

# The Impact of Online Reputations in the Recruiting Process

Online social networks including but not limited to Myspace, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are significantly changing the way people communicate, work and play. Just Facebook alone boasts over 350 million users and is now the second most popular site on the internet after Google. Until the mid-1990s social networking sites were mainly viewed as cyber communities where shy geeks hid behind online aliases. Yet over the past decade, easy-to-use interfaces have transformed social networks into vast public spaces where the mainstream can connect with others and promote their personal identities on the web. With this has risen what are now considered 'online reputations,' or publically held social evaluations of a person based on his or her behavior, what he or she posts and what others share about the person over the Internet.

Because the Internet is a worldwide database in which information is publically available and not easily deleted, it is important for professionals to understand that virtually anything they make available through these networks can potentially be viewed by almost anyone. In today's world when people or organizations want to learn about someone for a job application, friendship, dating or other purposes, they turn to this growing public pool of information. According to a special report published by The Economist, "Social-networking sites' impressive growth has attracted much attention because the sites have made people's personal relationships more visible and quantifiable than ever before." Simply by updating one's status on Facebook or Twitter, users can let their network of friends and sometimes the world know what is happening in their lives.

To no surprise, a study released in January 2010 by Cross-Tab Marketing revealed that recruiters and other human resources professionals within the US actually use online reputational information during their new hire qualification process. In fact, 70% said they have actually rejected candidates based on information they found online. Furthermore, 85% of the US recruiters Cross-Tab surveyed said online reputations influenced their hiring decisions to some extent.

Types of Online Reputational Information That Influenced Decisions to Reject a Candidate	
Concerns about the candidate's lifestyle	58%
Inappropriate comments and text written by the candidate	56%
Unsuitable photos, videos and information	55%
Inappropriate comments or text written by friends and relatives	43%
Comments criticizing previous employers, co-workers or clients	40%
Inappropriate comments or text written by colleagues or work acquaintances	40%
Membership in certain groups and networks	35%
Discovered that information the candidate shared was false	30%
Poor communication skills displayed online	27%
Concern about the candidate's financial background	16%

Cross-Tab's study also showed 75% of recruiters surveyed said their companies are actually now requiring recruiters and human resources professionals to research potential new hires online. On average, one in four US recruiters and human resources professionals surveyed reviewed all of these types of sites for application information.

Percent of recruiters and HR professionals who use these types of sites when researching applicants	
Search engines	78%
Social networking sites	63%
Photo and video sharing sites	59%
Professional and business networking sites	57%
Personal Web sites	48%
Blogs	46%
News sharing sites (e.g. Twitter)	41%
Online forums and communities	34%
Virtual world sites	32%
Web sites that aggregate personal information	32%
Online gaming sites	27%
Professional background checking services	27%
Classifieds and auction sites	25%
None of these	2%

There is a strong divide however between employers views regarding the gauging of one's online reputation and that of the general population. Contrastingly only 15% of US consumers surveyed think it is very appropriate for employers to review candidates' photo, video and social networking sites while 25% think it is somewhat appropriate and 44% think it is somewhat or very inappropriate. Yet only 51% are somewhat to very concerned about how their online reputation affects their personal or professional life. They also did not seem to have too big of an issue with employers reviewing their professional or business sites during the hiring process – 64% said it was very or somewhat appropriate for recruiters and human resources professionals to look at these sites.

What's important to recognize is that 85% of the US recruiters surveyed in this study revealed they believe the use of online reputational data will increase in five years. Furthermore, many recruiters are anonymously collecting information they are not legally permitted to ask a candidate during an interview such as their marital status, the number of children they have, religious/political/group affiliations, financial or medical conditions. Specific research into the legality of collecting this information will need to be explored in the future, yet for the time being, this study shows consumers generally underestimate the impact their online reputation has on their professional and personal life and the extent to which recruiters evaluate them during the hiring process.