

Take charge of your online reputation

Chances are you already have an online reputation, even if you do not know it.

On the Internet, you create an image of yourself through the information you share in blogs, comments, tweets, snapshots, videos, and links. Others add their own opinions (good or bad), which contribute to your reputation.

Anyone can find this information and use it to make judgments about you. For example, [research commissioned by Microsoft](#) in December 2009 found that of the U.S. hiring managers and job recruiters surveyed, 79% routinely review online reputational information when considering job applicants.

Most of those surveyed count online reputation as one of their top selection criteria. In fact, 70% of the U.S. hiring managers in the study they have rejected candidates based on what they found. Top disqualifiers included unsuitable photos and videos, concerns about the applicant's lifestyle, and inappropriate comments.

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Find out what is on the Internet about you

Use search engines

Type your first and last name into several popular search engines. Search for images as well as text.

Be specific to increase your search effectiveness. Put quotation marks around your name. Specify the city where you live, your employer, or other keywords that apply only to you.

Avoid searching for national identity numbers or Social Security numbers. If you see these (or other sensitive data like credit card numbers, grades, or health information) in search results, ask the Web site owner to remove the data immediately.

Search all variations of your name. If you have ever used a different name or nickname, if you use your middle name or initial, or if your name is frequently misspelled, check these as well. Include personal domain names (for example, yourname.com) in your search.

Check sites you frequent. Search online directories and sites that compile public records, genealogy sites, the Web sites of organizations to which you belong or donate time or money, and the like.

Search blogs and social networks

Review what others have posted about you in comments, pictures, or videos. Explore their blogs, personal pages on social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Orkut, Qzone, Twitter), or photo-sharing sites like Flickr and Snapfish. (Parts of these sites are inaccessible to many search engines, so you must look separately.)

Evaluate your online reputation

After you have gathered this information, think about the story it tells.

Does it reflect the way you want others to perceive you? If not, what is missing?

Is it accurate? If not, what should be deleted or corrected?

Do you need more than one online profile—whether professional, personal, or for an area of interest, like a hobby or volunteer work? If so, is it okay to mix information from different profiles?

Do you want your profiles to be public or more private?

Your answers to these questions are important because information online is searchable, often permanent, and may be seen by anyone on the Internet.

Unlike data stored on paper, online information can be aggregated by Internet search engines and other tools, which makes it easier for others to put together their own idea of who you are.

Web sites may archive what you have posted and data they have collected from you. Friends (or ex-friends) may divulge it; malicious programmers and security lapses may expose it.

Protect your online reputation

Act online in a manner that reflects the reputation you want to earn—whether you are building on an existing reputation, discarding an old persona, or creating a new one.

Think before you share

Before you put anything online, think about what you are posting, who you are sharing it with, and how this will reflect on your reputation. Would you be comfortable if others saw it? Or saw it ten years from now?

When you choose photos and videos, think about how others might perceive them.

Talk with your friends about what you do and do not want shared. Ask them to remove anything that you do not want disclosed.

Treat others as you would like to be treated

Be civil in what you say and show on the Web.

Respect the reputation and privacy of others when you post anything about them (including pictures) on your own pages or on others' pages or public sites. Remove anything that does not honor this.

Stay vigilant about what the Internet is saying about you

Sign up for personal alerts. Some search engines will automatically notify you of any new mention of your name or other personal information.

From time to time, search for yourself to see what additional information has been catalogued in search engines.

Periodically reassess who has access to your pages. Friends change over time; it is okay to remove those who no longer belong.

Polish your professional reputation

Publish positive information about yourself

To be your online best, create what you want others to see. Link anything you publish to your name.

Join a professional network such as LinkedIn or CareerBuilder. Put together a robust profile and make connections with colleagues there. Ask for recommendations from those who know your work well.

Comment on professionally-oriented blogs, participate in online forums, and review books on subjects in which you have expertise.

Start a blog or register a Web site in your own name.

- Publicize yourself through clear writing, straightforward design, and high quality images.
- Write regularly (at least twice a month) on a subject about which you are knowledgeable.
- Invite visitors to make comments to create a conversation.

Consider separating professional and personal profiles

Use different e-mail addresses, screen names, blogs, and Web sites for each profile.

Do not link your real name (or sensitive personal information such as your home and e-mail addresses, phone numbers, or photos) with other profiles that you create.

Add personal information to your professional profile judiciously and only as it reflects well on that image. Avoid cross references to personal sites.

Some social networks let you build separate friends lists—for family, your sports team, work, and so on—so that you can manage what you share within one profile.

Look for **Settings** or **Options** to help you manage who can see your profile or photos, how people can search for you, who can make comments, and how to block unwanted access by others.

Restore your online reputation

If you find information about yourself that does not fit the reputation you want, act quickly. The longer it stays public, the greater the chance that it will be spread or archived.

In a respectful way, ask the person who posted it to remove it or correct an error. If it is a correction, ask him or her to include a notice (CORRECTION or UPDATED) right next to the original (incorrect) material.

If the person does not respond or refuses to help, ask the Web site administrator to remove the digital damage.

If you feel a public correction is necessary, present your case simply and politely without attacking the person.