Job Seekers Hit the Social Media Highway

Social media sites are used by millions as fast and easy ways to keep up with friends and family. But a surge in unemployment numbers has given social media a new purpose, as a valuable tool for job searchers. It’s a convenient resource available 24/7, and it’s creating a whole new way for job hunters to market themselves to prospective employers.

Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn are now being used in conjunction with Facebook and Twitter as powerful tools in helping job seekers, says Danielle Grey, director of career services at South University — West Palm Beach, Florida.

“It is a great way to connect with people who may serve as references for you during a job search and an excellent way to post that you are looking for a job,” she says.

While conservative industries — including much of the business and legal communities — are just beginning to embrace the use of social media in searching for candidates, other industries are diving right in to connect online with potential employees.

“Hospitals have begun to hold virtual job fairs where students can log onto a website and speak directly with a human resources staff member about open positions,” Grey says.

She believes that the surge in professional organizations joining social media sites is a benefit to job seekers.

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This ability to network from home with the click of a mouse has some unexpected benefits. Savvy searchers may be able to see or learn more about the competition and change or shape their online presence accordingly.

When making change to your online presence honesty is truly the best policy, reminds Grey. Employers can easily Google a candidate’s history, quickly identifying résumé inaccuracies.

“(Lying) can be extremely damaging. An employer may have it down to two candidates, but an internet search may help to narrow it down to the right person,” states Grey.

While she acknowledges that appearances don’t always tell the whole story about a candidate, sometimes it’s all a potential employer will find on a Google search. So beware of uploading unflattering photos or posting blogs that berate your past employers.

On the flip side, Grey mentions that a candidate whose name search results in positive results — anything from volunteer work to mentions of an industry related award — could quickly rise to the top of a hiring list. She also asserts that while social media is an emerging trend in job hunting, it’s still wise to use the old stand-bys of conventional websites, newspapers, and job fairs in the search.

Stephen Kohnle, a downsized former director of worldwide sales for a small high-technology equipment manufacturer, turned to social media to help with his job search.

“I started with LinkedIn, leveraging my connections and tapping into the site’s array of different groups to find and connect with people in industries I’m interested in pursuing. Searching companies in these industries, I was able to identify places where I might like to work,” he writes in an article chronicling his experiment.
Kohnle took his research further, using Twitter in conjunction with whoshoouldifollow.com to help him locate potential employers and contact anyone who could help him with his search.

“People who can demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of a particular industry, or whose name appears when a Web search is conducted, are more likely than not to be noticed first,” Kohnle asserts.

Using the Web to learn more about job candidates is something familiar to Jim Bonner, executive director of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. While recently filling a staff vacancy, Bonner looked up applicants on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google.

“I even joined Classmates once just to look someone up,” he states.

Bonner adds that the results he’s found when Googling job candidates have had an impact on his hiring decisions. And it’s not just because he’s found unflattering information about a candidate. Sometimes finding no information about a person can be just as damaging.

“If the job requires networking, people have to have some exposure,” Bonner says. “If you are going to join LinkedIn, at least make some connections.”

He also advises against sharing embarrassing personal information, and if you must blog, to post insightful, well constructed commentaries that could boost credibility.

“Be positive,” Bonner says. “Employers want positive people. Read what you write before you hit send. And don’t discuss your job search or your belief that you got the position.”

While social media can be a beneficial tool in an employment search, job seekers should take inventory of their online presence and modify it as needed to convey an honest, positive picture of their work experience.

“In today’s competitive job market, it will be the resourceful and self-motivated participant in social media that will find the perfect job,” concludes Kohnle.