Social Networking – advance your career prospects, don't destroy them!

Web 2.0 social networking tools have become a driving force in today's business world and social community. They allow a more interactive way of using technology to connect people and build communities.

In the corporate world many businesses are using web 2.0 technologies to enhance services offered to their clients. Libraries are great examples of how social networking tools can effectively be used to connect to their respective communities. Libraries are using social networking sites such as Facebook , Myspace, and Ning to inform borrowers of their services. More interactive content management systems that enable communication between the library and the public are being used. Borrowers are now able to write their own book reviews on public library catalogues via open source software and Twitter is actively being used to keep borrowers up-to-date with daily events in libraries. All these tools allow libraries to be more transparent and more easily accessible.

Socially, a new generation of internet user has emerged: one that communicates and shares all kinds of information, including personal, via social networking sites. These sites can be a great way to communicate with friends. However, while libraries are trying to be more transparent to their communities, individuals using social networking sites for private communication may find this transparency a concern. The vast number of users and the huge pile of unprotected information about them, shared with minimum restrictions on social networking software, can create huge privacy issues. Privacy issues, such as who is looking at your profile or how much access can someone get to your personal details may be a concern. How much personal information can you find about yourself by simply doing a google search? It may surprise you! A few simple guidelines may be worth checking when you add personal content to these sites. Remember employers or respective employers may also be able to view your personal site, read comments, and view photos.

Let's use Facebook as an example. Facebook attracts a huge number of users across the world. Based on a recent report produced by Facebook in 2009, the site has more than 200 million active users. It is a great way to communicate with friends, including sharing thoughts, experiences, and photos. If you are using this site for personal conversations or photos, be mindful of what you post online. Provocative photos, discriminatory comments, or badmouthing people and employers may be able to be publically viewed, and be detrimental to you in your current workplace or future career prospects. If you are worried about who is viewing your page, or the types of comments friends make publicly on your Facebook site, you can take a number of actions to make sure the content is appropriate.

Facebook defaults your page to open access, however by changing the privacy settings you have the ability to do the following:

- Limit what others can post on your Page. You are able to choose what types of content friends can post to your Page under "Fan Permissions." You can ban videos or photos, etc.
- Remove any content from your page. There is a "Remove" button next to each piece of content.
- If a friend of your Page is repeatedly posting inappropriate content, you can simply ban them.
- Make your page viewable by only accepted friends if you are using if for purely personal content.

Be very wary of accepting people you don't actually know as friends, just because they claim they are a friend of a friend.

Myspace has similar features as do other social networking sites. Taking simple precautions can ensure your social networking page is kept appropriate for "public viewing".

It's not all bad news, however; these sites can be used to your advantage. It's all about being vigilant with new media. Many social networking sites allow you to join common groups. These groups share common interests, and are a great way to broaden your network and contribute to professional discussion.

LinkedIn is an example of a social networking site that can be used to your advantage, especially when job prospecting. It allows you to develop an interconnected network of professionals around the world. When you join, you create a profile that summarises your professional expertise and accomplishments. You can add your resume and references from people you have worked with. You can also join groups within your professional area. Used correctly, this site can be a great way to enhance your job prospects. Recruitment agencies also use LinkedIn to advertise positions to job seekers. Groups on LinkedIn include ALIA, VALA, Information Online Conference, and Learning 2.0.

Twitter is another social media technology that is leading a revolution in how people communicate with each other. Using Twitter to spread vital information and personal stories is becoming increasingly commonplace. At the recent VALA conference you could keep up-to-date with conference proceeding by reading tweets. According to Twirus, during the week of the conference, the VALA twitter site was in the top 5 most popular tweet hash tags in Australia. Like other social media sites, senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends if they are using Twitter for purely social purposes or, by default, allow open access if using in a more professional capacity.

The message is simple: be responsible. Social media enables us to network with professionals around the world. It gives us professional development opportunities that have not been open to us in the past. It is up to us to make sure our social media sites are suitable to be viewed by members of the public or employers. As with all web 2.0 applications; we have the ability to manipulate our pages to make them private or delete unsavoury information. Use social media to your advantage, not disadvantage.

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In late April, when asked by a high school student how he might become president, Barack Obama stated, "Be careful what you post on Facebook."