

Ryan Goodrich

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Ginger Utley

## **The Rise of Internet Information & the Fall of Internet Privacy for Job Candidates**

Not too many years ago, it was uncommon to perform web searches to see an applicant's true personality. The resume, cover letter, and interview were typically the only chances employers had to "get to know" prospective applicants. Hiring managers had no real way of telling how good of a fit an applicant was without taking a risk and hiring them. The interview helped to disqualify unsuitable individuals, yet anyone with a penchant for interviews could easily convey themselves in a positive light.

Information is available through numerous outlets online. The sides of an applicant that normally went unseen can now be found by simply performing a Google search or looking up the candidate's Facebook page. Interviewees are oftentimes on their best behavior for an interview, which can be quite deceptive in the employer's eye; so what better way to find how a candidate really acts than to look into their personal life?

Author of The 4-Hour Work Week, Tim Ferriss said,

*Personal branding is about managing your name—even if you don't own a business—in a world of misinformation, disinformation, and semi-permanent Google records. Going on a date? Chances are that your "blind" date has Googled your name. Going to a job interview? Ditto.*

The internet is not just where a person goes to store personal information. The internet is where consumers, businesses, and governments alike go to *find* information. If you want to find out how reliable a product is, most you go online to read the reviews for a product. The same goes for people as products.

Every employee at a company is a product of their own making. And now with the popularity of social networking, hiring managers are able to see first-hand what kind of a product you've turned out to be.

## **The Internet & Job Searching**

Much of the HR world acknowledges the inadequacies of the resume. While it still maintains a longstanding tradition of being the best way to gauge applicant experience, it is still too limited in the information that can be effectively shared. Back when the internet was not an available resource, many businesspeople relied more on their ability to learn more about a person through simple observation.

Henry Ford was reputed as a brilliant engineer, an ideal individual to work for in his day and age. He was truly an amazing innovator, developing the first automobile assembly line. This allowed him to reduce labor costs and establish the huge auto-centric economy of the USA. While he was a highly intellectual individual, he had several homemade rules of thumb which he applied to business tactics, most famously being his tasting test.

Either during an applicant's interview or when determining a candidate's worthiness of a promotion, he would invite them to lunch at the company's executive dining room. He would then observe how the young man approached his meal. If he tasted his food before applying salt and pepper, he got the job or received the promotion. If he salted first, his career with Ford was essentially over.

While this is a rather drastic approach to hiring and promotions, it demonstrated Ford's approach to running a business. The key message was to test your theory before committing to a course of action. Such small tests can save employers a lot of grief, especially nowadays. In this world of hiring and job seeking, employers have found new ways to better know you before even committing to an interview.

For those moments when the resume paints you out to be an ideal candidate, employers go online to find out more about you, a strategy that more than 9 out of every 10 employers use to screen employees (Reppler). The internet is a veritable treasure trove of your personal information just waiting to be tapped. Anything about anyone can be found online, sold either free or to the highest bidder.

In many cases, that information can be found for free through your interactions on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. And considering how easily your information can be found, employers just as easily reject candidates based on what they saw on these social networking sites.

## **Job Screening & Social Networks**

In a recent media craze, employers have been asking applicants for their Facebook password. While this might be viewed as a breach of privacy, on the internet everything is fair game. Hiring managers base much of their decision on whether to hire a person through an applicant's online interactions. Whether you use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Flickr, Reddit, Digg, YouTube, or any other major network, that information is available to the public. Your current boss can find that information just as easily as an interviewer.

As valued as privacy may be to people, anything you post online is not truly private. Employers see how you as an extension to your place of employment, which means they expect you to behave even in your personal life. Employers will disqualify you as an applicant based on things you may think are your personal business, such as:

- Posting inappropriate photos
- Posting inappropriate comments
- Posting content about drinking
- Posting content about using drugs
- Posting negative comments about a previous employer
- Demonstrating poor communication skills
- Making discriminatory comments
- Lying about your qualifications
- Sharing confidential information from a previous employer

At the same time, employers are also more likely to hire you based on what can be found about you online. In a study conducted by Reppler, the top reasons employers cited hires based on social media profiles were:

- Gave a positive impression of their personality and organizational fit
- Profile supported their professional qualifications
- Profile showed candidate was creative
- Showed solid communications skills
- Profile showed candidate was well-rounded
- Candidate had good references posted by others
- Candidate received awards and accolades

Social media is a very powerful influencing factor when it comes to the hiring process. When employers can easily find you online, it's too easy to simply pass up the opportunity to know more. One in three employers have rejected a candidate based simply on what they found about them online (CareerEnlightenment.com). Said Google CEO Eric Schmidt, "If you have something you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place." It becomes crucial that you be cautious in what you share online, even if it is just with friends.

While there are numerous instances in which social media can ruin employment opportunities, you can also create positive experiences. Social media hiring trends are on the rise. In 2010, more than 90 percent of hiring managers used or planned on using social networks to locate qualified candidates and make hiring decisions (CareerEnlightenment.com). Of these hiring managers, 86 percent of them use LinkedIn, 60 percent use Facebook, and 50 percent use Twitter.

The power of social media in the hiring process cannot be denied. Further research through CareerEnlightenment.com noted that 56 percent of HR professionals use networking websites to source potential candidates, and 65 percent of companies have successfully hired through social media outlets

like LinkedIn. And this number is on the rise. Odds are that if you've applied for a job, hiring managers have reviewed not only your application, but your online activity (79 percent of them).

## **The Dual Identity**

Employers expect professionalism in every avenue of life, whether it is personal or at work. While many managers won't actively monitor your Facebook profile, you need to prepare for those moments when they will, especially during the interview process. You ultimately have the choice of where you go and how you spend your time online.

Google yourself online. All it takes is one simple search, and everything about you can be found. But you have control over what content an employer sees first and makes their assessment of you. The information you share online should be reflective of the you that employers should see. Dan Schawbel, motivational speaker and personal branding guru, said it quite succinctly, "Brand yourself for the career you want, not the job you have."

You are in control of your search results. Rather than quietly submitting to the will of Google, you can make your online profiles more employer-friendly. You can create your own website and create content for it via blog posts or an online portfolio that will cast you in a positive and flattering light. Tom Peters, a personal branding strategist, adds, "All of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

It is too tempting to let your personal life leak into the internet. Be cautious in your interactions, because each of these reflects not only your personality, but your integrity. Your social network will greatly influence your ability to get a job.

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