ONLINE PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE

No matter who you are, there is a lot of information available about you, often easily found online. Your online presence, image or brand is the impression people get from all information available about you in person and on social media sites including Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, blogs, articles, personal websites and e-portfolios. This can be an asset or a liability depending on what is found.

Building and Managing Your Online Career Reputation

Organizations and governments capture, aggregate and use information for target marketing and to build brand reputation. They recognize that the reputation of their staff can impact their business reputation and bottom line. To safeguard their corporate reputation, recruiters, employers and prospective clients commonly check a candidate's online presence as part of decision making or hiring due-diligence. Maintaining a good reputation – online and off – will impact interviews, offers and clients you will work with.

Pictures, comments, posts, tweets and other interactions can show up in a search of your name for years, so it is important to create and maintain a professional presence plan before you finish university. This takes time and requires regular attention. Start by professionalizing your current online information and build slowly; this doesn't have to be hard or time consuming.

- Decide how you want to be seen professionally. Your online presence should support that impression. Information will be seen by past and present colleagues, supervisors and prospective employers. Information should be factual and match your resume. Inconsistent or misleading information raises concerns.

- Search your name and images. Information and images are 'cached' so never really disappear. Ask friends and family to remove tags, unprofessional posts or pictures inconsistent with your professional image. Set up an 'alert' for your name to stay on top of what is posted about you (or others with a similar name).

- Become active on professional networks to push new content to the top of search results, moving less professional material further down. Avoid negative comments and controversial subjects.

- Ensure privacy settings for all your accounts are high. There is no way to completely control who sees information posted by or about you as privacy settings only work if everyone in your networks, across all platforms, uses them too. Using a nickname does not ensure privacy. Connections can be uncovered through groups, e-mail addresses, schools attended, etc.

- When choosing photos for online accounts, use something professional looking – ideally a headshot which may be used on multiple platforms. Avoid cartoon faces, animal pictures, or party photos.

- Identify 2 to 3 niche topics in your professional field that you would like to stay current in, and create alerts on these topics. More than 3 requires more time than most people are able to consistently commit.

NETWORKING ONLINE

If you are employed, find out about your company's policies regarding use of Internet, online networking, and electronic devices as these vary dramatically from company to company. For some, strict policies regulate what is acceptable. In many companies, activity is electronically tracked and can result in termination.

Contrary to what people new to business think, networking doesn't mean cold-contacting strangers *(see tip sheet on Networking)*. Everyone has an existing network. Begin with people you know and grow your pool of people based on personal referrals, professional interests and routine interactions.

Clarify your top objective for social networking to guide your activities and grow or refine your network. Is it local job search? Relocation? Being more visible in a professional community?

- What sites, groups, subscriptions, publications and feeds do the people you want to connect with use?

- How much time are you setting aside to do this? What tasks can reasonably be undertaken during that time? Scheduling 10 to 30 minutes a day can be enough to connect meaningfully online with a growing network and stay up to date on industry trends, business news or people you have decided to follow.

Online networking follows the same 'best practices' as traditional networking, but expands who you are able to meet and stay in touch with. Best practice guidelines include:

- When trying to connect with someone, once is enough. People use online networks for different reasons at different stages of their careers; not all group members, colleagues, clients or professionals you try to connect with will accept.

- Your reputation is based on what people think of your activity. Contribute positively and professionally.

  » Write a reference or testimonial for someone who has helped you grow professionally.

  » Connect at least one person monthly with an opportunity, article or someone else in your network.

- Build a network of people both inside and outside your industry. Build lists for people across different disciplines. Join chats. Post interesting articles, comment thoughtfully on others' posts and start conversations. Initiate discussions with people who inspire you.

- While you ideally find people you already know to reach out to for advice or information interviews, all connections you make present win-win opportunities.

RESEARCH EFFECTIVELY ONLINE

- Do an advanced search for any keyword or combination of keywords – "marketing," "theatre," "Alberta" and you will see profiles of people whose careers include those keywords. This is a great way to explore potential career paths and to learn about companies or job titles to consider.

- If you are considering a new industry, follow Twitter feeds and read online news and profiles of people who have the jobs you are interested in to gather information about the industry, how people got there and what is important in the job.

- "Follow" what's happening at companies to get company information, and names of employees to whom you may be linked. Searches can be done by geographical area, industry, size and other parameters.

ONLINE JOB SEARCH SAVVY

- If you are working, it is not a good idea to use company computers, e-mail accounts or time for job searching. Reserve your job searching efforts for the time that you are not at work.

- If you are interested in career-relevant paid or unpaid projects, go through your contacts and send out short personal notes letting people know what you would be interested in tackling.

- Be open to new opportunities such as those at less well-known organizations. The wider you expand your search, the more likely you are to find a great job.

- As you find employers you might want to work for, check their company pages for information about their operations, locations, summer and new graduate hiring, and more.

- Before you submit your resume, look up the hiring manager. Knowing about the person who is hiring can help you tailor your resume and cover letter.

- Before an information interview or a networking event, research organizations that are attending to have some things you can ask about.

INTERVIEW HELP USING ONLINE STRATEGIES

- Many entry-level candidates interview less well than they could due to a lack of knowledge about an employer's organization and why they would be a good fit.

- Before a job interview, determine if anyone in your network can connect you to valuable insights into the job, the organization and company culture. Learn about accomplishments of people on your interview panel.

Online Self Assessment Checklist

YOUR CURRENT PRESENCE

☐ I have searched versions of my name and online aliases, including images on multiple platforms comparing what I find to my desired professional image, noting changes needed.

☐ My address, academic and/or work schedule, age, family members' names or other personal information is not easily found online, safeguarding my home and privacy. All privacy settings are set to high or private.

☐ Each social networking site, blog, photo sharing site or Twitter feed (even non-professional sites), conveys an image I would be comfortable for a prospective employer to see, including:

> » Pictures
> » Profile

> » Comments, tweets and posts
> » Group membership/people followed

CLEANING DIGITAL DIRT

☐ I have a professional e-mail account, ideally a permanent, professional version of my name and I use the same professional image and brand across all platforms so visitors start to recognize me.

☐ I have untagged inaccurate or unprofessional content / images and have contacted others who have posted unprofessional content or pictures of me and requested they remove or untag them.

☐ I have prepared what I will say about content I cannot delete, if asked about it.

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

☐ I have done a keyword search for the work I am interested in pursuing next and have a plan for incorporating these keywords and phrases into my profiles.

☐ I have articulated the experiences and achievements that are relevant to my career direction, including work and volunteer projects and related extracurricular and community activities

☐ I have used keywords and descriptors to clearly explain what I can contribute at my current career stage.

☐ I have established a consistent profile across all websites, ensuring content on one does not contradict content on another.

☐ I have checked previously used job boards on which I have posted my resume, deleted or updated outdated profiles and am comfortable with the current privacy policy of each site.

☐ I have made a list of past classmates, friends, acquaintances, volunteer/work colleagues and instructors and invited them to connect with me on a professional networking site.

☐ I have evaluated my current network and identified which individuals I can honestly and genuinely recommend in upcoming weeks and the basis of why I could do so.

☐ I have a targeted list of related companies, industries and individuals I would like to follow.

GROWING A NETWORK

☐ I invite contacts whose business cards I have collected at professional activities and in-person networking events to connect with me on LinkedIn, always maintaining a professional format.

☐ When attempting to connect with people I do not know, I ask for introductions from a mutual connection, identify some common ground or clarify my intention for connecting.

☐ I have evaluated my current circle of contacts (network) and have noted gaps I would benefit from filling, such as alumni from my academic program and other recent graduates who specialize in my field or work in the companies or industries I would like to connect with.

☐ I know what I am looking for in an online community, have identified ones relevant to my studies and professional interests, reviewed user guidelines for each and noted etiquette and tone of each forum before contributing positive, professional comments and questions.

☐ Knowing that networking is a reciprocal relationship, I look for things to share with contacts, including professional achievements, events, and connecting them with another person, where appropriate.

KEEPING VIGILANT

☐ I have set up an alert to be notified when something about me, or those with similar names appears.

☐ I understand that privacy settings may change unexpectedly so routinely check my privacy settings on all social media and other online accounts.

☐ Online and offline, I interact with my professional reputation in mind. I recognize that no information on the Internet is really private and I only post that which I would be comfortable being seen by prospective employers, client campus administrators.

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