How your digital footprint can affect your career.

Have you ever tried to Google your name and surname? You could be surprised by the results! You will probably find at least your photos from social media pages, or even your phone number, email, comments, publications, information about participation in certain events.

Performing any action on the Web, the users leave a digital footprint, which can be used to make their portrait. There is nothing bad about it if you know how to manage it. Therefore, it is essential to pay close attention to what is shared on the Internet, from geolocation to photos, but also to the comments and tags of friends.

There are two main types of digital footprint: active and passive. An active footprint is the one that a user leaves intentionally. These are, for example, publications in social networks and blogs, photos we've uploaded over the years, the pages we've "liked", comments about a product in an online store, or what people indicated in their profile on a job search website. A passive digital footprint appears on the Internet without the knowledge of a person. It is formed from data that sites and applications receive and store automatically. These are IP addresses, search history, cookies and other information.

Once information has been posted online, it can be difficult (most likely even impossible) to remove, so it's essential to be careful about managing and protecting your digital footprint. This is especially important for young people who usually leave considerable footprint while using multiple social media sites. Some of the content might go back many years and do not correspond to the current personality of the user. However, it will still remain visible to anyone who decides to do quick research about their author on the internet, including a potential employer.

In the era of digital technology, a Curriculum Vitae is no longer the only source of information. Employers are showing increasing interest in the digital footprints of their employees. What initially was created only for our communication with friends, today begins to affect our success in finding a job, our reputation and status.

A survey conducted by CareerBuilder found that 70% of employers "use social media to screen candidates before hiring. According the survey these are the key reasons why employers were turned off by a candidate's online presence:

- Candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information: 39 percent
- Candidate posted information about them drinking or using drugs: 38 percent
- Candidate had discriminatory comments related to race, gender or religion: 32 percent
- Candidate bad-mouthed their previous company or fellow employee: 30 percent

- Candidate lied about qualifications: 27 percent
- Candidate had poor communication skills: 27 percent
- Candidate was linked to criminal behavior: 26 percent
- Candidate shared confidential information from previous employers: 23 percent
- Candidate's screen name was unprofessional: 22 percent
- Candidate lied about an absence: 17 percent
- Candidate posted too frequently: 17 percent

To reduce the possibility of a mistake in the selection of a candidate, employers analyze the digital footprint of the candidate. Often, even the applicants give the links to their profiles in social networks, business communities and their publications in magazines, demonstrating that they are actively engaged in personal branding and have a circle of professional acquaintances.

Of course, a digital footprint cannot be considered an official confirmation of the unreliability of a candidate. But the presence of negative information (aggression, discrimination, explicit language etc.) could become an obstacle to employment or even damage your professional reputation.

So, what would you like recruiters to find out about you? To ensure that your online image makes a positive impression on potential employers, pay attention to digital hygiene and "filter" the information posted in the public domain.

Managing your digital footprint starts with getting a clear idea of what data about you currently exists online. To do this, do your own search of your name, surname, phone number and email address and see the results. This is a good way to get an idea of what information is readily available to anyone who might be looking for you online.

If there are any old photos, videos or comments, that might give a negative impression about your personality, update your privacy settings or delete them entirely. You can also try to contact website administrators and request the removal of the information. Make sure all social media accounts that could be found through your contact details such as name, phone number and email address are free from the content which could be potentially harmful for your reputation.

Make sure the privacy settings regarding the posts you share, comments in the communities and pages and tags from your friends are at the appropriate level, especially if among your friends on social media pages there are also your colleagues.

It is impossible to completely remove the digital footprint on the Internet. Once on the network, information will be stored there for an unlimited amount of time. In addition, it is possible that someone has already screened, downloaded, or copied your information. For this reason, to secure your digital footprint it is important to be careful about how much data you share online.

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Always take a more critical look at any website you plan to share your information with and determine whether to share your data with them.

Look at your posts from the perspective of the hiring manager you interacted with or the boss who hired you to join the team. Analyze what you saw. Can anything affect the fact that you are not hired? Delete some posts if necessary.

If you use your social media pages for sharing the photos of your holidays, parties with friends and posts about everyday life it is definitely better not to mention such profiles in your curriculum. Maintain digital privacy and tighten privacy settings, in order make your content visible only to your close friends or a restricted group of people.

However, in case you decided to share more information with your employer, these are a few things you need to take into consideration:

1. Edit your social media profiles. Write about your interests, career, education, keeping in mind that only relevant information should to be posted in the profile.
2. Update your profile picture. The ideal option is a recent professional photo in casual style. Make sure your name is written in an appropriate mode (a nickname used since high school should probably be removed).
3. Analyze your posts and statuses. Think about how the content you posted reflects your business image.
4. Share different content: photos from a trip, stories from business events, memes, professional awards. The main rule is that your page should not contain negative and ambiguous information.
5. Leave the groups and communities which can give a negative impact to your reputation
6. Manage the privacy settings for the photos you appear in and remove tags from the content associated with you which you do not consider appropriate for professional purposes.

It might seem that the easiest way to minimize the risk of failure due to a dubious digital footprint is to clear all your accounts. However, according to some studies, closed or completely deleted profile alarms HR managers no less than dubious content. In fact, 21% of employers said they wouldn't consider someone who doesn't have a social presence. It looks like you either have something to hide or nothing to show, both of which will send your resume to the bottom of the pile. Especially if you are applying for a position that involves social activity and communication with other people, for example PR or Social Media manager.

Nowadays it is impossible to face the world of work without our social image reflecting on the opportunities of work or on managing the relationship with our colleagues or the employer.
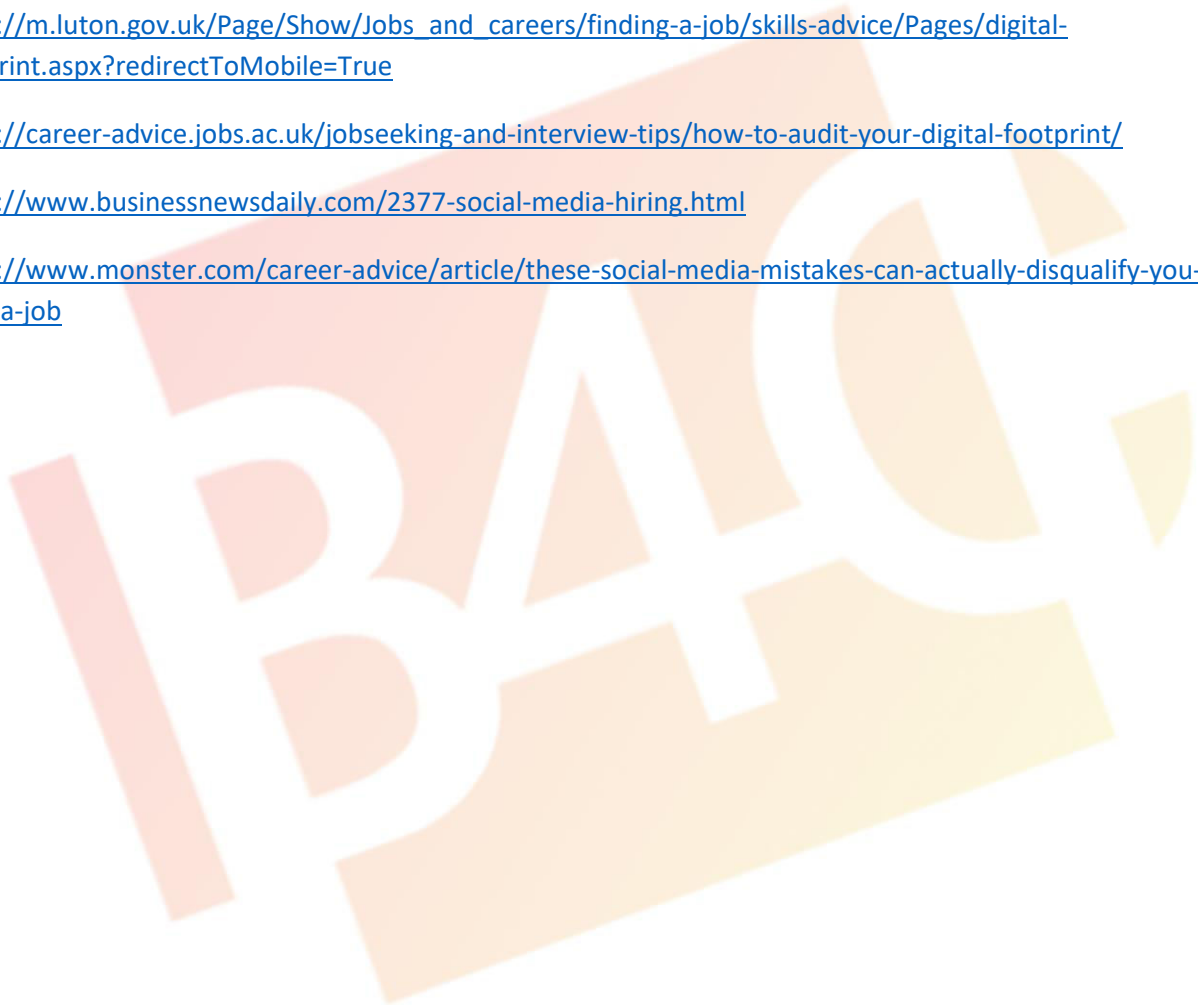
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