Managing Your Online Image

Step 1: Google Yourself!

In today's world, your online presence is a part of your image as a job seeker. Employers know that a quick Google search can yield information (good or bad) that is not in your application, and that they can use this information to learn a lot more about you. As you begin looking for internships or jobs, a critical early step is searching for yourself online to see what comes up. If the results are inconsistent with the image you want employers to see, do your best to remove or edit content, or try adding materials that are more consistent with the image you want to project. Pages that are visited more frequently tend to come up first in a search, so you can make content more prominent by visiting the webpage more often yourself.

Step 2: Watch Out For Social Media!

Many people view their social media accounts as platforms for personal communication. However, employers have started looking at prospective employees' accounts more frequently as part of their hiring processes. Research on employers shows that a majority have had social media content affect their hiring decisions; most often convincing them *not* to hire an otherwise promising candidate. This means that you need to approach social media with an eye to your professional image, as well as your personal one.

Do You Have:

Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	Instagram
Pinterest	Videos	Google +	Personal Blog

If you are on social media and in the job search process, you need to take the time to review your accounts and ensure that you are only sharing things that you are comfortable with your future employer seeing.

Common Social Media Pitfalls:

According to research, employers are most concerned when they find pictures, posts, or other content that include:

- Drug use
- Sexually explicit content
- Discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

Many employers also have negative views of:

- Profanity
- Alcohol use (even if you are 21!)
- Posts about guns
- Posts that denigrate past supervisors, coworkers, or jobs
- Poor spelling and grammar

Even if you know that the content you post is harmless or a joke, remember that prospective employers may not see it that way. When you review posts and pictures, ask yourself how a stranger would see them. And do not limit this scrutiny to your own posts; also consider your connections' comments on your posts and the content that they tag you in, because who you choose to associate with can also shape employers' views of you.

Privacy Settings:

The best way to ensure that your social media presence does not negatively impact your job or internship search is to only keep or post content that you feel comfortable with the entire world seeing. However, using privacy settings can offer a significant measure of protection, as well. For every social media platform you use, you need to understand how each one's privacy settings protect you- and how they cannot.

> **Example:** While a private Twitter account may keep your Tweets from being directly shared by others, your followers can still share them through screenshots.

Your privacy settings may not protect you adequately if content about you is owned by a friend or connection. If one of your connections shares something about you on social media that you feel uncomfortable with potential employers seeing, ask them to remove it, or at least untag yourself. Also remember, if one of your social media connections (like an Amherst alum) is connected to your prospective employer, that person might be in a position to share information about your activity that you would prefer stay private.

Many people keep two Twitter accounts, one for personal use (often with private settings) and one for professional use (often with public settings). It is fine to have a personal account that is public, but if you are relying on a pseudonym to prevent employers from finding you, you need to be aware that they can still identify you if the Twitter account is linked to the same email you provide on your résumé.

Step 3: Create a Positive Social Media Image

At this point, you may be thinking you want to lock your social media up as tightly as possible so that employers cannot see anything you share. A lack of online presence can be a red-flag for employers, though, particularly if social media is important to your field. It also prevents you from using social media to promote yourself through your job or internship search process.

When employers look at your social media, they want to find:

- Proof of professional experiences (that your resume is consistent with online information)
- Your demonstrated interest in their field or profession
- Evidence that suggests you are a good cultural fit with their offices

Employers are most likely to look at your presence on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Here are some basic tips for making these platforms appealing to employers:

- Profile picture: LinkedIn is a professional platform, so use a professional-looking headshot. Facebook and Twitter can be more casual, but choose a photo that is work appropriate.
- Make sure that the employment information you share on your resume is consistent across your social media platforms.
- Follow brands, companies, and people, as well as join groups, that relate to your career interests. This makes your interest apparent, and keeps you informed about trends and hot topics in your industry.
- Post articles related to your career interests to let people know what you are passionate about.

Other forms of social media: While Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and blogs are not as commonly searched for by employers, this could change in the future or be a common search for your specific industry. They may also come up when someone does a general search for you online. Each can be used to market your professional interests in different and creative ways; however, it is fine if they do not connect with your professional interests at all. Just be sure that content is appropriate and will not raise any flags with potential employers.

Step 4: Engage with Social Media

When used strategically, social media can be a powerful tool in your job or internship search process. To use it effectively, move beyond following and observing career related content; start *engaging* with it. Here are some tips aimed at LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter:

- When you post an article about your career interests, share your opinion about it or ask a question to engage others in conversation.
- When brands, companies, or people post content that interests you, Tweet back or post a response to engage them in conversation.
- Retweet and share posts that you think are interesting; this is flattering to the original poster!

Using social media to engage this way is useful on several levels. First, it is a great learning opportunity because you can ask questions and receive answers from a broad spectrum of professionals. Second, it lets people know which areas and topics interest you, and what your opinions are. This is a great opportunity to show prospective employers how well you understand industry issues and articulate your thoughts. Also, engaging in conversations with other members of professional groups or brand followers can help you create new connections with those who are intrigued by your opinions. These connections may be able to provide you with valuable support throughout a job or internship search and into a promising career.

Critical words of caution: Engaging in conversations on social media can be highly valuable, but can also be damaging if not approached carefully. So remember:

- Make sure you fully understand a conversation before joining in, so that you can make intelligent, well-informed comments.
- Think critically about all comments before you post them! Do they fit with the online image you want?
- *Always* be polite to others, even when you are disagreeing with them. Rude comments can alarm prospective employers, and you never know when the person with whom you are communicating may be in a position to influence your career advancement in the future!