

Your On-Line Life is Your Reputation: Dos, Don'ts and Tips

Social networking is now more important than you might think. It not only provides an easier, faster way to communicate, it also showcases the nuances of everyone's personal brand. But students often overlook the professional consequences of an on-line life. So what should they be thinking about?

"First, students should definitely realize the power, reach and possibly even the longevity of something that is posted on the Internet," said August Farnsworth University of La Verne College of Law Interim Director of Career Services and Professional Development. "What students write in the privacy of their own homes and post on their MySpace, Facebook or blogs can be viewed by someone they have never met on the other side of the world. I strongly encourage students prior to starting a job search or even before applying to college or graduate school to Google their own name, see what material comes up and clean it up if necessary."

Social networks are great tools for keeping in touch with friends and family. But often times, people make the mistake of posting comments and photographs that can get them in trouble. For example, one young man posted photos of himself dressed up for a Halloween party he attended the day before. The catch? He had called out of work saying he had a family emergency that same day. When his boss came across the photo online, the man was promptly fired.

Internet life can really hurt your reputation and put a damper on your future job or school prospects. But online profiles don't just come with brimstone and fire consequences. Your Internet presence can actually help you get that job or into the law school you've been eyeing.

Your online presence reflects your personal brand, so use it to mark yourself as a professional. Think of your online profile as an interactive resume that allows you to build depth and substance. It should be updated regularly to showcase your accomplishments and your extracurricular activities.

Writing content for other sites can brand you as an expert in a particular field or area of interest, so make sure you provide links to relevant writing. Build a reputation for thoughtful insights on blogs and forums that align with your professional goals. Be sure to avoid rants, slams and inappropriate commentary which could come back to bite you later.

And don't forget to include a link to your professional profile on your traditional resume to help direct admissions staff and potential employers. Professional networking sites such as Linked-in also allow you to post professional recommendations from advisors, professors and previous employers, which can provide further insight into who you are as an emerging professional.

"Make sure you have an appropriate e-mail address," said Kelly Fragiaco, University of La Verne College of Law Assistant Director of Admissions. "And set your spam filter to allow important admissions information for the College of Law through. Often, students think we haven't contacted them and then they find an e-mail from us in their spam filter."

Dos, Don'ts and Tips:

- Do use your online presence to build your professional reputation.
- Don't post "questionable" photos, blogs or video that can come back to haunt you; remember moral character is important for not only law school but also jobs.
- Do Google yourself to see what comes up and clean it up if necessary.
- Don't use slang or acronyms in e-mail correspondence; check your grammar and be professional.
- Don't use school or work e-mail accounts that will expire and leave potential employers or Admissions offices wondering where they can find you.
- Do make sure your social networking Web sites are marked private so only people you invite can view your page.
- Use the Internet as a tool for research; find information about law schools, potential employers and other things that can help you with your job or school applications.
- Use social networking sites to stay in touch with people you've met in school or at work.
- Proofread your e-mails and documents before sending them.
- Do set your spam filter to allow through important admissions information for the College of Law.

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Fragiacomo also recommended students keep in mind that most e-mails to admissions staff are typically printed and kept in their application file, so it's important to be courteous and respectful in your correspondence. Just because technology makes life easier, it's not okay to take it easy when it comes to your grammar, online profile and e-mails.

"The Internet is an excellent resource," Farnsworth added. "But, students have to remember that each time they communicate via e-mail to anyone, they are representing themselves."

The Brief

- The Internet is useful for research and keeping in touch with friends and family.
- Leave out slang and acronyms from e-mails; use a professional, upbeat tone and make sure your grammar is correct.
- Proofread all your e-mails and documents, this can help you catch mistakes and help your job or law school application stand out from the rest.
- Be sure that your online profile portrays a morally fit character.
- Be sure to remind your friends that you want to be seen as the perfect student or job applicant; tell them not to post embarrassing photos or leave inappropriate posts.
- Google yourself! See what comes up.
- Make sure your e-mail address is appropriate and won't expire.