

Privacy During a Job Search

by DEB KRIER

According to Jobvite's most recent survey on how businesses use social media for recruiting, a whopping 89% of U.S. companies will use social networks for recruiting in 2011. While this includes things like posting jobs, it also includes researching potential candidates.

Tweet

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(function() {  
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];  
s.type = 'text/javascript';  
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';  
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);  
})();
```

I've recently seen a flurry of articles on this topic, specifically about the question of the legality of performing a search of someone's online reputation.

Many people assume that what they post on sites such as Facebook is "private" and therefore, shouldn't be held against them during a job search. We've all seen examples of posts that could cast a negative light on someone. People post about calling in sick when they really aren't, leaving work early, not doing good work because they hate their job and so on. I've even seen posts where people admit to stealing from their employer! I've also seen many highly-questionable YouTube videos.

In April 2010, the U.S. Library of Congress announced that it will archive all Tweets and they'd be searchable! This project turned out to be bigger than they thought, so it hasn't yet been implemented, but it does bring to mind the question of how long this information can be used. What if someone Tweeted five years ago that they frequently played hooky from the office? People can and do change and things may no longer be relevant.

One article I read suggested that HR staff should be totally banned from performing any search on social media sites. This isn't reasonable. Obviously, using some social networking sites to research candidates is acceptable and expected. LinkedIn is a perfect example of this.

However, what about sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter? What is the expectation of privacy? No matter what someone's privacy settings are, Facebook itself doesn't guarantee privacy. If someone "publicly" posts something that could be detrimental, can they complain if it's used against them?

Employers have run background and credit checks, as well as requiring drug testing, on potential employees for years. Is

doing an online search any different? One difference now, however, may be that someone's online reputation is often checked prior to an interview and candidates are eliminated without even knowing why.

One of the problems with reviewing someone's online presence is that an HR person or recruiter could see things that they cannot legally ask in an interview. Third-party firms are springing up that eliminates this. They perform the online searches, eliminating information that is not allowable in the hiring process, including race, religion, national origin, age, sex, family status, sexual orientation and disability status. Reports are provided that include both positive and negative results. Positive results can be items like charitable and community involvement while negative results can include inappropriate photos and videos, racist posts and illegal activity.

So, what does all of this mean? If someone is in the job market, they should assume their online reputation will be investigated. They need to know what is on the Internet about them (AND anyone who has the same name) and be able to explain any negative items.

What do you think? Post your comments in the box below!

About the author:

Deborah Krier is a social media adviser, professional speaker, and trainer. With nearly 20 years as a marketing and PR professional, she is passionate about helping people use social media to promote themselves and their businesses. She is a principle with WWC Events, a full-service corporate event planning company and president of Wise Women Communications (WWC), a public relations and marketing firm. Her complete bio can be found on her website at www.debkrier.com.

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