

Social media 'secrets' are there for the world to read – forever

When job candidates arrive at CableOrganizer.com, their resumes are reviewed. They're interviewed by executives interested in learning about their experience, job skills and character traits.

Then, the executives head online. They'll use search engines to see what comes up about the candidate. Executives will see what's on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter. They'll review personal blogs or websites, especially if the candidate is in the creative field and executives want to review his or her portfolio of work.

Social media content that doesn't bother executives are tales of family weekends, personal successes, and business accomplishments, said Paul Holstein, VP of CableOrganizer.com, a Fort Lauderdale cable and wire management provider. Trouble areas may be tales of alcohol or drug use, tawdry relationship details or employer bashing.

"If you are hung-over from having too much to drink last night, it's probably not a good idea to write that," said Holstein, who – like most of his employees – is on Facebook. He rarely friend-requests them, for concern of intruding on their "personal space." But he will accept their requests. "I think the rule is pretty simple. Don't put anything online that you wouldn't want known in the office."

Last month, Facebook announced it had surpassed 500 million users worldwide. But, are those users' online reputations hurting their personal "brands" – and chances at new jobs or assignments?

Along with Twitter, YouTube, personal blogs and search engines, recruiters and human resource executives have a deep trove of resources to mine in performing due diligence about job candidates.

Three of four human resource executives and professional recruiters claim they research job candidates with a variety of online services, according to research from Microsoft. Candidates are scrutinized using search engines, discussion board chats, so-



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cial networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, photo- and video-sharing services like YouTube or Flickr, and their personal blogs or websites. Seven in 10 recruiters reported using information found to reject applicants.

Among the worst offenses CareerBuilder found were job candidates who bashed co-workers or clients, shared confidential information, lied about qualifications or revealed poor communications skills.

"Social media is the new way to do a background check when prospective employers are interviewing you," said Erin Glass, VP of Viziun, a Boca Raton-based Web and social media branding agency. "If you are not represented well or shown in a positive light, it is highly likely that you will not represent the company well, and therefore you may be passed over in the job hunt."

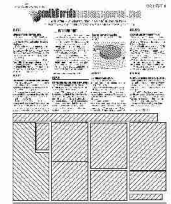
The use of social media in the vetting process is evolving, said Mildred Munjanganja, GM and VP of sales with CableOrganizer.com. Certain information found online, like religious or social views, cannot be used in hiring decisions. But, few corporate policies and procedures manuals have caught up with fast-changing technology, she said.

"If someone has a political blog, where do you draw the line?" she asked. "You can't use that information to make a hiring decision."

It's not just employees or job candidates. Business owners, who otherwise might feel their status as an entrepreneur might put their online actions above such review, still can feel the sting. Often, potential business partners, investors or even job candidates will search a business owner's online presence to determine whether aligning with that person or company will hurt or help their own brand.

Issues also go beyond what you post. Others may "tag" you in a photograph posted to Facebook. Glass will "untag" herself when that image could be misinterpreted, she said. To keep your life from becoming an "open book," mark your profile "private" to only allow friends to access the site.

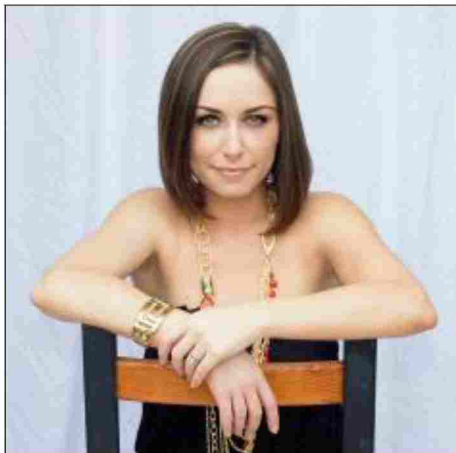
Before applying for a job, some will remove provocative or offensive photos, links and gripes about employers from their Facebook. Yet, given the permanence



of search, it's better not to post such comments in the first place, Glass said. And if you're currently employed, don't mention that you're job hunting.

"I tell my clients they shouldn't say anything online or post any pictures that they don't want on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*," Glass said. "Once you put something up in cyberspace, it is never truly gone."

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