

# Digital Dirt and Social Web sites

*According to a 2005 survey of 102 executive recruiters by ExecuNet, an executive job-search and networking organization, 75% of recruiters use search engines to uncover information about candidates, and 26% of recruiters have eliminated candidates because of information found online.*

To you, social web sites are private spaces where you can interact with friends, acquaintances, and even people you have never met in the open, multimedia style of the online world. To employers social web sites are a potential liability. Think of it this way, when you work for a company or attend a school you become an extension of the organization. People who then interact with you may form their opinions of that organization based on how you represent yourself - both in person, and ever increasingly, online.

Anyone who uses the internet to post personal information needs to understand that once posted anyone with an internet browser could potentially find the content. Knowing this, there are some things you should remember before you hit the submit button:

1. Live-journal, MySpace, facebook, LinkedIN, flickr and even blogs are all public domain, unless you take the precautions to prevent them being so. Once in the public domain, they become by default your public face to people who don't know you. What does your facebook profile say about you?
2. Just like police record checks, contacting references, and background checks a potential employer can "check you out" on the web. When you Google yourself, what comes up?
3. Think before posting pictures. Remember that a "picture is worth 1,000 words". While they may be fun at the time, pictures from parties or other social events that feature alcohol, risqué situations, or obvious illegal activities don't exactly portray the best image. Do you have any pictures online that you wouldn't want your mother to see?

It is much easier than you think to gain access to social web sites, even when you take precautions. For example in facebook, employers, faculty members, and others who have an alumni/college address (or an intern with one!) can potentially gain access to information you thought was only available to your peers. Remember to set your control settings to "friends only".

## **How do I clean up my digital dirt?**

### **1. Search yourself**

What is in cyberspace about you right now? Use a popular search engine (Google.com, Yahoo.com or MSN.com are good ones to start with) and type your name in quotation marks. What comes up? If you find something you'd rather the world didn't see, contact the site's owner and ask that it be removed. Sometimes this is not possible so then you might want to...

### **2. Clean up your Facebook (MySpace, Flickr, whatever!)**

Remember that recruiters, faculty and staff can look you up if they attend(ed) your school. Anyone can have access to free sites like MySpace. When evaluating your information, look at everything – groups, wall posts, and especially photos! Make sure to set your privacy settings so that only other students, or only confirmed friends, can view your information. If you are really worried about what these sites say about you, the best bet is to just get rid of them all together. The delete button can be your friend!

### **3. Bury your digital dirt/increase your online presence**

This involves covering up your digital dirt by crowding it out with positive information. Search engines typically rank their results based on the number of sites that link to those pages. The more links, the higher the search ranking. Suggestions: Start a career-based/professional blog or career-based web portfolio. Join online groups related to your career choice and make posts in their chat groups. The key is to keep the new information professional and make sure the pages you want recruiters to see have more links to them than the pages you'd rather keep hidden.