Using Social Media

The University of Chicago Graham School Career Resources

Social media can be a useful tool in your job search, but there are certain precautions you should take.

Managing Your Social Media Presence
Social media tools are not necessarily “good” or “bad.” Like any tool, they can be beneficial or detrimental depending on how you use them. As social media tools become more prevalent and are adapted for professional purposes, you should become familiar with both their advantages and possible pitfalls.

Social media is being utilized in nearly every facet of professional and personal interactions. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, You Tube, and news feeds have made it easy for people to connect online. The upside of this is that it’s easy to build and expand your network, which can help you in your job search.

Your Social Media Activity Can Impact Your Job Prospects
The problem, however, is that a lot of what is posted online can be easily found by colleagues, supervisors and prospective employers. You may have posted a photo or a status update – something you only ever meant to be viewed by personal friends – and people you’ve never met can view those postings and judge you for them.

According to Careerbuilder.com, 34% of employers have rejected prospective candidates based on something they found on Facebook. To avoid missing out on an employment opportunity, here are a few social media dos and don’ts to keep in mind.

Do Use Social Media to Your Advantage
If you haven’t already, consider setting up a LinkedIn profile. As a professionally-focused site, LinkedIn can help you build and expand your network, advertise yourself to potential employers, and stay informed on the latest issues and trends in your industry by joining professional groups.

A lot of companies and organizations now have a Twitter account. Consider “following” them so you can learn more about them and even get a heads-up when jobs are posted.
Do Clean Up Your On-Line Presence

Many employers conduct a basic internet search on their job candidates to learn more about them. Make sure that what they find is positive and reflects well on you. Google yourself to see what pops up in your search. If there are distasteful images or comments that you've posted or friends have attributed to you, take them down and ask your friends to remove any pictures or comments that you wouldn't want a prospective employer to see.

If you have dabbled with many different forms of social networking sites but are no longer active on certain sites, make sure to remove all content and disable your account.

Update any professional networking sites like LinkedIn to make sure your contact and current employment information is up to date and accurate. The last thing you want is to list an email that is no longer functioning or for an employer to see a 3-year unexplained gap in employment. Also, get rid of friends or random people you might have added on your LinkedIn network who aren't really there to help you with your career development. LinkedIn isn't for personal socializing, so if you're linked with people who make personal comments, ask them to stop or just delete them and add them on your Facebook account.

Don't Overexpose Yourself

Limit the number of social media sites on which you're active.

Having too much of an online presence could mean you’re not cultivating your interpersonal skills, which are highly valued in the workplace. No matter where you work, you need to be able to interact with people offline as well as with people who aren’t as familiar with social media as you are. Employers want to hire people they can trust to converse with clients, coworkers and senior-level staff or board members.

Do Guard Your Privacy

Be selective about the people you invite and accept on your networks. Keep your personal and professional networks separate. It’s great to be friendly with people at work, but don’t be Facebook friends with them. The last thing you want to happen is for a co-worker or supervisor to read a negative comment that you write on your “wall” after a bad day on the job.

Be vigilant about maintaining your privacy online. Make sure you secure your privacy settings on Facebook and other social media sites so that only trusted friends can see your pictures, your wall and updates.

Do Be Discrete

If you maintain an online blog, remember that strangers can access your page just by conducting an internet search. Make sure you don’t leak any confidential materials, information or stories from your workplace. Even if you think you’ve done a careful job of maintaining anonymity and concealing the identity of other people, the cost is too high to take the risk.

With the advent of Twitter and enhancements to other social media outlets, it's easy for people to cite or re-post something they find online with their own comments/spin attached to the post. You can't control what other people say about your posts, so be careful about what you put online.
Do Mind Your “Netiquette”
Just like you would in personal interactions, remember to mind your manners online. Don’t use informal greetings like “Hey!” or “Hi there” when contacting someone you know in a professional context.

Be careful about contacting people online when you’re not personal friends with them. If there’s someone you’d like to be introduced to, don’t “friend” or “poke” them on Facebook. They are probably trying to keep their personal and professional contacts separate and may view friend requests as unprofessional.

Instead, see if someone you know personally can provide an introduction, either in person or online. If this isn’t possible, send the person a brief, professionally-worded message on LinkedIn or other professional-focused site conveying why you are making contact. If the person doesn’t respond within two weeks, send a gentle and brief follow up message. If you still receive no response, let it go (and don’t take it personally). Some people simply prefer not to connect with people online; they’d rather their initial connections take place in person. Other people simply don’t have time to respond to all the online messages they receive.