Not Just Your Space

The College Student's Guide to Managing Online Reputation

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First edition

e-Book created by Naymz.com

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Introduction

So, you're looking for a job or that coveted internship. Or maybe you might be thinking of heading off to Grad School or Law School. You have your resume all polished up, your one and only pinstriped suit dry cleaned and pressed to perfection, your "Top 50 Interview Questions" all memorized, and a six-pack of Red Bull. You're ready to rock. You are big money, big business. You've got everything covered, right?

Wrong.

Have you Googled yourself lately?

I'm talking about going to Google and conducting a search for your first and last name. You know, ego-surf. Vanity search. What comes up? Most likely the information is…

- o Outdated
- o Embarrassing
- o Flat-out wrong
- o Not even you!

By the time you finish reading this book, you'll know the risks of having personal information online, how to find it, clean it up, and easily monitor it in the future.

Digital Dirt

If you're in college, you most likely have a MySpace page, FaceBook profile, Blog, or all of the above. If you aren't a complete nerd, odds are that you probably have some incriminating photos, dubious comments, and questionable friends on these sites.

If you are a nerd, don't stop reading just yet. No one is safe. Ever wonder if your World of Warcraft enemy, ex-girlfriend/ boyfriend, or that meat-head frat guy might be talking about you on these sites?

Have you pondered who might find this incriminating information about you? According to ExecuNet, a leading recruiting firm, 78% of executive recruiters routinely use search engines to learn more about candidates and 35% have eliminated candidates based on the information they found.

It's not just employers who are digging around. Teachers, parents, friends, girlfriends, boyfriends, and classmates can all access this information in various ways. According to *USA Today*, police are now being trained on how to use FaceBook so they can investigate complaints about students. Police have shut

down parties and busted underage drinkers because of the information they have found.

Many of our parents, bosses and professors were college students at one time. They talked about the same things you do in the locker room or while hanging out after class. They took incriminating pictures of each other. They may have dabbled in recreational drugs or had a few beers before turning the legal drinking age. They might have written about the boundaries they tested, but it was probably in the back of a yearbook or on a bathroom stall.

The difference between the two generations is that our elders did not have the technology available to post this information for 1.6 Billion internet users to find.

Search Engine Watch reports there are 25 to 50 million proper name searches performed each day. Results from a random sample of 1,000 names from Naymz.com, showed an average of 13.4 searches are conducted daily on each name via Google, Yahoo, and MSN. According to *comScore*, these three engines compromise 85.3% of all searches conducted online as of July 2006. This indicates that each day somebody is searching to find the skinny on you. So, what are they finding? If you're not careful, you could end up regretting not cleaning up your online identity.

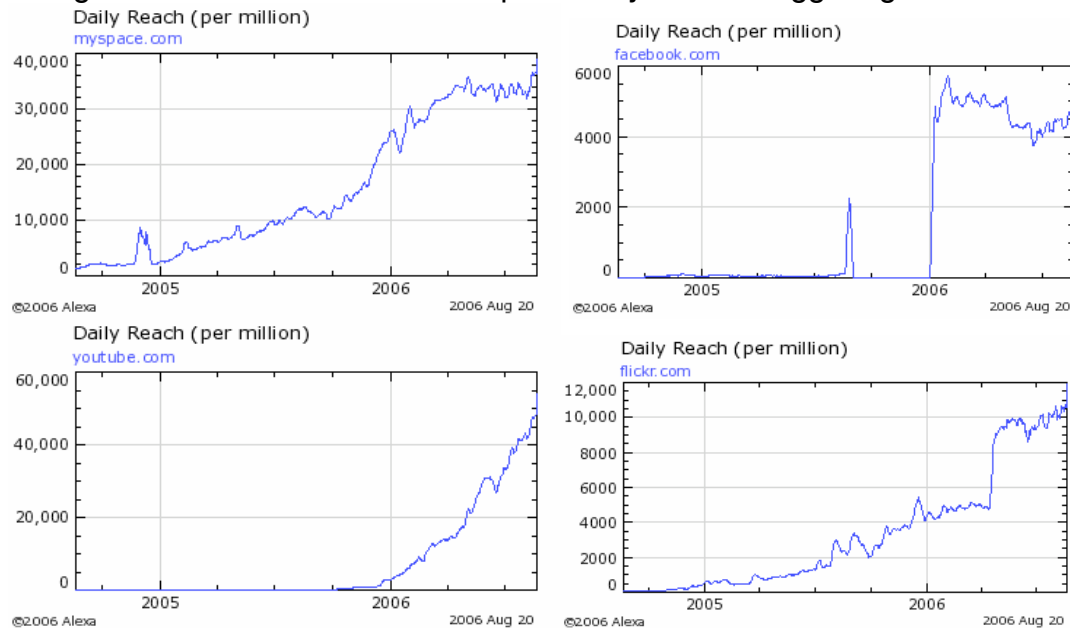**Social-Networking Insanity**

   FaceBook   MySpace   Friendster   Blogger   Flickr   YouTube

These are just a few of the hundreds of sites that allow anyone with internet access to instantly publish personal information about themselves and others. Those in the industry refer to these as "user-generated-content" sites. Personal information can also be found about people in online message boards, forums, personal Web sites, or news groups. In many cases, this information is harmful and malicious.

There are also a slew of "Girls Gone Wild" wannabe Web sites scouring the internet to find your worst stories and pictures and expose them to millions of people. Here are few addresses to keep you entertained for hours (assuming you aren't surprised by finding yourself featured). Proceed with caution . . . . . .

- o www.drunkuniversity.com
- o www.boozetime.com
- o www.collegedrunkfest.com
- o www.ebaumsworld.com

The growth of these sites over the past few years is staggering:

Daily Reach (per million)
myspace.com
40,000
30,000
20,000
10,000
0
2005   2006
©2006 Alexa   2006 Aug 20

Daily Reach (per million)
facebook.com
6000
4000
2000
0
2005   2006
©2006 Alexa   2006 Aug 20

Daily Reach (per million)
youtube.com
60,000
40,000
20,000
0
2005   2006
©2006 Alexa   2006 Aug 20

Daily Reach (per million)
flickr.com
12,000
10,000
8000
6000
4000
2000
0
2005   2006
©2006 Alexa   2006 Aug 20

Courtesy of Alexa.com

They have become so big and controversial there is currently a bill circulating the U.S. House of Representatives which proposes to ban use of all social-networking sites (i.e., MySpace) in public schools and libraries.

So, you have a MySpace or FaceBook page with a few drunk photos and maybe a good story or two. You don't need to worry about those, right? Nobody's ever going to find them. Think again …..

Identity Crisis - True Stories

Here are a few true accounts from the rapidly growing list of students who have been burned by their online identities. These are from the March 8th issue of *USA Today*…

Michael Guinn posted pictures of himself in drag on FaceBook which led to stories of his boyfriends and nights out clubbing. One of his schoolmates showed this to an administrator at John Brown University. At most schools this wouldn't be a problem other than the fact that John Brown is a conservative Christian college. Mr. Guinn was kicked out of John Brown.

Admissions dean Paul Marthers at Reed College in Portland, Ore., says the school denied admission this year to one applicant in part because his entries on blogging site LiveJournal included disparaging comments about Reed.

Two Louisiana State swimmers were kicked off the team last spring for criticizing their coaches on Facebook. A University of Colorado offensive tackle was suspended from a bowl game in December for sending a racially threatening message through Facebook to a Colorado cross-country runner.

An employer who was ready to hire a student from Vermont Technical College in Randolph Center changed his mind after seeing the student's Facebook page, says Lauri Sybel, director of the college career center. Since then, Sybel says she has checked other students' pages to make sure they weren't hurting their job prospects.

The Price of Celebrity

The more famous or popular you are, the more likely you are to be a target of slanderous material.

Do a search for Bill Gates in Google. As of late August 2006, the first page of results show a Web site called "Bill Gates is Dead" as well as a blog entry about the founder of Microsoft along with photos of him doing his sexiest pose.

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Anyone who knows a thing or two about search engines can employ something called "Google Bombing". The most famous example would be President Bush's bio appearing at the top of the search results for "miserable failure".
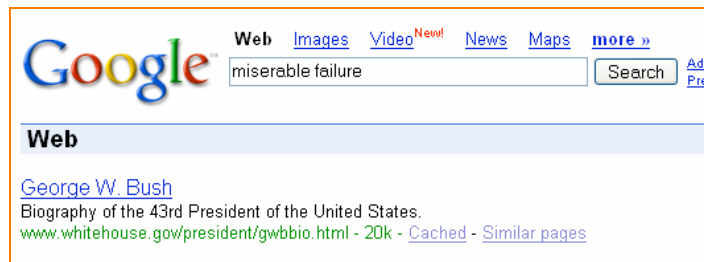
In a similar vain, if you search for "liar" on the Google UK site, a link to the UK's Prime Minister Tony Blair appears.

Mistaken Identity

"Yeah, well at least your name isn't Michael Bolton. There was nothing wrong with it... until I was about 12 years old and that no-talent ass clown became famous and started winning Grammys." **Michael Bolton – Office Space**

Just about everyone shares their name with someone else. Take Eddie Johnson, for example. Here is the former NBA player Eddie Johnson…

Edward (Eddie) Arnet Johnson (born May 1, 1959 in Chicago, Illinois) is a former professional basketball player who spent 17 seasons in the NBA. A sharpshooting 6'7" forward/guard, Johnson attended the University of Illinois before being selected by the Kansas City Kings in the 1981 NBA Draft. Johnson retired from basketball in 1999 with 19,202 career points.– Source Wikipedia.com

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Here, also, is Eddie Johnson who was also in the NBA…

Edward "Fast Eddie" Johnson Jr. -- being held in a Florida jail on sexual battery and burglary charges -- is a 6-foot-2, two-time NBA All-Star who played most of his career in Atlanta. An Auburn alum, he retired in 1987 and is 51.

Unfortunately for the first Eddie Johnson, his picture was placed next to the online accusations of sexual battery and burglary in several publications. Edward Arnet Johnson has since had a very difficult time shaking off this case of mistaken identity in the public eye and probably will take some time to clear himself.

Do you have a name doppelganger out there that shares your name but is a sexual predator, murderer, or maybe just a total dork? You need to work to separate yourself from that other ass clown. A little bit later, we will show you ways to do so.

Your Impending Career

"Yes. It is true. I, Michael Scott, am signing up with an online dating service. Thousands of people have done it, and I am going to do it. I need a username, and... I have a great one. "Little Kid Lover". That way people will know exactly where my priorities are at." **Michael Scott – The Office**

Nowadays resumes and references will only get you so far. Recruiters and employers are doing search engine background checks on prospective employees.

Multiple sources have reported that companies are employing college interns to research digital dirt on job applicants referencing sites like MySpace and FaceBook. Your peers are even selling you out. Why not? Competition can be fierce. You out of the running only means more jobs for them.

It's one thing for your friends or family to come across some questionable material on the internet. It may not even be questionable in your eyes. But, if the choice has been narrowed to you or another candidate for the job or internship, your online identity may make or break a company's decision to hire you.

Cleaning Up Your Online Rep

Ok, so now you realize the importance of keeping your online reputation in check. Just like the few hours it took to construct your resume, you'll need to dedicate time to sanitize your online identity and get it ready for the real world (not the one on MTV, either). Here are five steps you need to take to get there.

Step 1 - Investigate

First and foremost you need to uncover your online identity. Depending on how common your name is, typing in your first and last name into a search engine will often bring up a lot of noise. Search with your name in quotation marks. Also try searching for your name and add your school name, fraternity/sorority, organizations, middle name, middle initial, hometown, dorm, major, etc.

Be sure you review, at minimum, the first 3-5 pages of search engine results. Searching via Google and Yahoo! will probably be sufficient as they represent about $3/4^{ths}$ of all online searches. But it doesn't hurt to check out MSN Search (search.msn.com) and Ask.com as well. Every search engine works a bit differently and will display a unique set of results.

If you don't want to leave any stone unturned, look through these search engines as well:

- o search.myspace.com (MySpace Search Engine)
- o technorati.com (Blog Search Engine)
- o blogsearch.google.com (Google Blog Search)
- o video.google.com (Google Video Search)
- o youTube.com (Video Search)

Step 2 - Clean your "Space" and wash your "Face"

"It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it".

Benjamin Franklin

(He also invented daylight savings time. Not sure why that is important here, but I did miss a few classes in my day because of him.)

FaceBook and MySpace members do have the ability to change privacy settings so only confirmed friends can view their information. If you MUST have questionable material on your profiles, it's best to restrict availability to friends you trust.

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I can hear you FaceBook users now, "Well, nobody can see my FaceBook profile unless they have a .edu e-mail address." This is true. However, most recent college grads hold on to their school e-mail addresses and can use it years after they graduate. A lot of these graduates become recruiters or are happy to let their employers snoop around from their accounts.

If you have a MySpace page, take down the picture of you with your shirt off in Cancun with a beer bong in hand. If you have a blog, be sure to remove the entry in which you bash your Econ 101 professor for his unibrow and yellow armpit stains.

The same advice applies to any other Web pages out there which you control, including your blog, Flickr WebShot photos, or YouTube videos. We recommend the "Mama Rule". *If your mama wouldn't be proud of what she sees online, it's probably best to leave it offline.*

Step 3 - Ask for Help

You may have written a not-so-politically correct editorial which was published on your school newspaper's Web site. Or maybe you added a comment to someone's blog post in which can be perceived as hateful or sexist. There may also be some negative information that someone wrote and posted about you. If you think it will deter someone from hiring you for that dream job, take some action to get it removed.

Ask the Web site owner or editor to remove it. Be specific about the page and section you are requesting be removed. And like your mother told you, ***ask nicely***! If you cannot get it removed, be prepared to speak to it if it comes up in an interview. In extreme cases, consult with a lawyer to determine if legal action can be taken to have the defamatory content removed.

Step 4 - Become your own Ari Gold

You want to be the next Aquaman or Joey Ramone? Hug it out with yourself. (If you've never watched Entourage, ignore that previous line.) Regardless, you need to become your own online agent.

Begin by creating and posting positive, accurate content about yourself across multiple Web sites. There are several sites which will allow you to easily create and maintain profiles at no cost.

Ziggs.com, ZoomInfo.com, and LinkedIn.com focus on individual career profiles. You can add your photo, work history, organizations with which you are involved, and others individuals who are in your professional network. ZoomInfo and

LinkedIn also allow others to post their endorsements of you and act as a reference on your profile page. It's like your resume on roids.

These sites are great to represent the "professional you", but recruiters already have your resume in hand when they search online for you. There are other sites which will allow you to break the mold of boring, stale resumes. It's acceptable to demonstrate personality, as most companies don't like to hire stiffs (unless you are going to be an accountant). But, again, make sure the information found is accurate and creates a positive impression. Here are some options:

o   Create a blog for free on sites like Blogger.com and LiveJournal.com to write about your thoughts on the field you plan on working in, or your experience studying abroad. Add links to industry news on your page. Within your blog, create a "blog roll" with links to all the important industry publications, experts, and blogs. Remember, perception is reality. Even if you don't read the industry news, be prepared to speak about them during your interview.

o   Create an online photo album using Flickr.com, Webshots.com, or Picasa Web Albums (picasaweb.google.com) of your experiences studying abroad or backpacking in Europe. If you include pictures of Spring Break 2004, pick and choose wisely.

o   If you have videos of winning an award, giving a speech, or playing college athletics, upload it and add it to YouTube.com or Google Video (video.google.com).

o   Ask others to write and post positive comments about you. If you create a profile page on a site like iKarma.com, request your friends, professors, mentors, and classmates write good reviews about you. They can even rate you.

o   Also use MySpace.com and Friendster.com to create informational pages about your personal life, but be careful as these sites can tempt you to get too personal.

Now that you have quality content about yourself all over the internet, you should aggregate it in one place. Sites such as ClaimID.com, Naymz.com (*disclaimer: this is the company I work for), and Opinity.com allow you to compile links to those sites and place them in a centralized location. These profile sites work as a table of contents to your online identity. They also add your pages to the major search engines where they will be found and indexed.

Finally, add a link to your best Web site on your resume and cover letter. This will steer a recruiter in the right direction if they are interested in finding out more about you.

Step 5 - Bury your Skeletons

So, now you have all this great web content out there. Now what? Well, nobody's going to find it unless you get it into the search engines. Prepping these pages for the search engines will also help bury any unwanted information which may still be lingering further down in the search results. Here are some tricks of the trade to attempt to dominate the search engine results for your name.

1. Be sure the text on each page is unique to all other pages. Don't copy and paste the exact same bio on each profile page. That's cheating. We all know you cheat in college, but the search engines aren't as forgiving as your Teacher Assistants.

2. If it's available, buy your own domain name. Is your name Chad Stone? If so, lock down www.chadstone.com and point it to your best page. If the .com isn't available, try .net or .org. Google really likes this.

   Here is a short list of reputable domain name registrars to determine if your name is available:

   http://www.godaddy.com
   http://www.register.com
   http://www.networksolutions.com

   Note: If, when put together, your first and last name turns into something which can be misconstrued, add a hyphen between them (i.e. www.Oliver-Clothesoff.com).

   For example, take the poor choice of a name for the Pen Island Company Web site**: www.penisland.com**

   See what I mean?

3. Google and the other search engines are primarily popularity contests. Google gives each Web page a number called "PageRank". The more sites that link to your page, the higher that page will display in the search engine results. It also considers the PageRank of the sites that link to you.

   To raise the tide of all your pages in the search engine results, I recommend adding links between all the pages you want to be found in

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the engines. This will increase your PageRank on Google and allow other search engines to easily find all of your pages.

4. Start posting intelligent and thoughtful comment's on blogs and open forums, using your full name as your handle for the comments. The more popular the forum, the more likely it will get a high ranking in the search engine results. All of your forum profiles should link to the online profile you want ranked the highest (typically your own website, i.e. www.yourname.com).

5. If you have the knowledge and ability to manipulate the HTML for your pages, include your full name in the title tag <title>, as well as the header tag <h1>. Post information you want the search engines to find in text and not images. If you do include images use image alt tags <alt> and include your name in those tags where appropriate.

6. To guarantee high placement in search results, Naymz.com and Ziggs.com premium subscriptions can guarantee your profile page is listed on the first results page for your name across the major engines. Search engine advertising (Sponsored Results) is employed to achieve high placement. There is a nominal fee for these services.

Step 6 - Verify Yourself

If you're really paranoid, you can verify your identity and place a badge of verification across all pages which you control. Companies, such as Trufina, will conduct a background check to confirm you are who you claim and not a criminal or fraud. Not that I need to point this out, but it's probably unwise to use this service if you *are* a criminal or fraud - unless you plan on becoming a rapper or join the mafia.

Other "Digital" Tips
- Don't use e-mail addresses like ilovechicks@gmail.com on your resume or on any of your Web sites.
- Remove your "SexyBack" Justin Timberlake ringtone from your phone and change that voice-mail message in which your introduction is "What's up, playa."
- We recommend you not include your e-mail address on your profile pages unless you enjoy e-mails selling male enhancement pills, or from your long lost uncle in Zimbabwe who needs your bank account info to send you your inheritance. There are millions of "spam-bots" running around the internet looking for e-mail addresses on Web pages. Be cautious.

Monitor you Rep

So, you uncovered all the bad stuff about you online. You cleaned up what you could. You asked for a little help to remove what you couldn't, and then you buried the rest in the search engine results with the good stuff. Nice work. Pat yourself on the back, go get a beer, and admire your Google results. However, an online identity expert's job is never done.

It's as important to monitor your online reputation as your credit report . . .

RSS
Do you have an RSS reader? If not, get one. RSS is the acronym for Really Simple Syndication. It's an amazingly easy and time-efficient method to monitor anything of interest to you which is published on the internet. RSS readers are built into MyYahoo! and Google's Personalized Home Page. Other powerful RSS readers include:

- o Newsgator.com
- o Bloglines.com
- o Pluck.com
- o Google Reader (www.google.com/reader)

Once you have an RSS reader, create and subscribe to RSS feeds based on keyword searches for all variations of your name

Monitor your name in Blogs:
- o Technorati.com
- o Google Blog Search (www.google.com/blogsearch)
- o Feedster.com
- o Blogpulse.com
- o IceRocket.com
- o Pubsub.com

Monitor your name in the News:
- o Google News (www.google.com/news)
- o Yahoo! News (news.yahoo.com)

Monitor your name in Message Boards and Forums:
- o BoardReader.com
- o Big-Boards.com
- o BoardTracker.com

<u>Conclusion</u>

Online social networking and publishing are becoming increasingly integrated into our personal lives. These are powerful tools, but with great power comes great responsibility.

Online documentation of anything questionable or negative about yourself is like having your high school mascot tattooed on your ankle. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it's a pain, possibly expensive, and sometimes impossible to get removed.

I'm certainly not advising you to not do beer bongs, streak the quad or take pictures of chicks making out. It's college! It's the time of your life to enjoy yourself and push the envelope. Believe me, the rest of us in the real world are more jealous than a Cubs fan in October that we aren't there with you.

It comes down to common sense. You may have killed a lot of brain cells in college doing god knows what, but use what's left of your head. Be mindful of what you and others publicize on the big bright stage known as the World Wide Web.

About the Author

Tom Drugan
http://www.naymz.com/search/drugan/tom/4

Tom has been involved with digital and search engine marketing since his college days and has been doing it professionally for over seven years. Tom is currently a Managing Director at Naymz.com and resides in Chicago.

Because he has an established career and owns his own company, Tom is allowed to publish photos like the one here.

About Naymz

Located in Chicago, Naymz is an online provider of reputation and identity management and promotion services for people, associations and business.

The Naymz Web site, located at www.naymz.com, recently launched in June 2006 and provides a user-friendly experience for those who wish to promote an accurate and positive personal and/or professional online reputation and identity.

In addition, Naymz also provides Web services and custom business-to-business (b2b) solutions to assist any size company in managing their corporate reputation and that of their employees.

For more information or to create your personal Naymz profile, please visit: http://www.naymz.com/

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