

Social Media and the Executive in Transition – Nigel Leadbitter, Executive Director

Some time ago I was leading a workshop for a client prior to the merger of two businesses. Through the merger process it was expected that a fair percentage of the workshop participants, including members of the leadership team, would transition out of the business and find themselves in the market for a new role. The discussion turned to how recruiters and prospective employers now use the web to research candidates. A simple Google search could turn up embarrassing Facebook photos or angry rants on Twitter, or posts on blogs about past employers. “That’s not fair” was the cry, “that’s our personal life”. Well, the simple fact of the matter is that as soon as we post **anything** on the net, on social media platforms, forums or seemingly innocuous sites, the material lands in the public domain and is open for others to read. Even genuine, thoughtful comments on forums can end up in debates that spiral out of your control. Remember the childhood game of “Chinese Whispers?”

Just try “Googling” yourself and see what pops up!



And once that unappealing page is posted to the Internet, it doesn't really go away, even if it is deleted. Search engines keep a copy, called a cache, of everything posted to the Web. Deleted pages live on in cyberspace unless you specifically ask search engines to remove them from their caches.

So what's a Web-savvy executive to do? First of all, **think before you post**. Ask yourself, “Would my family be okay with this?” Web experts recommend using the privacy settings on social networking sites to restrict who can add you as a friend, make comments, or view your photos. Search for your name and your email address to find out what a potential employer might be learning about you, and if you find anything that might raise eyebrows, take the time to have it removed from the search engines.

Control your Personal Brand

Some things you can do to prevent your personal life from spilling into the job search process are:

- Remove anything on social media sites that may not picture you in a good light. This includes photos, comments and personal views. You can set your profile to private so the public will only see basic information about you. It might not be a good idea if they see you with a drink in your hand in a bar or something.
- Update all business media sites such as LinkedIn with an updated resume, pertinent business information and a tasteful photo.
- Do not use silly email addresses like “fuzzybear” or “hot2trot” or something to that effect. You will want an email address that is much more professional.

The good news is that your appearance on the internet, properly groomed, can benefit an executive in transition. A thoughtful personal Web page or blog can highlight extracurricular activities or demonstrate your involvement in a particular field.

Remember, your internet presence becomes a kind of character reference, for better or worse.

Make sure it's for the better.