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Get the profile: Managing your online reputation

A Huxley Associates career guide

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Introduction

When it comes to managing your online reputation, what's the difference between your professional and social profile? For many recruiters (whether agencies or direct employers) there is no real difference and both are ripe for the plucking and a very valid way to accept or reject a potential hire.

You'd be surprised how many employers and recruiters use online searches or social networking sites to screen potential employees. According to recent research carried out in the UK, 77% of recruitment agencies use search engines to screen out candidates, while 25% of hiring managers themselves use search engines to do the same job.

In the US, Internet screening is much more prevalent with 75% of respondents to a survey admitting to having formal policies in place to research applicants online. More alarming is that 70% of those surveyed agreed they had rejected candidates based on the information found. Now more than ever it's crucial you take control of how you are perceived online and use your online reputation as a force for good.

On the plus side, a recent Microsoft survey found that 86% of companies agreed that a positive online reputation influences their perception of an applicant.

In this guide we provide advice and guidance on how to monitor what is being said about you; how to clean up your online reputation and how social media and the Internet can be a benefit to your career plans.

Why you need an online reputation

If your online activity is limited and you don't come up in any searches you are missing a key opportunity to promote yourself to potential employers. Whilst not all recruiters are using Google to find out more about candidates, recent research in the UK has shown that 77% of hiring managers do. By actively managing your online reputation this presents an opportunity to reinforce your application and position yourself as an industry professional they need to hire. A professional LinkedIn profile and relevant comments on industry forums will also demonstrate that you are online savvy and are actively contributing to the industry. With a carefully constructed online reputation it is possible to highlight your key skills and achievements and to build a strong reputation that will make you stand out above and beyond other applicants. Whilst active monitoring is required to ensure your online reputation remains positive, the benefits of creating an active online personal brand far outweigh the potential risks.

Monitoring your online reputation

Whether it is your profile on social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, or comments you've posted on a company's blog or website, everyone has a digital footprint. It is therefore essential that you keep track of what people are saying about you and that you know what your name is being associated with – before it costs you that dream job.

As the line between our private and professional lives becomes increasingly blurred it's essential you are proactive and that you monitor all of your online activity – both personal and professional. You only have to look at the recent examples of individuals losing their jobs after inappropriate comments about their boss/company posted on social networks to see how crucial it is to limit any digital faux pas.

The key to successfully monitoring your online reputation is to regularly check for updates and to act quickly to resolve any issues that may come up.

One of the easiest ways to monitor everything that is being said about you and what a potential employer will see is to enter your own name into Google and screen the results. If your Google search returns hits that don't present you in the best light go back to the original website/source and delete the offending entry. You can also set up a Google Alert which will allow you to receive updates every time something is said about you online, making it easier to actively manage your reputation.

Similarly run searches across Twitter and other search engines on a regular basis to ensure you have a full understanding of how you are being presented online. You can also sign up to other alerts such as TweetBeep or use other online tools such as MonitorThis.

How to protect your privacy in social media

The first thing you need to do when opening an account in any of the social media channels is to spend some time setting the Privacy Settings of your profile up properly.

Here are some tips to consider in the main social media networks:

Facebook account

- Photo albums - they have their own privacy settings, make them as private as possible (you don't want your next employer to see the pictures of your last holiday in Vegas). Untag any photos you don't want to be tagged in.
- Applications - many of the applications you've accepted over time are sharing your information with 3rd parties. Try to delete the applications you don't use.
- Who can find you? You can decide if search engines can find you or not, decide how public your profile needs to be and adjust your Facebook settings accordingly.
- Think about creating groups of friends with different levels of access; you will then be able to accept friendships without risking your privacy.
- Your wall - there is a risk of what your contacts may upload or post on your wall. The best way to

“ 86% of companies agreed that a positive online reputation influences their perception of an applicant. ”

Microsoft survey

manage this risk is to monitor what is being said. If an inappropriate message is posted on your wall delete it as soon as possible or if there is a photo that puts you in a compromising position ask your contact to remove it. Similar guidelines apply for monitoring your LinkedIn account.

Twitter account

- Spend some time deciding how public you would like your profile to be and then set it accordingly. Many people think Twitter is about sharing your posts with every single user in the world, but why would you share your thoughts with people that don't have your telephone number?
- Be very careful not to share anything in public that can offend communities or cause you trouble while looking for a job.
- If you want to share your tweets with a range of other networking sites that include business and social users, it is wise to create a separate profile for each style so inappropriate posts don't get revealed in business circles.

LinkedIn account

- Choose carefully what you want to display on your public profile, by default every visitor can view your full profile. Take this into account.
- Use a picture showing your best professional image.
- If you push your Tweets into LinkedIn using the Tweets LinkedIn app be sure to use a business type of Twitter profile to link to as all tweets are loaded automatically and you can't pick and choose which comments to show.

In a nutshell, don't share anything you don't want to be public knowledge. The best way to keep your privacy is to keep your information private.

How to join the social media dots...

So many social media sites, so little time!

If you're LinkedIn, Facebooking, Tweeting, YouTubing, MySpacing, Blogging and Flickrng, it's a time consuming task to post the same update individually across a number of social media platforms.

To help you keep all your social networks up-to-speed with your latest thoughts, views and insights there are a number of tools that allow you to share one update or post on several social media sites.

Which sharing tool is right for you?

Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google Buzz, Foursquare users

For mainstream users, Tweetdeck is a popular choice. Covering the above platforms, it's quick and simple to make your updates. Be mindful that you are sharing the right sort of information with the appropriate network however (you may not want to update LinkedIn at the same time as Facebook as the subject matter may be inappropriate for both).

You like to blog too?

FriendFeed.com and Ping.fm are for the more advanced social networkers out there. Acting as real-time feed aggregators, these tools will consolidate the updates from social media and social networking websites, social bookmarking websites, blogs and micro-blogging updates. You can also create bespoke feeds using this stream of information.

Explore what's right for you

These tools are just the tip of the social media iceberg. As smart phones and apps evolve, so too does the technology which can help you share updates and discussions.

Listen out for what your peers are doing, read the Internet, listen to the news. Social media isn't going anywhere, so make sure you stay on top of the technology to help you make the most of your online reputation.

Social media sharing websites

www.FriendFeed.com
www.Ping.fm
www.tweetdeck.com

Your priorities and how to achieve them

	To find a job	To show your expertise	To socialise
Benefits of an online presence	<p>If you're looking for a job change, an online presence is fundamental to increase your chances of moving to a great opportunity. Creating a credible online presence portrays you as a sophisticated professional which will create a strong positive impression to potential employers.</p> <p>You can also increase your visibility and exposure (find roles and be found) and can easily contact companies and friends. This will enable you to exchange job roles that may be of interest and increase your knowledge about specific organisations that may be useful for your job search.</p>	<p>The Internet makes it very easy to be seen by your target audience and to show your expertise in a huge variety of forums by writing content that addresses a problem/offers insight/advice to your industry. To be seen as an expert you don't need to know more than everyone else, you just need to know the specific topic at hand very well and be able to educate your target audience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great opportunity to find people you went to university with, former colleagues or even childhood friends • Stay in touch with friends even if they're living abroad • Share pictures, videos, links and your thoughts with people you know • Send direct messages to your contacts or use the chat function to talk to them in real time
Strategy to follow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure your profile is always up-to-date • Be active - tweet, comment and share ideas • Create a blog/website. Publish updated and quality information, and link your page to your social network profile • Use keywords in your CV/profiles • Always pay attention to the type of information available in your profile/blog/website (comments, photos, etc.) • Have good references from your previous/recent positions • Be mindful of who you follow and who is following you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog (shows expertise in an informal knowledgeable manner) • Speak at conferences and link information to the web • Write articles/book/PDFs (e.g. how to solve a problem) • Tweet about latest industry news • Upload an instructional video • Add status updates/enter group discussions on networking sites to reflect your understanding and passion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your profile and your activities are only visible to your friends and people you trust; only basic information should be visible to everybody • Monitor pictures you're tagged in and remove your name from inappropriate ones and ask the owner to remove them • Don't hide completely – allow people to find and contact you
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LinkedIn • Xing (Germany) • Viadeo (France) • Twitter • Facebook • MySpace • YouTube • Orkut (Brazil) • Visual CV • Personal website • Ecademy • Perfspot • Plaxo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LinkedIn (Xing in Germany, Viadeo in France, Ning in Asia Pac) • Industry specific networks (e.g. Stackoverflow for IT) • Facebook • YouTube • Wikipedia • Internal company networks • Twitter • Quora 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook • Twitter • MySpace • Ning • Orkut
Exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, tell your network that you're looking for a new position • Upload a professional/friendly headshot • Update your CV/personal details on a regular basis - fresh profiles are shown first in candidate searches • Include relevant keywords in your CV/profiles to help recruiters find you • Join college alumni groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join relevant groups on LinkedIn and take part in discussions. Be active, show your communication skills and share your knowledge • Get connected to the right people • Get recommendations from managers/colleagues who can describe and prove your expertise • Create a detailed profile, with a breakdown of all your skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join online groups and forums to take part in conversations, give your advice, etc. • Avoid posting any comments that could compromise your reputation - stay neutral (i.e. no inappropriate comments, political views, criticism of previous employer...)

Our career guides

This guide is part of Huxley Associates' dedication to supporting our customers and delivering market-leading recruitment solutions. As one of the world's leading recruitment consultancies we pride ourselves on being a key recruitment partner for professionals and organisations across a range of sectors.

Our series of career guides offer best practice advice and an insight into the latest recruitment news to help you secure your next job.

Other career guides in the series:

Get the interview: Writing the perfect CV
A Huxley Associates career guide

Get the job: Successful interviewing
A Huxley Associates career guide