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How to Protect & Maintain Your Online Reputation
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- **Check Your Online Reputation Regularly**
  - Search your name on various search engines *e.g.* Google.com, Yahoo.com, Bing.com, pipl.com, 123people.com, technorati.com.
  - Search all variations of your name, including maiden name and typing your full name in "quotes" to ensure accurate hits.
  - Determine source of unwanted content and delete.
  - If there is false information about you on the Internet, alert a potential employer prior to their processing of your background check/e-diligence.

- **Determine the Purpose of Your Social Media Tool(s)**
  - Is this tool for personal or professional use?
  - If it is for personal use, consider your privacy settings and how a potential employer might gain access to and use this information.
  - If it is for professional use, consider why you are using it (*e.g.* marketing, branding, networking, information gathering, etc.) and make the necessary adjustments to make it more effective for that purpose.

- **Establish a Positive Professional Online Identity**
  - A few top search results of positive information can dilute or drown out evidence of "youthful indiscretion."[1]
  - Use a LinkedIn profile, blog or similar tool to present yourself as a professional and highlight your strengths, achievements and interests that relate to your field or career of interest.
  - LinkedIn has a high SEO (search engine optimization) which places your LinkedIn profile close to the top, if not at the top, of a Google search, allowing you to control the information seen.
  - Join online groups and add valuable content to their discussions to raise your profile.
  - Post evidence of your connections with other professionals.

- **Choose Your "Friends" Wisely**
  - Are you blurring the line of professionalism by sharing access to your personal social media tools? Would you want an employer or supervisor to see your status updates?
  - Consider the professional and legal implications of "friending" co-workers, supervisors, direct reports, students, etc.
  - "Unfriend" people you do not know. You can also "Disconnect" with people on LinkedIn.

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[1] Managing Your Online Identity, The University of Iowa College of Law, August 2009

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- **Lock Down Privacy Settings**
  - Make personal sites private and professional sites public.
  - Restrict abilities of other's to post information on your social media site(s).
  - Establish notification alerts whenever information is posted by others to your account.
    - You can do this via Google Alerts – google.com/alerts; Yahoo Alerts – alerts.yahoo.com or via RSS feed subscriptions to search results.
  - Delete inappropriate content others post.

- **Think Before You Post**
  - Does the image you believe you are projecting match others' perceptions?[2]
  - Is this personal or professional information?
  - Are you using your work computer? Know your organization's Internet policy and how it affects you.
  - Consider your audience (and unintended audience).
  - Consider confidentiality, material conflicts of interest, ethics, liability, defamation and copyright infringement issues.
  - Who will see this information? Would your 80 year old grandmother be offended?
  - Would you want your boss to see this?
  - What if this is the only post a potential employer will see and you would be judged on this alone?
  - Limit what can be construed as "bad" if taken out of context.[2]
  - Remember nothing is ever really anonymous online. Thus, be mindful of your tone/message.
  - Add value to your industry, field or interests through appropriate, thoughtful comments.
  - If you feel any information is questionable, don't post it.

- **A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words**
  - What do your pictures say about you? What are the intended and unintended messages?
  - Delete any questionable pictures of you in your and other's accounts.
  - Establish notification alerts to view pictures of you as they are posted.
  - As good practice, "untag" any photos of yourself which are questionable or unflattering.

- **Be Accountable**
  - Be prepared to be accountable and explain anything you have said or done online.[2]

- **Enjoy It**
  - Social media tools can be an excellent, interactive and enjoyable way to set yourself apart, strengthen your reputation and build your network.
  - Be creative and have fun! One of the benefits of these tools is their dynamic and "outside the box" nature. Use those elements to your advantage.

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[2] Managing Your Online Identity, The University of Iowa College of Law, August 2009