

The Social Network

While some online content can put job searchers at a disadvantage, more people are using social networking to enhance their preparation for interview, garner an advantage over less-wired peers, and even gain an edge with recruiters. Use social networking sites to acquire background information on recruiters before you interview so you can focus your interview discussion on topics of interest to the recruiter and also find common ground, including student organizations and even friends.

What percentages of employers use social networking sites to research potential employees?

- Approximately 7/10 or 70% of companies use social media to research a potential hire. 21% of companies have said they they won't consider a candidate without social media presence.

Social Networking Sites

- LinkedIn - LinkedIn operates one of the world's largest professional networks on the Internet with more than 135 million members in over 200 countries and territories, connecting past and present colleagues/classmates. The job search tools include: Recommendations which provides employers with positive references from contacts within your network, Introductions which allows you to ask a person in your network to introduce you to one of their contacts, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) which allows your profile to show up in Google results.
- Instagram - Instagram is becoming one of the most prominent social media's this century. While Instagram is not intended for user's to display their professional goals/aspirations, it is important to keep in mind recruiter's can use Instagram to research potential candidates. Always do your best to display yourself in the best light when posting on Instagram. Keep your Instagram account private if you don't want any recruiters to look at it. Lastly, if your mom wouldn't like you posting it, then don't post it!
- Google - By searching Google, you can learn about recruiters' professional interest, including their research and published papers. Google yourself. If you haven't already, give it a try and see what comes up. And remember, not all search engines are created equally, so use Yahoo!, MSN and others as well. If you find anything compromising, do what you can to remove it.

Strategies for Safe and Strategic Social Networking

- Beware of what people can see on your page. Facebook users sometimes believe that only other students see their pages, but many young recruiters are now using these sites to research candidates.
- Determine access intentionally. Some career counselors advocate deactivating your Facebook page while job searching. Changing your settings so that only “friends” have access to your profile is another suggestion. (Keep in mind that savvy recruiters may still access your information.)
- Set a standard. Do the Mom test: Would you be comfortable having your mom look at the photos and text on your page? Also, are you comfortable talking about everything on your page in an interview? If anything on your page would result in a “no” to either of these questions, limit access or change your page.
- Use social networking to your advantage. Use these sites to find alumni in the companies that interest you. Contact alumni before you interview in your career center or before a site visit to learn additional information about the organization; this will give you a context for the interview. In addition, use social networking sites and internet searches to learn more about the recruiters who will interview you—begin the interview with as much information about them as they have about you. Finally, utilize alumni contacts late in the process to ask final questions about the company culture, seek negotiation advices, and jumpstart getting settled when you move to a new location and start working with a new company.

Before you begin meeting with employer, take a quick inventory of your online world. Does it match your job search persona? Use the list below as a starting point to create a professional online impression.

- Email address. It’s time to upgrade your internet ID. If an employer can reach you at kegtapper@hotmail.com, switch to your school account or create one that’s more appropriate. Don’t forget about your voicemail – make sure it is professional.
- Online resumes. Do you have resumes posted on various job search sites? That’s OK, but make sure the information is updated and consistent. Tailoring your resume to the job is a great idea, so there’s nothing wrong with creating two or three versions of your resume. But if you post these online, be aware that Employer A might be able to view Resume B, so you don’t want any contradictory data.
- Personal blogs. Give your blogs a once-over. What makes good fodder for discussion among your friends won’t necessarily play well with employers. Remove the more controversial items and anything that would portray you as a disgruntled employee waiting to happen.
- Communication. The way we communicate online is usually very casual. Shorthand is common when it comes to emails, text messages or instant messages. But now that you’re looking for a job and not talking to your “bff,” you need to write like a professional. And when in doubt, pick up the phone. It’s always best to make a call rather than send an email.

Things to Do

- Including a professional photo (or none at all)
- Creating a professional user name
- Making professional connections
- Developing your network
- Using links to showcase skills
- Utilizing tags for keywords
- Being consistent from site to site

Things to Avoid

- Being pushy or asking for a job
- E-stalking a contact or potential contact
- Being inactive (post and check regularly)
- Using just one network
- Making your profile searchable
- Being tagged in inappropriate photos
- Making your friend list viewable by all

Blurred Lines

Like everything else in your job search, it's important to take extra time to make a great impression. That goes for your resume, your cover letter, the clothes you wear to an interview, and the thank-you note you send once the interview is over. After all that hard work, don't be caught by a loose end online. The Internet has blurred your personal and public life. Your office persona is probably different from the regular you, and that is fine. You should carry yourself a bit more polished and professional in the office than when you're out on the town. But keep in mind that the Internet has the potential to give people access to all sides of yourself. So be careful, and tread lightly.