

Most candidates know that a good resume (one that is well written, uses correct grammar, and is error-free) is an excellent way to represent them to a potential employer. But has thought been given to the candidate's public persona? In this age of instant information, hiring personnel have a broad range of sources with which to measure a candidate's professionalism and fit with a company and position.

It is both interesting and surprising to note that many candidates never consider the image they present and communicate to potential employers during the interviewing process and beyond. For example, a resume provides a contact phone number, yet when the number is called, the voicemail sounds like it was recorded in a bar or at a party. This may be appropriate for someone interviewing for a bartending position, but not for an accounting manager at a software company. Voicemail messages should clearly communicate the name in a professional voice and manner, and hold music (if any) should be consistent with the professional image the candidate wishes to present.

Another way for potential employers to research a candidate is through social networking sites such as LinkedIn, FaceBook, and MySpace.

What is social networking? A social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities via web-based services, and many times shows pictures of the person in social situations. Social networking websites are increasingly used by professionals to build their image and are no longer considered "just for kids."

According to a CareerBuilder.com Survey in September 2008, 22 percent of hiring managers said they use social networking sites to research job candidates, up from 11 percent in 2006. We also know from talking to our clients that research on social networking sites is common practice with HR teams, especially when there is more than one candidate in the running for a specific position. We found the following research from CareerBuilder staggering:

- 41% - candidate posted information about their drinking or drug usage
- 40% - candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs or information
- 29% - candidate had poor communication skills
- 28% - candidate bad-mouthed their previous company or fellow employees
- 27% - candidate lied about qualifications
- 22% - candidate used discriminatory remarks related to race, gender, religion, etc.
- 22% - candidate had screen name that was unprofessional
- 21% - candidate was linked to criminal behavior
- 19% - candidate shared confidential information from previous employers

How does social networking affect the job seeker? Social networks connect people for little to no cost and can make it easier to keep in touch with contacts around the world. In addition, some social networking, if used correctly, can give a candidate an edge over the competition by providing a non-traditional medium to promote their talents, goals, strengths, and professionalism.

The largest professional social networking site is LinkedIn which claims to have more than 20 million registered users from 150 different industries.

In CareerBuilder's survey, 24 percent of hiring managers who research job candidates via social networking sites said they found content that helped solidify their decision to hire the candidate. Top factors that influenced their hiring decision included:

- 48% - candidate's background supported their qualifications for the job
- 43% - candidate had great communication skills
- 40% - candidate was a good fit for the company's culture
- 36% - candidate's site conveyed a professional image
- 31% - candidate had great references posted about them by others
- 30% - candidate showed a wide range of interests
- 29% - candidate received awards and accolades
- 24% - candidate's profile was creative

It is important to remember these statistics when seeking a professional position and, as more and more hiring managers and recruiters use these tools, it will become even more important. Social networking sites only work for a candidate if they relate skills, accomplishments and overall fit with the potential or current employer. (Keep in mind this could apply for promotions as well!) The candidate should either remove their profile from social networking sites that are strictly personal or revamp their pages to communicate appropriate traits that you want seen by a potential employer. Also, focus on the professional network sites and developing your public persona—one that your future employer would appreciate.

#### Tips for Promoting a Professional Public Persona:

1. Have a professional resume that presents the persona you want to represent to potential employers.
2. Google yourself – see what is “out there” on the web about you. You may be amazed at what information is made public.
3. Check your social networking pages. Have someone else review them for appropriateness and relevance to potential employers.
4. Make sure your contact information is accurate. Double check phone numbers and email addresses.
5. Have an appropriate voicemail message at the contact number. Loud noise, offensive music, and obnoxious or poor language are all things to avoid in a message. It is also helpful if you indicate whether it is a confidential voicemail or email, so that recruiters or HR personnel may leave you a detailed message.
6. Have a neutral email address. Does your email name communicate the public persona you are trying to create? Take a look, we have seen some very interesting ones!
7. For those bloggers out there, know that your blogs may be accessible by potential employers. Make sure that your message is not offensive to companies you may want to attract as a potential employer.
8. Be prepared. Have a quick answer for common questions, such as “What kind of position are you looking for?” That way, when you tell friends, family, and others that you are looking, you have a well-prepared paragraph.
9. Make sure your references are aware of the type of positions for which you are applying. References are extremely important in the hiring process, and you want them to support the professional persona you are communicating.

10. Put yourself together well. Even in a “casual” company environment, you should dress appropriately for an interview and the position for which you are interviewing. You want to be a candidate for the job, not “What Not to Wear”!