

GOT DIRT? – Dealing with Digital Dirt in the Job Search

by Elisabeth Sanders-Park

I've heard it said that 'everyone has an online identity; the question is whether or not we actively manage it'. An ExecutNet survey of 100 executive recruiters showed that 77% use search engines to learn more about candidates and check the background of job seekers, and 35% have eliminated a candidate from consideration based on the information uncovered. These numbers are rising, and the trend is becoming common practice. Employers used to check references at the end of the hiring process to tip the scales between top candidates or confirm their final decision. No more.

Today, applicants are 'Googled' early in the process to determine if they are worth an initial phone call. What employers learn online won't get a person hired, but it can get them screened-out. Job seekers at all levels must not only maximize appropriate online opportunities, but actively reduce or remove digital dirt that could get them screened-out before they have a chance to market themselves. There is a lot of information available on maximizing online opportunities in the job search – how to craft a LinkedIn Profile, position yourself as an industry leader through blogging, tweet your way to a job (I recommend, 'The Twitter Job Search Guide' by Whitcomb, Bryant, and Dib), etc., but little light is shed on how to deal with negative online information in the job search.

The first step is for the job seeker to 'Google' the version(s) of their name employers are likely to search and see what comes up. As they surf, they should view the results from the likely perspective of the employers they want to work for. Remember, there are essentially 6 reasons you get the job... or not. Could what employers see online lead them to believe the job seeker does not represent the company image (Presentation), embody the company personality (Attitude), promote the company mission and goals (Motivation), attract the right people (Network), possess the necessary skills (Ability), or work in the company's best interest (Dependability, more in my recent book, 'The 6 Reasons You'll Get the Job']?... if so, it must be dealt with. Digital dirt falls into two categories – your own, and that of others with the same name as you.

John Smith or John Smith? – If there is more than one person on earth who uses the same name as the job seeker, employers are likely to get information about multiple parties, whether they know it or not. Here are some quick tips. The job seeker can:

- Conduct the job search using a unique version of their name – their full name, nickname, middle initial, just middle and last name, an initial, etc. In this case, they must use that name in all their correspondence, marketing tools, and online expression, plus update all their online profiles and alert their references and past employers about the specific name they are using.
- Create a 'Search Me' button to drive employers to select information. This is simple and free, and I recommend that all job seekers do it. They can visit www.vizibility.com, search their name, review all the results, then choose, click, and prioritize the five they want to employers to see. The system then lets them create a button or link that drives directly to the hand-selected results. This button/link may prompt 'Search Me', 'Google Me', 'Get the Right Job Smith', or something else, and can be used on an electronic resume, email signature, LinkedIn profile, and more. Because this offers only five results, employers are likely to search further (most will

search 2-3 pages of results), but at least they know they have reliable information about the candidate.

Burying Digital Dirt – If when employers search a job seekers name they will encounter negative information likely to result in screen-out, the person may attempt to bury the old, negative details with a barrage of fresh, positive expressions, including LinkedIn and Facebook status updates, blog entries, comments on others' websites or blogs, Tweets, Amazon book reviews, and more. Each new online expression must be targeted to the employers the job seeker wants to work for. I recently coached a man who has done a great job burying a negative (and untrue) story about him which ran in his local paper and online. He has established himself as an expert in his field (management, staff development, entrepreneurship) by tweeting tips and links to helpful articles, reviewing a dozen business books on Amazon.com, finding and sharing events and information on LinkedIn, writing and posting articles, commenting on relevant blogs, and even crafting and posting helpful, relevant whitepapers. The result? When you search his name, you get a barrage of positive, helpful, expertise and must scan multiple pages of results to get to this negative stuff. Like this man, many job seekers can bury their digital dirt, but they must continue to spread a fresh layer of new online information throughout their search. I also recommend that they create a 'Search Me' button via www.vizibility.com as mentioned above.

These are simple solutions to a new job search dynamic that can be complex, but these tips will make the difference for many people. If you need targeted solutions for your clientele, contact me and I am happy to coach you through it. Also, in light of the fact that there are issues a job seeker should bury until they have established their value but which the employer will or should know about, timing is everything. Bury the digital dirt, but for tips on timing, see Debra Angel MacDougall's article at <http://www.worknetsolutions.com/faq.html>.

As always, thank you for letting me be part of your very important work. It is an honor.