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Drawing the Line: Professional and Personal Personas Online

Today, the professional profile is more than your resume. A study found that 67% of employers screen job candidates through social networks. What they find is just as likely to land you a dream job as it is for you to be disqualified. The same study found 54% of companies have actually disqualified job candidates after viewing an applicant's social media.

What is a professional and personal persona and why is it important?

An online persona (professional or personal) is the way you conduct yourself publicly and the impression that you give to others when engaging professionally online. It is your online or digital presence.

Having a positive persona can help you when networking, job hunting, or building a reputation for yourself as a professional. A negative persona could cause you to be overlooked for certain opportunities.

How do I manage my professional and personal persona online?

Keep in mind an online presence is not only social media accounts on major platforms, but also includes things like reviews or comments you've left on websites, public YouTube playlists, forums like Quora or Reddit, or old accounts that you no longer use. Any content linked to your name and/or email address is still visible unless you delete the account—and sometimes, even after account deletion.

To manage your professional and personal personas online, consider the following:

Search for Yourself

Search for your name on common search engines. Use incognito mode or private browsing so your results aren't influenced by what you've previously searched for. Make sure to look at images, too.

Conduct several searches using different variations of your name as well as locations, organizations, or universities you are affiliated with. Take steps to remove any negative or unprofessional results.

Go Private

Set personal social media sites, such as Facebook or Instagram, to private. On Facebook, consider controlling who can tag you in content and post on your page.

Consider all imagery of yourself, including profile pictures. While a profile picture doesn't necessarily need to be professionally taken, make sure it's one that you would be okay with employers and colleagues seeing. Keep it clean and friendly.

You may want to consider using a username different from your actual name on your personal social media sites. Consider if you use these sites at all, and if not, delete your profile.

Acting Professionally Online

Professionally or personally, be aware of posts you share, the comments that you leave, and who you add or accept as friends. Assume nothing posted online is truly private. Although your page may be private, others can see what you post on public pages.

Social media is an outlet to express yourself and connect with others, but always remember to be mindful about what you are posting. Fundamentally, it is important to enjoy the online world in a way that is conducive to both your personal and professional life.

Consider Creating a Website

Consider creating a professional website. Include the relevant information (resume, a portfolio of projects, etc.) A website is not only a way to market yourself and show the world who you are, but also an opportunity to create the professional persona you want others to see.

Maintain a LinkedIn Profile

LinkedIn continues to grow in both membership and engagement. About 90% of recruiters use the site regularly. If you're job hunting or looking to network, LinkedIn is the place to be.

Update your summary, experience, and accomplishments. Share posts that relate to your professional interests, connect with others in your field (or the field you want to be in), and comment on interesting posts.