching for a summer internship with an art museum in the Midwest." This update will alert individuals in your network who may have valuable contacts in art museums or related areas. CAUTION: Be careful about using such a status message if you are currently employed and your employer does not know you are conducting a job search.

Steps to managing your Online Profile:

- Review all of your current online profiles, including blog postings, LinkedIn/Facebook/MySpace accounts, and Twitter feeds. Do these profiles highlight your strengths? Do they have glaring weaknesses or areas that would eliminate you from a job search?

- Google your name and look for areas of concern. Search social networks, such as Facebook, for profanity, alcohol, or provocative pictures and language. Remove such information even from wall-postings and messages. Look at the groups in which you are a member and delete any which could be negative (e.g., those containing profanity). Don't forget to "un-tag" yourself in photos on your friends' pages as well.

- Even if your profile is relatively clean on social networking sites, consider changing your privacy settings so that individuals who are not your "friends" cannot view your profile.

- If a search results in something questionable, email the webmaster and see if you can have it taken down, your last name removed, or the page "darkened" so that it will not come up in a search.

- Search for other Internet resources you might pop up on, such as YouTube, MySpace, or blog postings.

- Most importantly, **think before you post!** You might remove a picture, video, or comment from the Internet, but another user may have saved and re-posted that information on their own page.

- Limit yourself to a manageable number of social networking tools. As with the job search process overall, it is much more beneficial to have a few social networking profiles with a lot of depth than several with little depth and little time to manage them. Of all the networking sites, most experts agree that LinkedIn is a must for job seekers.

Examples of online social networking sites:

www.linkedin.com
www.facebook.com
www.twitter.com
www.flickr.com
www.photobucket.com
www.blogger.com

In case you doubt whether employers research potential/current employees online, note the following:

• Vault.com conducted a survey recently and found that 39% of employers have reviewed current employees' Facebook or MySpace pages; 44% have researched potential job candidates.

• ExecuNet surveyed executive recruiters and found that 83% had googled candidates; 43% eliminated candidates from further consideration because of information found during their search.