

Social networking sites are great for keeping in touch with friends, but do you know who else is looking at your details – be wary, take note!



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Amazing People
3 Brook House Barns, As-
ton on Carrant, Tewkes-
bury GL20 8HL 01684
772888

www.amazingpeople.co.uk
hello@amazingpeople.co.uk

Can Facebook and MySpace damage your career prospects?

It's great to stay in touch, and Facebook, MySpace, Live Journal, Bebo etc mean that you can keep up with your friends and send messages so you all know what's going on, but just as your friends can access your page so can your potential boss and the HR department.

You Google them, they Google you

As a career coach I encourage my clients to Google the name of the person that will be interviewing them or their boss, so that they can find out a conference paper they may have written, or media quotes thus helping them plan what is most relevant to talk about to enhance rapport and sell themselves better.

However it also works the other way. Many companies will now do a background check using Google and Yahoo, especially on graduate applicants but they are beginning to do it on potential employees from all levels before the job offer.

According to a survey of 102 executive recruiters by ExecuNet, an executive job search and networking organisation, 75% of recruiters use search engines to uncover information about candidates and 26% of applicants have been eliminated because of information they found on line.

Can they really find my secrets?

What they find is not details on sporting achievements and articles written for student papers but instead details of how the person got drunk, the drugs they take and satirical essays about the university staff.

It can seem like a great joke to share this sort of material with your friends, and at 18 people rarely are thinking about their future career search. However, when found by a potential employer it can destroy the carefully crafted image via CV, application form and interview.

And the impact on my career could be ...

At New York University, recruiters from 30 companies told Trudy G Steinfield, Executive Director at the Centre for Career Development that they do look at these sites and if they find something questionable about the applicants lifestyle or values this is a red flag to a potential job offer.

Just a quick glance on MySpace yesterday found many sites with people looking like they were about to pass out via drink or drugs, and sites where you can see the student in a provocative pose.

Not all companies will use these social networking sites to search for details, but with so many doing it, shouldn't you make sure whatever you have written there, or in forums is something you'd be happy for a potential recruiter to see. At least with facebook you can be careful who you allow to be a friend.

It's blogs as well

Blogs can also be damaging – Catherine blogs about her life, living and working in France at <http://www.petiteanglaise.com/>. However, when her employers saw what she wrote, she was sacked. In this instance she did win an appeal, plus got a book deal, but it might not be such a happy ending for you.

To find out what's being said about you, you can set up a Google alert on your name so you get an email whenever you have been mentioned on the web or in a blog.

Brought to you by Denise Taylor, Chartered Occupational Psychologist. Denise is a careers expert who specialises in helping individuals achieve career satisfaction and to take a systematic approach to job search.

If you need help in choosing a career path, getting the job you want or to discuss how to deal with a challenging work situation, do get in touch.

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