

## CHAPTER 28

# YOUR INTERNET IMAGE IT COULD BE SABOTAGING YOUR CAREER

The Internet with all the knowledge available on an instant notice is a wonderful thing and can really help accelerate one's career. Have you ever considered what information about you is available to others on the Internet? Does your Internet image paint a very positive image and help support your career efforts or does it sabotage them? Never thought about it? If not, you should check to see what is out there. You may not realize it, but your private information from the past may be an instant career killer if someone was checking. In this chapter, we will explore some of the do's and don'ts about putting your private and professional information on the Internet.

### **SEARCH YOURSELF PERSONALLY ON THE INTERNET**

If you have not done so already, the first thing to do is Google yourself and check every hit. Find out what information is readily available about you. Does it paint a positive image about you or are there some really embarrassing personal items you may want to get rid of? Many people put very personal items on the Internet in such places as [myspace.com](http://myspace.com), [youtube.com](http://youtube.com), [facebook.com](http://facebook.com), [twitter.com](http://twitter.com), [linkedin.com](http://linkedin.com), and personal web pages that can be searched. Have you ever considered who has access to any of your private information and how this could be used?

### **BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING**

In the 1970s George Orwell wrote a book titled *1984*. The book was about how computers and video cameras were used by the government to track every

move and action you made during the day including what you did in the privacy of your home. Well let me tell you, 1984 is now happening at work. Big Brother is watching you. Here are some examples.

*Internet Searching of Applicants' Background.* The Human Resources and/or Security departments of most companies do a background check of potential new hires. Some companies hire independent firms for background checking. A background check is no longer just a phone call to the references on your resume, but a full-blown Internet search using several different powerful search engines. These search engines, in a matter of minutes, pull up all the Internet information out there about you. This includes pictures, videos, tax records, criminal records, financial and legal information, and any information posted on the Internet that has your name associated with it. Remember, Human Resources has the specific task to check out every individual applying for a job.

Given this knowledge, what do you think they are going to find out about you? Do you have some rather embarrassing information still on the Internet from past years? Old college party pictures? Personal dating information?

► **Career Tip.** Do an Internet search of your name and delete or remove all the improper information immediately, especially if you are interviewing for a job. This information could be sabotaging your chance for getting hired.

Have you ever considered that there might be people out there with your exact same name and when Human Resources does the search, they find others with your name and rather embarrassing information? You better be aware of this just in case you are asked during the interview process about the images and information Human Resources found on the Internet that is from others with your same name.

*Turn off the instant email preview feature on your computer for group meetings and presentations.* Many people use the instant email preview feature so that they can see if the email they just received is important and they need to respond immediately. What makes this feature a real embarrassment is when an engineer has their computer hooked up to the conference room projector, sharing their desktop during a net meeting, or when you are at their desk discussing something on the monitor with several others. The instant preview pops up and naturally everyone in the meeting looks and reads it. This can be extremely embarrassing when the engineer receives a very personal email with information never intended for others to see. I have seen some instant preview emails pop up that were viewed by all the people in the meeting resulting in quite an embarrassing moment for the engineer.

*The company is monitoring your email and instant messaging. Don't put it in an email.* Many people believe the company will never look up their email or instant messaging. The company would not store all the emails/instant messages sent, so there is no way they could recall anything. Let me warn

you that this is not the case; in fact, the company specifically stores all emails/instant messages oftentimes for legal protection. Lawyers have tuned into this and the best way to win a case is by obtaining copies of all the emails/instant messages sent. The first thing lawyers typically do is subpoena the email and instant messaging.

This comes into play often in ethics cases especially if harassment is involved. Every email/instant message sent to the person being harassed is recalled and examined. In addition, all the emails of people sending email to the harassed person are also recalled and examined to determine if they have a bearing on the case.

► **Career Tip.** Always assume every email/instant message can be recalled at a later date and examined by the company.

*Don't even think about visiting inappropriate web sites.* Some engineers think they can visit inappropriate web sites and simply delete the files, cookies, and history, and they are safe. Well this is not the case; the files are still on the computer hard drive but only listed as free space. Using special software companies can recover these files. In addition, many companies have a policy that when the computer is turned in for repair or upgrades, the hard drives are scanned for any inappropriate material that may have been stored.

*Companies can recall every web site you visited and the time spent.* Companies have at their discretion the capability to produce a log of every web site you visited on their computers and how long you spent at the web site. This data is often used as a reason for dismissal. The data supports that the engineer is failing to do their job and addicted to surfing the Internet.

*GPS and Blackberries.* Many people receive a Blackberry with Global Positioning System (GPS) capabilities from their company so that when they are out of the plant, they can be instantly reached via cell phone, email, or text messaging. Do you realize the Blackberries are recording and sending your location at any given time? So if the company really wants to check to see if you are at the conference or business meeting, and not out on the beach or golfing, they can. Also where are you going after hours when you are out of town? Would the company approve of these places or would it be grounds for dismissal?

*Cell phone and video cameras.* Many people have cell phones with a camera and video storage capabilities. Are you using these appropriately at work? A simple photo of yourself at work or at your desk could reveal in the background what you are working on and even company secrets. When posting these on the Internet or sending to your best friends you could be leaking important company information without even realizing it.

*Video phone teleconferencing.* The new capability that most people are trying to exploit is video teleconference via the camera in their laptop or PC. Remember that in order to collect and transmit the video, it all has to be stored

first and reformatted. This means that those video teleconferences can all be recalled at a later date. Are you letting them see and record you at your best? This brings us to the next topic: using the Internet to your advantage.

## USE THE INTERNET TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Now you know how Big Brother can be watching you. How can you use this to your advantage? The first and obvious answer is: don't put anything inappropriate in an email, text message, or instant message.

*Compose your messages assuming Big Brother is watching.* You should assume that every email you write could be recalled at a later date and the contents examined for its appropriateness. Keep this in mind as you compose your electronic message and let it guide you in your selection of words. This is especially the case if you receive an email that is quite upsetting and wish to respond about the anger and hurt feelings you have. A good rule of thumb when you are angry is to apply the 24-hour rule. Simply do not respond when you are in a state of anger and wait 24 hours before sending a response email. Most times after waiting 24 hours the anger passes and you are in a much better state of mind to compose a response.

► **Career Tip.** Apply the 24-hours rule when you are angry and tempted to instantly respond to an email.

Let them find you at your best when searching the Internet—knowing people are going to search the Internet to obtain information on you, why not put the best and most positive information you have out there. For example, do you have any information you can put on the Internet showing how you volunteered at a homeless shelter, helped raise funds for food shelves or charity organizations? Awards you received from the company? You could put together a portfolio on the Internet of yourself showing all your key accomplishments instead of the great beer party you had last summer. The key is to let people see you at your best versus at your worst. I am sure there are many items you could put on the Internet to enhance your image.

## SUMMARY

The key to remember is that Big Brother is watching you 24/7 at work and at home if you are using company equipment. You must assume every electronic message you compose and send at work can be recalled and examined for appropriateness. All the web sites you visit are recorded and files do not go away just because you hit delete. Companies do extensive Internet searches on people, so all the personal information you have on the Internet is available for them to examine. Conduct an Internet search using your name and find

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out what others see. Delete the inappropriate material and replace it with material that will enhance your image. Let people see you at your best and not at your worst when they do an Internet search on you.

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.