**Choosing Wisely: How Social Media Can Help and Hurt College Graduates in the Job Search**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the many ways college graduates can use social media to either help or hurt them in the job hunt process. The discussion includes information on how employers use social media to filter out applicants as well as to connect with potential recruits. This paper also offers examples and tips that readers can use to market themselves to employers through social networking platforms.

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**Introduction**

In the technological era that we currently live in, social media has become increasingly prominent in almost every aspect of our lives. Pew Research Center began tracking social media usage in 2005 and, since then, the number of adults using social networking sites has jumped from 7% in 2005 to 65% currently. Although most social media sites started out as personal pages, our society has quickly turned these sites into essential platforms of communication. Whether it’s a business getting feedback from customers, a young adult launching their own blog page, or someone re-connecting with an old college roommate, social media provides us with endless abilities to collaborate and connect.

Perhaps one of the most useful applications of social media is the use of these sites in the job search. Nearly two-thirds of Americans now use social media platforms to search for jobs (Pew Research Center, 2015). Current job seekers are able to create and use social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to market themselves to potential employers. Employers are also able to use these sites to their advantage, as they view applicants’ social media pages to learn about them, and filter out applicants that may not be a great fit for the job.

In high school and college, students are constantly told to watch what they post on social media sites, as it can have a detrimental affect on both their college and job acceptances. It is important for job seekers to know what kind of content can hurt their chances of getting a job, but it is also important for them to know how they can alternatively use social media to their advantage

**Prominence of Social Media in Networking**

Social Media has become an integral aspect of networking, for both recruiter and potential employee. Both parties can use sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and even YouTube to network and launch a working relationship. There have even been social media platforms created specifically for networking purposes, such as LinkedIn and VisualCV. Recruiters have increasingly turned to social media to find candidates for positions and do quick “background checks” of these candidates. Those who have neglected to create and update a social media presence, or have posted negative content, could miss out on being considered for positions. Some even say that a social media profile may be as important as your resume if you are looking for a new job or career. According to a Social Recruiting survey conducted by Jobvite in 2014, 73% of recruiters have hired a candidate through social media.

With an increasingly competitive labor market and recruiters relying more heavily on social media to find employees, it is essential for young adults to use social media to their advantage rather than allowing their posts to hurt their opportunities. While searching for jobs and hoping to launch a dream career, young adults must learn how to market themselves by filtering posts on social media sites and using their personal pages to grasp the attention of potential employers in a positive way.

**Social Media Practices: Hurting the Job Search**

As is evident from the introduction above, one simply cannot avoid social media in our day and age. A result of this is the inevitable lecture we get from our parents, teachers, and advisors about being cautious on social media with what we post and share on our personal pages. We are warned constantly that inappropriate posts could ruin our chances of becoming the professional we aspire to become in the future. But how often do employers and recruiters actually look at an applicant’s social media pages, and how much of an effect does it really have on their decision?

It turns out that recruiters actually pay a lot of attention to our social media accounts. The Jobvite Social Recruiting Survey from 2014 concluded that 55% of recruiters have reconsidered a candidate based on their social profile, with 61% of those reconsiderations being negative. The top factors for reconsideration were Illegal Drug References at 83%, and Sexual Posts at 70%. Other factors that turned away recruiters from the survey included profanity, poor spelling/grammar, alcohol, and the presence of guns. Some recruiters look even more extensively through posts, and are turned away from applicants by factors such as poor communication skills, bad mouthing previous employers, discriminatory comments, or lying about qualifications (Smith, 2013). Leslie Kwoh, a writer for the Wall Street Journal, investigated potential employers watching applicants on social media. She talks about how employers can even take very “subtle clues” from social media profiles and turn them into red flags. This is evident in one account included in her article, stating “Pete Maulik, chief strategy officer at a New York-based innovation consulting firm, says he was close to hiring an “excellent” candidate last year when he decided to check the man’s LinkedIn profile as a final precaution. That’s when he realized the candidate probably wasn’t a team player, he says.” Maulik evidently found that this candidate took credit for everything on his profile, and presented himself as a lone wolf who did everything himself (Kwoh, 2012).

It is evident that employers and recruiters are certainly interested in any information that they can come across on applicants’ social media pages. However, some argue that social media should not be used in the hiring process at all. Social Intelligence’s Mark Drucker states, “By going online, employers expose themselves to all kinds of information that cannot be legally considered in the hiring process, such as religion, race, gender, and health status. Some factors may sway the employer, even if only subconsciously” (Kwoh, 2012). There is a concern that social media screening could become discriminatory, so employers and recruiters must be cautious to make sure they comply with hiring rules, legal requirements, and procedures. The old rules for hiring still apply even in our new digital era, so employers should only be accessing publicly available information about a candidate, and limiting the search to job relevancy (Gurchiek, 2014).

For millenials, social media has been so prominent throughout their lives, and what they have posted over that time may not have been created with the end goal of a job in mind. This means that young adults especially have to watch what they are posting online. The number one thing that job seekers should avoid is posting content that includes profane sexual content or the use of alcohol and drugs. Common sense should be used, and anything that potentially could be scrutinized should be made private. Experts say however, that having everything on a private setting could imply that the applicant is trying to hide things from potential employers. So, it is important that job seekers keep the things that promote their personal brand in a positive light public.

**Social Media Practices: Helping the Job Search**

“The good news is that hiring managers aren’t just screening your social media profiles to dig up dirt; they are also looking for information that could possibly give you an advantage” (Smith, 2013). Applicants, to grasp opportunities instead of losing them, have the ability to use the attention they are gaining on their social media pages to their advantage. Job seekers shouldn’t simply focus on hiding inappropriate content, but rather should aim to build strong social networks and create profiles that promote their skills and personal brand as a professional. A CareerBuilder survey revealed that in order for recruiters to move forward with a candidate, they like to see information that supports the candidate’s qualifications, a good personality fit with the company, strong communication skills, and creativity (White, 2015).

So, how does one start to create a personal brand on social media? The first step in this process is establishing a social media presence. Most young adults will not have a problem with this, however it is important for anyone who has more of a “silent” online presence to engage in social networking and increase their visibility. If an applicant does not have a strong online presence, employers may question their ability to work, collaborate, and connect with others. Having a strong, but professional, online presence will attract the attention of almost any potential employer.

The next step is taking advantage of professional networks that have been created solely for this purpose. LinkedIn is by far the most crucial social networking tool for young professionals. LinkedIn is so important to the job search because 80% of companies are on the site using it to recruit employees (Stanford Career Development Center). Unlike Facebook and Twitter, it allows users to showcase objectives and skills that are mainly professional, but allows you to also add personality into the mix. Through this network, you can tailor your profile to appeal to potential employers that you are interested in. Your profile will give recruiters and employers information that they need, such as your resume and cover letter. Through LinkedIn you can also gather your own information about career fields, companies, and job leads; in order to really focus your job search with the objective of locating and nailing down your dream job. The Stanford Career Development Center, in an article called “Using LinkedIn to Market Yourself and Find a Job”, revealed what they call the Golden Rules of your LinkedIn profile in regards to what content should be displayed in your profile:

1. Display a professional appropriate photo
2. Create a headline with professional titles and roles
3. Write a keyword-rich summary that “sells your skills and experience
4. Get strong, helpful recommendations
5. Tie your LinkedIn profile to your other efforts (add your email and Twitter signature)
6. Join Groups
7. Keep your profile up-to-date

A final advantage to using LinkedIn is that you can connect with others and turn your relationships into career opportunities. For example, if you see that your college classmate works for a company in which you are interested, they can introduce you to their employer on your behalf if you are connected with them on the network. LinkedIn and the connections it provides can present a young adult with endless employment opportunities if they use the tools the network provides.

Although LinkedIn is an extremely helpful tool for building your brand, job seekers should not be limited to “professional” social networks. As noted in the previous sections, employers are not only looking at LinkedIn, they are looking at your other social media pages as well. Therefore, you should use any social media site that makes sense for you and the brand you are creating. Facebook and Twitter can be great platforms to promote your personal brand, if you can post content that appeals to employers. Employers are also increasing their own Facebook and Twitter presence, which will allow the job seeker to “like” or “follow” the company to engage with them and stay updated on their employment opportunities. “Companies are investing in their social media presence, giving job seekers plenty of options for interesting content to like and follow” (Salpeter, 2014). You can even use Twitter to your advantage by searching different “hashtags” to filter through any job listings that a company may post. Similar to your LinkedIn connections, your Facebook friends and groups can be extremely helpful in your efforts to find a job, as a job seeker can get referrals from friends and post that they are looking for a job in the groups they belong to on Facebook.

Obviously recruiters and employers are looking at social media in the hiring process. There are many tools out there that job seekers, especially young adults who are more familiar with social media, must use to their advantage. A simple Facebook post or LinkedIn connection could land a certain college graduate with their dream job someday!

**Conclusion**

The increasing presence of social media has allowed it to become a part of almost every aspect of our lives. Many argue over whether our use of social media sites is good or bad, and particularly over the effects our social media posts can have on our professional careers. Undoubtedly, negative social media posts can affect job seekers in their chance on having a fulfilling career. However, if young adults applying for jobs can use the social media sites to their advantage, and learn how to network on these sites in a professional manner, social media will reveal an enormous number of job opportunities!

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