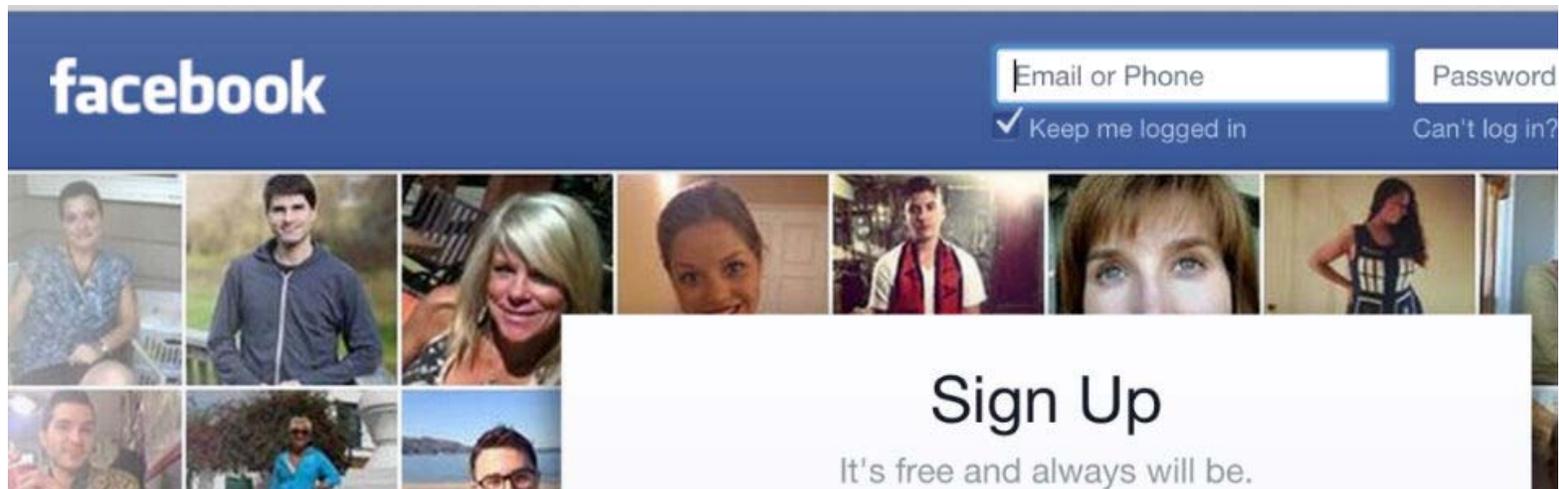


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HOW TO MANAGE YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Checking up on applicants' social media profiles is becoming routine. This is our guide to taking control of your online reputation.

Most of us treat our Facebook and Twitter accounts as purely social outlets. We update statuses and photos casually; we don't expect our friends or followers to scrutinize what we share. And unless we post something truly heinous or incriminating, we don't worry that our profiles could seriously limit our educational or professional prospects.

As it turns out, we should be somewhat worried. Checking up on applicants' social media profiles is becoming routine for many employers and admissions offices around the country. Recruiters say (<http://business.time.com/2012/07/09/how-recruiters-use-social-networks-to-make-hiring-decisions-now/>) social media helps them gain a more comprehensive picture of a candidate than a resume and cover letter alone provide. By looking at these profiles, recruiters can evaluate how you present yourself, your interests and your habits. And depending on what they find, an applicant's web presence can make or break an offer. This is especially true for students or recent graduates who don't have much in the way of job history to recommend them.

There's nothing wrong with using social platforms for fun — that's what they're for. Don't run off and remove every cat gif from your Tumblr or account, no employer expects or wants that. But a little awareness will go a long way. This is our guide to taking control of your online reputation:

WHY IT MATTERS: WHO'S LOOKING?

Kaplan Test Prep surveys 500 academic institutions (<http://www.kaptest.com/assets/pdfs/Highlights-from-Kaplan-Test-Preps-2012-College-Admissions-Officers-Survey.pdf>) each year, and their most recent report should give you pause before you upload photos from last night's party. Here are some highlights from admissions officers:

- 27% use Google+ to learn more about prospective students
- 26% use Facebook to learn more about prospective students
- 35% found information on Google+ or Facebook that negatively impacted prospective students' applications

These percentages are rising every year, especially as academic institutions strive to connect with students through viral social media marketing campaigns. It is likely that admissions officers are scrolling through your post history; are you putting your best foot forward?

Employers place an even greater emphasis on social media reputation. Cross-Tab, a marketing research firm, reveals a few eye-opening trends (<http://go.microsoft.com/?linkid=9709510>) regarding your newsfeed and your hireability. Here's what the data shows:

- 70% of recruiters denied candidates due to information found online
- 75% of companies have hiring policies that encourage recruiters to examine an applicant's online reputation
- 84% of recruiters think that online reputations will impact future hiring procedures all or most of the time during the next five years

Unfortunately, very few applicants take their social media seriously – in fact only 7% of applicants in the U.S. think that their online reputation factors into their rejections at all. Don't make the mistake of putting inappropriate content out there for HR professionals and recruiters to see. The following sections will guide you through the process of managing your digital reputation in a positive way, so that you can maximize the odds of getting into the college or career of your choice.

BASICS OF REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Let's break the task down into manageable chunks, addressing each step of reputation control while leaving no stone unturned. Finally, you'll learn how to customize privacy settings so that you don't have to worry about college and workplace recruiters stumbling across the wrong information.

EVALUATE YOUR REPUTATION

Put yourself in the shoes of a recruiter. Consider what you'll discover about applicants through everyday search engines, background checkers, family history websites, social networks, and cached data. Digital interactions often leave behind footprints. What will yours look like? Here are your tools:

SEARCH ENGINES

- ▶ **Where to check:** Google.com, Bing.com, Yahoo.com, and search.aol.com
- ▶ **How to check:** Start out by searching for your first and last name, which is likely to pull up content regarding other people who share your name. Examine the first few pages of the search engine findings, and then try different combinations, including “name and city.” Search for any usernames or nicknames recruiters and schools might have access to, such as your email username. If you are worried about posts from a particular website or time frame, you can use Google’s [advanced search operators \(https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/136861?hl=en\)](https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/136861?hl=en) to narrow down the hunt. To find information that is more specific, put quotation marks around your name.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Inappropriate information on your social media accounts, dating site accounts, retail wish lists, message board posts, blog articles, comments, mentions, and other web service accounts.

SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

FACEBOOK

- ▶ **Where to check:** Facebook search, friends’ walls, “Photos I have liked,” About page, Photos, and Apps
- ▶ **How to check:** Start by viewing your own profile and examining what is immediately visible. If this is all clear, dig into your “likes,” app usage, and groups by exploring the sidebar tabs on the Home page.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Inappropriate photos that feature you, uploaded to either your page or your friends’ pages. Tagged posts or comments that reflect poorly on your attitudes toward work or school. Even clicking the “like” button on a post can associate you with the content through someone’s newsfeeds, so carefully monitor what you endorse with the “like” button.

TWITTER

- ▶ **Where to check:** Your Tweets, profile description, followed accounts, interactions, and mentions.
- ▶ **How to check:** Click on “Me” to review your profile and examine followed accounts. Select “Tweets” to examine your history. Click on “Notifications” to view interactions and instances you were mentioned.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Inappropriate tweet content, followed accounts, interactions, and mentions.

TUMBLR

- ▶ **Where to check:** Posts, Tumblr search, liked posts, and followed accounts.
- ▶ **How to check:** All of these options can be found on your Tumblr dashboard.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Inappropriate posts, liked posts, tags, or followed accounts.

PINTEREST

- ▶ **Where to look:** Profile description, followed accounts, pins, boards, and likes.
- ▶ **How to look:** Log into your account and click on “Your Profile and Pins” to see what information is visible to the public. Click on the respective tabs for boards, pins, and likes on this page.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Unprofessional pins, comments, and likes.

BACKGROUND CHECK

- ▶ **Where to look:** Local court records, public records, or criminal reports.
- ▶ **How to look:** Visit your city or county's court website.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Public records of law violations, jail time, arrest warrants, overdue fines, and other criminal records.

CACHED DATA

- ▶ **Where to look:** Google cache, the Wayback Machine, and Coral Cache
- ▶ **How to look:** Locate a website in Google search listing and click on the URL drop-down button, and then select "Cached." Type the URL to the website into the text fields on the Wayback Machine or Coral Cache.
- ▶ **What to look for:** Dated information that you don't want prospective employers or college recruiters to see. Information you thought that you deleted from the Internet, like old content and interactions.

RECOVERING YOUR REPUTATION

Once you've identified problematic content associated with your identity online, you'll need to take steps to remove or hide it. However, this can be trickier than it sounds, especially if the content has been posted by another person, archived on a website, or stored in an account you can no longer access. Here are a few strategies that can help you work around common reputation roadblocks.

SOCIAL MEDIA PROBLEMS

- ▶ **Other people's content:** If you're tagged in another person's photo, post, or comment, it might not be easy to remove your association with the content. Facebook has an entire video dedicated to [removing tags](https://www.facebook.com/help/www/140906109319589) (<https://www.facebook.com/help/www/140906109319589>) and reporting inappropriate photos. Ultimately, you might need to contact the person who uploaded it originally and request that they remove it.
- ▶ **Delayed deletion:** Some content, such as tweets, don't always disappear immediately after they are deleted. Twitter explains that posts occasionally remain in [search records](https://support.twitter.com/articles/18906-deleting-a-tweet) (<https://support.twitter.com/articles/18906-deleting-a-tweet>) for a period of time after deletion. This can lead to awkward situations, especially if you want to remove questionable material right away. Before you post anything that is potentially embarrassing or inappropriate, make sure to consider this lag.

SEARCH PROBLEMS

- ▶ **Distinguishing Yourself:** If you have a common name, it can be difficult for you to set yourself apart from others who share your name. The tech news website, Lifehacker, encourages young professionals to purchase a [custom domain](http://lifehacker.com/5958893/why-its-worth-it-to-purchase-your-own-domain-name/all) (<http://lifehacker.com/5958893/why-its-worth-it-to-purchase-your-own-domain-name/all>) that contains your first and last name. These URLs can help guide school admissions officers and recruiters directly to your web presence.
- ▶ **Remove Search Listings:** Google has a list of steps to take if you wish to remove [personal information](https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/93713?hl=en) (<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/93713?hl=en>) from search listings. The ideal method is to remove the content directly at its source, which might require that you contact a site's webmaster.

WEBSITE PROBLEMS

- ▶ **Forgetting Logins:** You might come across inappropriate material on an old website profile, however you won't be able to delete it if you can't remember the username and password. First, attempt to reset your password. Next, contact a website administrator to see if they can remove the content for you.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

- ▶ **Google Alerts:** You can actually customize Google search settings so that you receive an email alert every time a search listing with your name is added. That way, you don't have to search for yourself periodically to keep track of your reputation – Google does all the work for you. Just visit the Google Alerts website, type your name into the “Search Query” box, and customize the parameters. Select your email in the “Deliver to” box and click “Create alert.”

PRIVACY SETTINGS

- ▶ **Facebook:** Click on the “Privacy” icon from your home page. From here, you'll be able to customize who can see your posts and limit how people search for your profile. [Privacy settings \(https://www.facebook.com/help/325807937506242/\)](https://www.facebook.com/help/325807937506242/) can prevent recruiters or admissions officers from finding your profile at all, or it can only allow them to see certain posts. You can also elect to review all content you're tagged in, so that guests at parties can't post images of you chugging beers without permission.
- ▶ **Twitter:** It's all or nothing with Twitter: you can either post “Protected” or public tweets. Protected tweets are only visible to [approved followers \(https://support.twitter.com/articles/14016-about-public-and-protected-tweets\)](https://support.twitter.com/articles/14016-about-public-and-protected-tweets).
- ▶ **Blogs:** Various blog platforms, including Tumblr, give users the option to make [blog updates private \(http://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/advanced_post_options#private-how\)](http://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/advanced_post_options#private-how) or even [password protect \(http://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/blog_management#create\)](http://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/blog_management#create) an entire blog. Make sure to explore these settings before your start publishing blog articles.

REPUTATION MANAGEMENT THROUGHOUT COLLEGE

College students can best control their online reputation by remaining proactive about posts; make sure you're absolutely certain that a post won't damage your career or academic opportunities before you publish it. Having this mental filter can prevent social media emergencies when you must rush to remove content or contact website administrators. Be very deliberate with the information you post online, and make sure that it doesn't tarnish other people's reputations either!

FRESHMEN – SOPHOMORES

- ▶ Select new friends carefully, don't add strangers.
- ▶ Avoid over-sharing information with the public; it could put you at risk.

- ▶ Monitor tagged photos for inappropriate content.
- ▶ Add classmates to maximize productive interactions.
- ▶ Avoid adding current instructors or school administrators since the content either of you post can lead to awkward academic situations. For example, if you skip class and accidentally post a photo from the beach.

UPPERCLASSMEN

- ▶ Remove or hide content that might affect your job search prospects.
- ▶ Develop professional social networking ties through websites like LinkedIn.
- ▶ Add connections that emerge from internships, fieldwork, and volunteer activities.
- ▶ Investigate companies where you wish to work and contact key figures to ask questions.
- ▶ Monitor social media job boards for upcoming employment opportunities.

LEVERAGING YOUR REPUTATION DURING THE JOB HUNT

So you're ready to dive into the employment search – congratulations! According to statistics from Jobvite, an employee recruitment company, 77% of recruiters surveyed (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-04-09/restless-workers-on-the-hunt-in-u-s-exploit-social-media.html>) have actually hired candidates through networks like LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter. Now that you have your online reputation cleaned up, you can actively use your digital presence as a way to connect with recruiters, provide supplemental material to your resume, and increase your professional resources.

BEEF UP YOUR RESUME AND COVER LETTER

We're often encouraged to keep paper and digital copies of our resumes brief, no longer than one page. However, our social media accounts can help us fill in the blanks. Here's how:

- ▶ **LinkedIn:** The “Add Link or Upload File” option lets you add illustrative examples of your experience with an employer, which might include marketing campaigns, news articles, press releases, research reports, and even interactive media. You can also request former employers, teachers, and colleagues to give you recommendations so that future recruiters can see who's vouching for you before they contact your references.
- ▶ **Indeed:** Many job seekers think of this website as a career listing database, but that's not all it does. If you upload your resume to your Indeed account, it is added to a resume database that employers can browse. When you aren't actively job seeking and applying, interested recruiters who have discovered you on Indeed still can contact you.
- ▶ **Taleo:** This is an employer and applicant cloud database driven by Oracle, one of the largest corporate software companies in the world. According to their statistics, almost 50% of Fortune 100 companies rely on Taleo (<https://www.talentexchange.com/candidate/faq.html>) for hiring. If you are applying to corporations that list jobs on Taleo, having a pre-filled Universal Profile can help you save time during the job search process since you won't have to fill out the same information multiple times.

CREATE PROFILES TO COVER YOUR BASES

In this digital era, some recruiters see your social media presence as a sign of credibility. Unfortunately, this doesn't bode well for those who wish to maintain their privacy by not participating in social media. A lack of networking accounts can send the wrong message (<https://www.talentexchange.com/candidate/faq.html>) to recruiters regarding social and emotional health. Having existing accounts, even if they provide sparse information, can be better than having no online presence at all.

EXPANDING YOUR DIGITAL INFLUENCE

Your personal networks can be extremely valuable commodities, depending on the types of industries you're applying to. Marketing industry recruiters, for instance, are more likely to be impressed by applicants that can spark dozens of likes and shares with a single post update. This requires that you develop multiple social media skills, including:

- expanding your total number of friends and followers,
- posting engaging content,
- and updating on a regular basis.

First, you'll need to get an idea of your current status. Here are a few resources that can help you measure influence and reputation:

- Klout (<http://klout.com/home>)
- Social Mention (<http://www.socialmention.com/>)
- Google+ Ripples (<https://support.google.com/plus/answer/1713320?hl=en>)
- Kred (<http://kred.com/>)
- PeerIndex (<https://peerindex.com/>)
- Facebook Insights (<https://www.facebook.com/insights/>) (for Pages)
- Edgerank Checker (<http://edgerankchecker.com/>)

Once you start monitoring your influence, you can grow it with the following activities:

- Starting conversations on group or event pages
- Adding new connections on a regular basis
- Posting thought provoking questions that encourage community answers
- Posting current and compelling news that gets shared, liked, or commented on

Social media reputation management can seem like an overwhelming task for most college students who are also juggling time commitments like school work, extracurricular activities, and internships. However, it is possible to cultivate a winning online presence by breaking your goals down into smaller tasks: evaluating reputation, removing inappropriate content, setting up profiles, increasing your search engine visibility, and branching out into professional networks. Since social media practices and norms are continually changing, students and young professionals should continue to actively use their accounts so that they don't fall out of the loop.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

- ▶ [Trust Cloud \(https://trustcloud.com/\)](https://trustcloud.com/)
- ▶ [Privacy Rights Clearinghouse \(https://www.privacyrights.org/social-networking-privacy-how-be-safe-secure-and-social\)](https://www.privacyrights.org/social-networking-privacy-how-be-safe-secure-and-social)
- ▶ [Remove Content from Google Search \(https://support.google.com/webmasters/topic/1724262?hl=en&ref_topic=4589100\)](https://support.google.com/webmasters/topic/1724262?hl=en&ref_topic=4589100)
- ▶ [Electronic Privacy Information Center \(http://epic.org/\)](http://epic.org/)
- ▶ [YouTube Copyright Infringement Notification \(https://www.youtube.com/yt/copyright/copyright-complaint.html\)](https://www.youtube.com/yt/copyright/copyright-complaint.html)
- ▶ [Pinterest Copyright Infringement Notification \(http://www.pinterest.com/about/copyright/dmca/\)](http://www.pinterest.com/about/copyright/dmca/)

CAREER RESOURCES

- ▶ [Monster \(http://www.monster.com/\)](http://www.monster.com/)
- ▶ [Indeed \(http://www.indeed.com/\)](http://www.indeed.com/)
- ▶ [SimplyHired \(http://www.simplyhired.com/\)](http://www.simplyhired.com/)
- ▶ [Craigslist \(http://www.craigslist.org\)](http://www.craigslist.org)
- ▶ [Talent Exchange \(https://www.talentexchange.com/\)](https://www.talentexchange.com/)

SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

- ▶ [About.me \(https://about.me/\)](https://about.me/) – [Privacy Policy \(http://about.me/privacy\)](http://about.me/privacy)
- ▶ [Blogger \(https://www.blogger.com\)](https://www.blogger.com) – [Content Policy \(https://www.blogger.com/content.g?hl=en\)](https://www.blogger.com/content.g?hl=en)
- ▶ [Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/\)](https://www.facebook.com/) – [Privacy Policy \(https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/\)](https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/)
- ▶ [Google+ \(https://plus.google.com/\)](https://plus.google.com/) – [Privacy Policy \(https://www.google.com/policies/terms/\)](https://www.google.com/policies/terms/)
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- ▶ [Medium \(https://medium.com/\)](https://medium.com/) – [Privacy Policy \(https://medium.com/policy/f03bf92035c9\)](https://medium.com/policy/f03bf92035c9)
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- ▶ [Twitter \(https://twitter.com/\)](https://twitter.com/) – [Privacy Policy \(https://twitter.com/privacy\)](https://twitter.com/privacy)

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(<http://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/diverse-and-multicultural-students/>)

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(<http://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/student-nutrition/>)

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