

To reveal or not to reveal: the MySpace dilemma

Ask my mom what a Social-Networking Website is and she will reply, "What's that? Is that one of those things on a computer?" Ask a teen or Generation X'er and they will quickly reply that they have a MySpace, Facebook, or other online account to share pictures and keep in touch with their friends and family around the United States (Mom & Dad typically not included!)

When I was going through high school in the early nineties, very few classrooms were equipped with computers. None of us had email addresses, much less an online account that revealed our personal mug shots and those of our friends, along with blogs of our deepest thoughts for the world to peruse. Fast forward to today and all high school and college classrooms are hardwired for the Internet, and most of them have WIFI for students to access the Web on their laptops.

Easy access to the Internet and innovative websites such as MySpace and Facebook have revolutionized how teens and young adults express themselves and communicate with the world. This new medium is fascinating that it allows us to build stronger friendships with others in our local community. The digital highway breaks down physical barriers, allowing us to expand our potential circle of friends across America and around the globe at the simple click of a friend request!

Several of my friends in my Sunday school class use Facebook to reconnect with high school classmates who have moved from our area. One buddy has used his Facebook account to reconnect with his social side since his recent divorce. At last count, he is up to 138 "Friends" (me not included, but more on that in a moment.) Online Social-Networking Websites can help us get more connected with friends, but can they help advance our career in the process?

My business and information system background has made me turn a cautious eye to these websites. I teach Business Administration and Microsoft Office courses for Remington College in Shreveport. My family, friends, and students look to me as technical support for their computer issues. Many of my friends and students are amazed that I do not have a personal online account. I am protective of my personal and professional image and have decided not to open an account.

I have long preached to my students the importance of positive first impressions. In person, we have five seconds or less to impress a new acquaintance with our attire, demeanor, and smile. A professional image is all too important when seeking new employment. We must do everything we can to protect our image, including our online image, especially during these adverse economic times.

Many young people are publishing their personal information and photos online for anyone to read. I was curious to see how many Remington students have an online account, so I surveyed our student body. Fifty-six percent of our students have a web page on one of the many online sites. The most popular site was MySpace, with ninety percent, and numerous students also had a page on Facebook. Here is a breakdown of their responses:

MySpace	90%
Facebook	29%

myYearbook	3%
BlackPlanet	5%
Other	45%

One class surprised me in that not one of them had an online profile, so I praised them and encouraged them not to create one.

Many of the pages I have viewed on MySpace are in poor taste and could come back to harm the poster in the future. In my previous management positions we routinely searched the Internet looking for information on applicants for our positions. The online profile is quickly becoming the next impression of an applicant after the submission of a resume. I think that many young people could be harming their future employment possibilities.

Some of the pages I found made me think differently of the applicants for my vacancies. I will never forget the photos of a young lady who was clearly intoxicated, wearing a tiara on her head with a beer in one hand and cigarette in the other. Needless to say, she was not one of the 80 applicants I called for a personal interview.

Many people are looking for new job opportunities. Employers receive tons of applications for their job postings. Employers must look for ways to narrow down the pile of resumes to a more manageable list of people they wish to interview personally. Online searches are becoming more routine in helping narrow down the list of quality applicants.

When I get on my soap box with new students about MySpace pages, many of them quickly tell me that they have their account set to private. Only their friends can view their information. That may be true, but nothing stops your friend from downloading your pictures and uploading them on their page that is not set to private!

You never know where your pictures or information will show up. One of my computer buddies is constantly emailing me photos of people that he downloaded from MySpace or Facebook. I would be embarrassed if those types of photos of me were emailed or posted on someone's profile. The way to protect yourself is not to post them in the first place.

I encourage you to pull up your profile and ask yourself: "Would I hire this person?" "Would my boss hire this person?" "Would the industry I want to get into one day want to hire the person portrayed on this profile?" If the answer to any of these questions is "No!" you may need to make some modifications to improve your future hire-ability.

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