management

Control yourself

Richard Naish

Managing your online identity is vital.
Here's how to remain master
of your domain

A recent survey found that 25% of hiring managers used search engines to screen candidates. When someone puts your name into a search engine, the results display your online identity, showing any websites where your name is displayed. It looks like that in the future job market, your online identity is going to be more important than your CV in determining how your career progresses. So how do you go about managing it?

Online search results show any content related to you that can be put on the web; and activities that produce content range from the professional to the personal. On the professional side you have content which you may want lots of people to see:
- organisational websites that carry your name
- professional networking sites where you have a profile, such as LinkedIn or Naymz
- your work email address
- presentations you have made at a conference
- any corporate blog you write.

Then on the personal side, there may be content you are less happy about sharing with the world:
- photos of you on holiday on Flickr
- your Facebook page with some of your friends
- your personal blog
- your Twitter page
- your YouTube page
- your sports clubs and associations
- your time and position in that 10km race you did for charity years ago
- minutes of what you said at a community meeting last month
- even your personal address and phone number.

There is the risk that someone with a very complete online identity could be subjected to identity fraud; anyone with internet access, anywhere in the world, can fraudulently apply for loans or mobile phone contracts in that name.

So how should you manage your identity?

1 Don't put potentially embarrassing content online: The most obvious recommendation. The wife of the head of MI6 found this to her cost when her Facebook account revealed photos and information on Britain's top spy. And those drunken student antics may be very amusing at the time, but any photos posted online may come back to haunt you years later. Web pages do wither and die over time but there is a lot of archiving elsewhere on the web; the original site may be long gone, but another is still publishing an archive of it.

2 Get a personal domain: You can take control of your identity by registering a personal domain in your name. You can introduce yourself on the site and then link from that site to all the web-based content about you that you control, such as your organisation's website, your blog, your Twitter/LinkedIn/Facebook page etc. This is the site most likely to be picked up by search engines such as Google, since it matches your name and has lots of websites with high page-ranking linked to it. Google gives sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Amazon high page rank as a measure of their 'importance'. For example www.twitter.com, www.linkedin.com and www.facebook.com all have page ranks of 9 out of 10, whereas a small corporate website that has not been optimised for search engines may be given an 'importance' of 0 out of 10.

3 Separate your work and personal identity: For example, you could use LinkedIn and Twitter for developing your career and Facebook just for friends. This allows you to post safe, work-based information to the first two and more personal stuff to Facebook. This does, of course, mean you have to decline work colleagues who want to be friends on Facebook… or even harder, 'unfriend' any existing work colleague. This separation can also be achieved with different email addresses for work and personal issues; potential employers may not be impressed with a CV that has an email of fluffybunnyears@hotmail.com.

4 Call in the cleaners: If something is 'out there' on the web that you don't like, you need 'cleaners'. An agency called http://identitytiger.com mostly does corporate work, while California-based www.reputationdefender.com has a service that measures and manages your online identity for you. And for the protective parent, it can monitor what is being posted about your teenage children, so you can spot online bullying and ensure future employers don't rule them out of a job due to poor online identity. **e**

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