

## **Be Aware of, Control & Maintain your Online Reputation**

In today's digital world, how you are perceived online may have a profound impact on whether or not you receive that elusive job offer or the ability to earn new business. Your online participation can provide a potential employer or client a different perspective and a glimpse of perhaps who you truly are. Obviously, we are going to be on our "best behavior" in an introductory meeting, but who are you when the formality of the meeting is over and the "spotlight" is turned off? Are you that same person? Perhaps yes, but possibly no.

Managing online (and offline) how others perceive you is critical! It's important to look at yourself like a brand or as a company with a product or service to sell. Your career may be your biggest financial resource, more valuable than any single item you own. Think of it as a public relations campaign or running for an elected position. It's all about perception, credibility and results!

As the owner of a national executive recruiting business, who we present to our clients is a direct reflection of our ability to address their staffing needs. Prior to submittal, that candidate needs to be fully screened technically, but equally as important, their intangible qualifications are screened. In addition to checking references, we also view the candidate's online participation and how they are perceived. Do our conversations and their online "personality" align? Hopefully!

Today, most hiring officials, human resources, and recruiters utilize social and business networking sites as a tool to locate candidates and to observe behavior. When I receive a message from someone I don't know, prior to calling back, I'll do an online search of their name and phone number. If they appear credible, I'll call back, if I read questionable content or comments, I may not.

Don't assume that because you've set your settings to private on Facebook and other sites that all of your information will remain "private". Keep abreast of the latest settings to make sure you're in control of what information is available to others.

Protecting and defending your business online is imperative. Regularly type in your name or company on a search engine and see what the results reveal. Companies that ignore damaging remarks or comments are taking a big risk. Be alert, vigilant and responsive to criticism of your company, products and services – if not, it could affect your bottom line.

The danger is growing as negative comments are increasingly being posted online in blogs, chat rooms, online industry forum boards and consumer protection and public service sites. These negative comments will stay online for a very long time and are extremely difficult (and expensive) to remove.

In addition, how your team behaves outside of the office (and online) is technically their business, but be aware that they are still a reflection of you and questionable behavior can easily be carried over and possibly effect your business.

**Ways in which to enhance your online reputation:**

- Post your individual/company's profile on several social/business networking sites. Since you control the content, it can't be misconstrued and will come up as a top search engine result. Make sure what you are putting out there is exactly how you want to be perceived.
- Become a member of relevant online groups and participate in the discussions. This is your chance to shine!
- On your website or through your advertisements, broadcast your most credible accomplishments, accolades or testimonials.
- Become a member of credible and industry specific associations.
- Increase your online presence by writing relevant blogs.
- Write letters to local publications and suggest interesting/relevant content to publish for their readers.

If, by chance, there is some negativity floating on the internet about you or your business, incorporating all of these positive elements may dilute the one negative. It may also "push" that negative result away from the first few pages. Try directly addressing a negative blog posting with a professionally written rebuttal by you or a trusted client. As a last resort, there are companies that specialize in protecting your online identity and help to eliminate disparaging content.

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