

What Other Materials Might Appear About Me on the Internet?

If you have written any articles or opinion letters that might be published in any publication that is available online, an employer may be able to find it through a Google search for your name. This would include any articles written in school newspapers, in publications such as the Booze News, and in opinion letters written to school newspapers and local newspapers.

While one has the freedom to write nearly whatever one likes under the First Amendment, remember that employers have a right to read whatever has been written and form their own opinions about the writer based on the content. Employers may differ from their applicants on politics, morals, values, etc., and in many other ways that they would not have necessarily discovered but for the materials they encounter on the internet.

Are There Safety Concerns With Using These Websites?

Multi-million dollar lawsuits have been filed against certain of these companies for damages resulting from attacks from people using information obtained from these websites. Many people post their private information (name, address, workplace address, etc.) and it is not hard for someone who wishes to do you harm to find you using this information. Such websites have been accused of helping to promote both cyber- and actual stalking of their users by criminals.

If you have posted information on the web which might be detrimental to your career, it opens up the possibility that a rival applicant for your position might expose you to the employer. You might also find yourself in the position of being blackmailed to keep such information from being leaked to your employer. If you admit to criminal behavior on such a website, that information may be used against you in a court of law if you are prosecuted for those criminal acts.

Privacy in a Post 9/11 World

The best rule is to err on the side of caution. Either remove your facebook.com, myspace.com, and/or friendster.com accounts or do not create them in the first place. If you create such accounts, post only information about yourself that you would want your mother and father to see. Anything they would approve of you can be fairly certain an employer would have no problem with.

If you feel you must have such an account, use any and all privacy settings available to limit the viewers of your page as much as possible.

Just remember that once you put information on the internet, it can be very difficult or impossible to retract it. No one knows who might be watching.



The information contained herein is not intended as a substitute for legal advice. Students who are confronted with legal problems or who need specific advice are encouraged to seek assistance from a licensed attorney at Student Legal Service.

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Student Legal Service



myspace
may not be just
YOUR space

*What Employers Find
on the Internet
May Hurt You*



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What are Myspace.com, Facebook.com, Friendster.com, etc.?

As most college students know, these websites are online social gathering spaces where one can post a personal website with photographs and text describing the student's life, personality, likes/dislikes, etc. Many college students use these sites intending to make new friends or keep in touch with old ones. Frequently, students post information on these sites which is intended to be funny, such as boastings of sexual conquests, drug use or violence. Some students choose to post nude photos of themselves on their website for visitors to view.



The risk in posting such material is that employers and recruiters at graduate and professional schools are beginning to look at these pages when deciding on whether or not to accept a candidate for a job or position in the university.

What once was considered a private realm for the younger generation is becoming widely known to the older generation and most of one's material posted on such sites is visible for all to see.

What Can My Potential Employer Use Against Me?

Getting your first job is one of the most difficult tasks you will face upon graduation. Employers often receive résumés and applications from hundreds of candidates. They must use certain techniques to thin the field of applicants.

One's grades and achievements will be the main information considered. Many employers are also beginning to run internet background searches on their employees to see if anything appears under their name on the search engine. This could include any



Photographer: John Steffen

website that features your name in their databanks. Some employers are going directly to sites such as myspace.com, friendster.com, and facebook.com to see if they can find a profile on their potential applicant. Assuming they find something about a candidate on the internet, they WILL read it. Depending on what they find, they may decide on the spot not to even interview a candidate whose website contains material the interviewer finds objectionable.



Photographer: John Steffen

Employers cannot discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin, but they are free to discriminate against candidates whose websites they find disgusting, immature, or questionable. If the employer feels that a candidate's views might harm the company's reputation or image, you are not likely to be hired.



What Might an Employer Find Questionable?



Employers might be concerned about the following content. This list is not exhaustive:

- Nude Photographs
- Stories about sexual escapades
- Stories involving drug use or excessive drinking
- Stories involving violence
- Violent images

Can an Employer Withdraw an Offer of Employment or Can a University Withdraw an Offer of Acceptance to the University?

Yes. If an employer comes across material he or she finds objectionable after you have accepted a position or if a University recruiter discovers similar material after you have accepted a position at the University, the employer or recruiter is free to withdraw the offer and you will have no legal recourse. Many



employers have a morals clause in their employment contract which gives them to freedom to make such judgments.

What About Privacy Settings?

If the website you are using to post your personal information has privacy settings, it is a good idea for you to take advantage of them if you feel that you still want to have a website posted. No system is perfect and it may still be possible for a potential employer or a university recruiter to find your information on that site.



Even if you limit viewers of your website to other members of your university, it is possible for employers to get around such restrictions with relative ease.



Photographer: Daphne Brian

The company may have employees who are recent graduates of the university the current candidate is attending. Such employees often retain access to their university email accounts and could easily access a Facebook website for the university in question.

Some companies may employ interns who are students at the same university as the candidate and that person could also access Facebook pages allotted for students of a given university.

Many employment contracts require you to sign a waiver clause allowing the employer access to your otherwise private records.

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