A 10 step guide to managing your social media presence

Social media can be a great way to promote yourself to potential employers and can greatly aid your job search. However, there are a number of potential pitfalls which candidates should be aware of.

Your profile on a social media site may be the first time an employer finds out about your life outside of work, but some people remain naively unaware of how they may be portraying an unflattering version of themselves to both existing and potential employers.

It has become increasingly common for employers to check a person's profile before offering them a job. Whilst the ethics of this have been debated for some time now, it is not against the law for employers to do this.

Therefore, it is a good idea to check your on-line presence before you start applying for jobs. Here we outline some simple steps to help you ensure that employers are not put off hiring you by your on-line presence:

Step 1 – Google yourself

Start by searching for yourself on-line to see what would show up if an employer Googled you. Check Google Images to see what photos of you are publicly available. This will show you which sites you need to adjust your privacy settings on (see point 3 below) and/or edit/delete.

Step 2 – Check your privacy settings

Check your privacy settings for each social media account you hold and set them so that only people you know are able to see more than your basic profile. Remember you can control when someone else tags you in a photo or comment.

Step 3 – Delete unused accounts

Take the opportunity to delete any accounts that you no longer use. That way you can keep track of your on-line presence much more easily.

Step 4 – Edit and/or delete questionable comments, posts and photos

Your history on social media is kept indefinitely unless you delete it. What you once considered amusing and appropriate may no longer be the case. Employers will be put off by offensive content and the use of profanities.

Step 5 – Be mindful of spelling and grammar

Poor grammar and spelling might not matter to your friends but could affect your job chances so be mindful of this when posting or commenting.

Step 6 – Check your profile picture

Ensure that any publicly available profile picture is appropriate and shows you in a professional light.

Step 7 – Be aware of your social media handle and your email addresses

What can be amusing for personal use may not be how you wish to be seen by employers.

Step 8 – Check who and how you are being mentioned on social media

It is possible to set up a Google Alert for your name (or something more specific if you have a common name) so that you are sent an alert every time someone mentions you.

Step 9 – Continue to be mindful of any future social media activity

Don't rely on the fact that you have adjusted your privacy settlings. Friends can, and do, share and retweet your posts and comments to people you may not know.

Step 10 – Not just a lesson for social media

Remember - If it's not something you would say to your colleagues in front of your boss, don't say it in a public forum!

Finally, it's not all doom and gloom. Whilst there are pitfalls to using social media, it can also be a very useful tool for promoting yourself to potential employers. Sites such as Linkedin can be very useful in this respect. You can upload details of your work experience, skills, expertise, education and qualifications, connect with people you know, and network with people in the industries and job roles you are interested in.