**Keep It Clean: Social Media Screenings Gain in Popularity**

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If you think that your Facebook and Twitter profiles won't be looked at when you're applying for a job, think again. The vast majority of employers are now searching through candidates' social media accounts as part of the hiring process, new research finds.

A study from CareerBuilder revealed that 70 percent of employers now use social media to screen job candidates before hiring them, up from 60 percent a year ago and 11 percent in 2006.

Many employers are also moving beyond social networks when checking out potential employees online. Nearly 70 percent are using online search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing to research candidates as well, compared to just 59 percent last year.

While the fear of having something embarrassing or negative discovered might tempt some job candidates to try and completely erase their online persona, employers say that strategy can backfire for many job seekers. One-quarter of hiring managers expect candidates to have some sort of online presence, and nearly 60 percent are less likely to call someone in for interview if they can't find them online

"This shows the importance of cultivating a positive online persona," Rosemary Haefner, chief human resources officer at CareerBuilder, said in a statement. "Job seekers should make their professional profiles visible online and ensure any information that could negatively impact their job search is made private or removed."

Despite what job candidates might think, most employers aren't scouring the internet looking for reasons to not hire them. Most employers are actually trying to find reasons to hire someone.

The study found that 61 percent of employers conduct social screenings to look for information that supports a candidate's qualifications for the job, 50 percent want to make sure the candidate has a professional online persona, and 37 percent want to see what other people are posting about the candidate. Just 24 percent of those surveyed check social media to search for reasons not to hire someone.

Having their social media pages investigated has paid off for a number of job seekers. The research shows that 44 percent of hiring managers found content on a social networking site that caused them to hire the candidate. Specifically, 38 percent said they found information that supports the candidate's professional qualifications, 37 percent discovered the perspective employee had great communication skills and 36 percent were impressed with their professional image.

Additionally, 35 percent thought a candidate displayed excellent creativity.

While they might not be searching for anything negative, more than half of those surveyed said they have found something during their social screenings that led them to not hire someone. The leading types of posts and behavior that left employers with a bad impression include:

* Candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information.
* Candidate posted information about them drinking or using drugs.
* Candidate had discriminatory comments related to race, gender, religion.
* Candidate bad-mouthed their previous company or fellow employees.
* Candidate lied about qualifications.
* Candidate had poor communication skills.
* Candidate was linked to criminal behavior.
* Candidate shared confidential information from previous employers.
* Candidate’s screen name was unprofessional.
* Candidate lied about an absence.
* Candidate posted too frequently.
* Professionals shouldn't ease up on ensuring their online presence is a positive once they land a job. The study found that 51 percent of employers use social networking sites to research current employees. Of those, 34 percent have found content that caused them to discipline, or even fire, an employee.

The need to hide or remove any inappropriate content should be obvious, but having a clean and private profile doesn't demonstrate who you are, and may even suggest you have something to hide, said Laura Betourne, a social media specialist at Uproar PR.

"Employers with a strong company culture are looking at more than just your job experience," Betourne told Business News Daily. "Use your personal accounts to convey your personality, and share your hobbies and favorite pastimes."

Betourne said it's important that job seekers and employees conduct a Google search of themselves to look for any old social-media accounts they have forgotten about.

"Most importantly, don't forget to search the Google images," Betourne said. "It's possible there are photos from your social media accounts you may have thought were private, and do not want popping up on the first page of the search results."

The study was based on surveys of 2,300 hiring managers and human resource professionals across a variety of industries and company sizes in the private sector.

*Additional reporting by Nicole Fallon. Some source interviews were conducted for a previous version of this article.*