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## Employers, Get Outta My Facebook

**When considering job applicants, prospective employers have no business poking around their profiles on social networking sites. Pro or con?**



### Pro: Web Profiles Aren't Résumés

by [Greg Fish](#)

Imagine posting a picture of yourself in a Halloween costume on your MySpace ([NWS](#)) or [Facebook](#) profile at the risk of killing your career. Or having your employment hinge on whether a hiring manager likes your views on abstinence-only sex education.

One could argue that if you choose to make your profile public, everything you post is fair game. But that view defies the purpose of social networking sites. A public profile is a vehicle for casually interacting with others in an informal setting, on personal free time. When companies use these profiles to find not only a professional but also an ideological match for a job, they're misleading themselves and building ill will with talented prospective employees, who might decline to apply for a job for fear a comment about China on their blogs makes them persona non grata.

What happens if an applicant charges she was rejected because a hiring manager didn't like that her profile identified her as a vegan Democratic atheist who enjoys basket weaving? If those things have nothing to do with her merits as a professional, she may have a legitimate complaint.

Even worse, an employer could unearth inaccurate information. Because few social networking sites require verification, someone with a grudge against an applicant might set up a profile designed to viciously smear him. Without a subpoena to examine the IP address and ID of the profile's author, prospective employers might end up making decisions based on slanderous information.

Also, let's remember that people use the anonymity of the Internet to portray themselves as they want to be seen rather than as they really are. With a few pictures and a strategic paragraph, a shy and quiet intern-to-be can easily make himself look like a party-hopping raver. In his bid to meet exciting people and liven up his nightlife, did he cost himself a job because a hiring manager thinks he's too wild and crazy to work in a corporate setting?

Job seekers already have to contend with background screens, drug tests, credit checks, and verification of employment history, education, and income. Is adding an ideological litmus test of an online identity really necessary? What should companies care about more, the professional skills and merit of an employee or what her favorite beer is?



## Con: It's All Part of the Package

by [Timothy B. Lee](#), Cato Institute; Show-Me Institute

Obviously, employers should not use information obtained from Facebook, blogs, or other Internet sites in ways that would be intrinsically unethical or illegal. But there are lots of situations in which such sites could be used legitimately in hiring decisions, and there's absolutely no reason employers shouldn't check them as a normal part of the hiring process.

Employees in sales, public relations, and customer service function as representatives for the companies they work for, so employers have a legitimate interest in ensuring potential workers won't embarrass the company.

More important, a job applicant's well-crafted online persona can serve as an asset, acting as a kind of extended résumé. In many white-collar occupations, a candidate can use his Web presence to demonstrate passion and depth of knowledge for his or her area of expertise. When hiring a writer, for example, I'd be more likely to choose one who had a blog (assuming it was well-written) than one who did not, even if I disagreed with some of the views it contained.

Similarly, a programmer, for example, can enhance his application by keeping a blog that demonstrates his contributions to open-source projects, handiness with gadgets, or knowledge of the technology industry. Ultimately, developing an appealing Web presence is a part of portraying oneself in an attractive manner—no different from wearing a freshly pressed suit and proofreading your résumé.

Of course, in most cases, employers won't find out anything at all about a job candidate. And when they do find information, they should keep in mind that some of it might be inaccurate or give an incomplete picture.

But the bottom line is that a public Facebook page is just that: public. People are responsible for what they post. It's unreasonable to make personal information available to the whole world and not expect employers to look at it.

Facebook gives users the option of keeping their profiles private, and so does blogging software such as LiveJournal. Users should take advantage of these options for information they don't want considered by potential employers. But if applicants choose to make information about themselves available to the world, they can hardly object when employers take that information into account in hiring decisions.

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## Reader Comments

**Ian Hendry**