

Q&A Column
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Email Subject Line: Getting Googled By An Employer

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Headline: What if an Employer Googles Me?

Summary:

I've heard that some people who've applied for jobs get turned down because of something an employer found out about them online. What do I need to know about this in order to make sure I'm protected?

Rob C., Brampton, Ontario

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Dear Mark,

I've heard that some people who've applied for jobs get turned down because of something an employer found out about them online. What do I need to know about this in order to make sure I'm protected?

Rob C., Brampton, Ontario

Dear Rob,

The first thing to know is that some employers do take a few moments to "Google" their top job applicants: in other words, they might do a search on the applicant's name using a search engine like Google or Altavista. The findings, if any, may contribute to their overall impression of the candidate who's being researched.

Should you be worried about this personally? Only if there is material on the Net about you that could put you in a negative light. Which means if you have concerns about this, it's not a bad idea to run your name through the most popular search engines to see what others might learn about you. In addition to Google and Altavista, you might want to also try MSN, Yahoo, AOL and Askjeeves. In each case, try the Canadian version first (e.g. google.ca), then the regular version too (e.g. google.com). This way you cover the most ground.

The reality is that for the vast majority of people there will be little, if any, record of you online. But...there may well be if you have your own BLOG (web log), if you participate in online discussions using your real name, if you have been interviewed or mentioned by the press, and if you have your own website. With this in mind, it can be important to know what's out there about you.

Take me, for instance. A google.ca search on my name shows that my web page (careeractivist.ca) comes up as the number one and two hits. That's great for me. Except that a few citations down comes this disturbing citation: "Dennis Kozlowski And Mark Swartz Sentenced To 8 1/3 to 25 Years..." Turns out a guy with the exact same name as me stole hundreds of millions of dollars from a company called Tyco a few years back. In other words, you might want to be on the lookout for cases of mistaken identity that could potentially haunt you.

Not that you can unilaterally change or expunge what's out there on someone else's site. The goal here is simply to be aware of what others might find if they do a search on you, so that you are prepared to respond to any questions that come up about this in interviews. Of course, if you do find something malicious or slanderous about you on someone else's site, you can try contacting them to remove or alter the offending content.

As I've said earlier, for most folks this won't be an issue at all. Still it doesn't hurt to be aware. And if you can find some ways to get mentioned in a positive light, you do stand a chance of being noticed in a good way.