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## Enhance Your Digital Footprint

Everything you post online — from your Facebook status to your Twitter tirade — is accessible to future employers. Don't let digital dirt derail your job search.

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Whether they realize it or not, project managers have an online reputation — and it could dictate whether or not they land that nice new job they've been looking for.

"Your résumé is no longer just a piece of paper. It's what people find out about you on search engines," says Michael Fertik, founder and CEO of ReputationDefender, an online reputation management service based in Redwood City, California, USA.

That includes everything from a blog post about your less-than-friendly boss to an impromptu tweet about a surly stakeholder.

"Your online impression is a composite of all the traces you leave online — and I mean all. Your website, your blogs, your tweets, your Facebook updates, your reviews, your arguments and comments in forums, plus a whole lot more," says Sam Deeks, founder of mu:kaumedia, a Devon, England-based reputation consultancy.

"What they find on your name in the first few pages of search results will be how the majority of people will judge you."

And they will criticize you, according to a Microsoft survey of more than 1,200 hiring and recruitment managers and 1,200 consumers in the United States, the U.K., Germany and France, conducted in December 2009. In the United States, 70 percent said they have rejected candidates based on information they found online. U.K. recruiters reported a similar trend, with 41 percent saying they'd eliminated candidates based on their digital dirt.

The stakes are high, so here are some tips to control your online brand:

### **Claim your virtual real estate.**

Social media profiles rank high in search engine results so make sure your first and last name appear on your Facebook page, LinkedIn profile and Twitter account, Mr. Fertik says. Use your real name instead of an alias to ensure the top search results of your name are under your control.

### **Avoid damaging behavior—and get rid of existing offensive content.**

Red flags for employers include anything that suggests dishonesty, lack of self-control, indiscretion or extremism, says Mr. Deeks. Avoid references to fraud, lying or stealing, anything to indicate addiction or anger, or comments about previous employers, political activism, racism or religion. You should also get rid of or privatize incriminating photos of yourself, which can have as much damage as the words you write.

If such information already exists, do your best to get rid of it. If you control the information, like on your social media profile, you can obviously remove it. If you don't own the content, contact the person who does and ask them to do so.

### **Build favorable content.**

You can't always eliminate negative information from search engine results — but you usually can move it farther down the search rankings by creating or posting favorable content that search engines can find, says Susan Guarneri, founder of AssessmentGoddess.com, a career transition and personal branding firm in Three Lakes, Wisconsin, USA.

The lineup can include articles in which you're quoted, blog posts or comments that establish you as a thought leader in your field. Even professional bios on industry or community websites and case studies that showcase your project management portfolio will help enhance your digital footprint.

**Maximize privacy settings.**

Most social networks have privacy settings — use them, says Mr. Fertik. While you want to make the profile itself public so that employers can find you in a search, make your details private to public viewing.

**Bring in the professionals.**

If you're low on time, you may want to hire a service that can police your online reputation for you, says Mr. Fertik. "The pros can do a better job for you than you can do for yourself," he says. Services vary, but can include monitoring the Internet, blocking misleading content or even just showing you how much control you can have over your information.

Ultimately, your reputation online and off is your personal brand as a project manager and it must be spotless. If it's not, your customers — potential employers — will shop elsewhere.

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**What do you think?**

Do you manage your online reputation? How do you build favorable content about yourself? [Go to our LinkedIn group](#) and comment.

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