Online Image Management

How can you keep your personality alive in your online presence and not scare away potential employers and graduate schools? Professional online images take time to create and build. By following these tips, you can help build a positive and credible online image that can help advance your career.

1. It might seem obvious, but get rid of any negative posts and pictures, both those you've posted and the ones you're tagged in. Employers and graduate schools *do* judge you by the company you keep. Do an online search of your name to see what information and/or images of you come up. This will help you catch potential red flags.
2. Check your grammar, spelling, and writing. Many employers reject job applicants because they show poor communication skills. Consider your online presence as part of your portfolio. Read through any of your postings to catch errors.
3. Highlight the good stuff. If you're a volunteer or participate in another community activity, be sure to write about it online, even if it's just a couple of tweets or a Facebook status.
4. Remember what the Internet really is: a giant public record. They say nothing posted to the Web ever truly goes away, and you might be surprised how quickly and easily your personal information can be shared.
5. Make a decision to let someone whose opinion you value highly (parents, favorite aunt, mentor, etc.) be connected to you on *all* of your social media sites. Even if you are saying to yourself, "No way! That is *my* personal space," remember these people want you to be successful. This is about having your back, not invading your privacy. Offer to do the same for another and send each other a private message when you notice something inappropriate.
6. Speaking of privacy, make sure to continue to privatize your social network accounts. You should know exactly what the world can see of your profile and posts. And keep in mind that privacy policies can change at any time and all the time. Being proactive will help you down the road. Ask someone who is not connected to you (such as Career Planning & Development staff) to conduct a search to see what comes up!
7. Set up a Google alert for your name so that when a picture that's been tagged or any mention of your name comes up on Google, you know first. Information is still power.
8. Remember that just because you don't post pictures of every event or party you go to, it does not mean it wasn't fun or didn't happen. Even though we are encouraged to post every detail of our lives online, you have to refrain sometimes. The time is now.
9. If you are already in hot water, check out Reputation.com; just be aware that it comes with fees. There are also various apps that can help you monitor your content, but be wary of becoming dependent on these.
10. Give your phone a break. This is especially true if you're upset and feel like you might say something you regret later. You could also benefit from just turning your phone off once a week. Who knows—you just might enjoy being disconnected.
11. Although it won't hurt your image if you have photos showing you outside of the professional setting, it will hurt you if your photos display you in a way an employer may see as inappropriate. Even if you don't post unprofessional photos of yourself, your

friends could still tag you in photos without considering how it could affect your image. Depending on your career goals, the type of photos considered appropriate will vary.

12. Never post pictures of yourself at a bar, party or other situation that may be inappropriate and inform your friends to ask for permission before tagging you in a photo. Facebook users concerned with maintaining a professional online image also should be cautious about joining groups and fan pages. Groups such as "Party Girls" do not portray professionalism. The various applications on Facebook, such as quizzes and games, also can affect your image.

13. Use caution when joining groups, fan pages and applications (and review old ones!). Be sure it is about a topic you would be willing to discuss with a company CEO and your grandmother. Setting your profile to private may give you a false sense of security since people often accept friends who they do not know well. Additionally, a potential employer may go through a mutual friend to see your profile.

14. Even with strict privacy settings, it is still possible for other people to get access to your social media accounts. Always be insistent on maintaining a professional online image, even if your profile is set to private. Your tweets and the conversations you join are a reflection of your professional online image. If you do not have your tweets set to private, watch what you tweet or retweet.

15. Build a professional online image by sharing ideas and information and adding knowledge to the community. One of the social networks used less often by young professionals is LinkedIn. But, LinkedIn can help build credibility in a person's professional online image. Go beyond simply filling out a profile and take full advantage of the site's features.

16. Join groups and answer questions of other users after creating your LinkedIn profile. Publishing posts on LinkedIn or participating in the blogosphere also can help build a professional online image. Blogging displays leadership and knowledge in your given field. Strategically write blog posts that will showcase your skills and knowledge and comment on other industry-related blogs.

17. A personal Web site or online portfolio is a great tool to help build a professional online image. Not only does it show that you are serious about your career, but you also can include materials to promote your personal brand, such as recommendations and work examples.

Sources:

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