



Promoting positive partnership between  
dynamic students and progressive businesses.

## **YOUR DAMAGING 'DIGITAL DIRT'**

### **Why your online identity could kill your employment chances...and what you should be doing about it.**

Just as we have all tried "Googling" a date or famous celebrity, so employers are using search engines to check out candidates. While the recruiters of yesteryear were happy to judge applicants on CVs and letters, today's web-savvy bosses are adding 'search-engine screening' to the mix. A recent survey by executive search firm ExecuNet found that 77% of recruiters use search engines to evaluate applicants, while Search Engine Watch reports up to 50 million proper-name searches every day.

Your online identity comprises any web-based information about you. Most of it will have been submitted by you, but some will have been written by others. So, even if you don't have an internet connection, your name could pop up on web pages to form your online identity. Negative web content has been branded 'digital dirt' as it's potentially the most harmful component of your online identity. It's important to remember that your digital dirt, like everything else on the internet, does not disappear and will follow you around forever.

So, what is your online identity saying about you? Try an experiment, and type your name into Google, maybe adding your city or university. Next, search for your email address. What have you found? Oh dear, that's not your MySpace page, with the tale of the all-day hangover is it? Or the dating website profile you set up 'as a laugh' last year? Worse, your digital dirt may extend beyond search engines. Employers can use Flickr and Photobucket to find 'interesting' images, while advanced web searchers may even delve into IP addresses, potentially uncovering everything you've ever done online.

Worried? You should be. Of the 77% of recruiters who use search engines to evaluate candidates, over 35% admit to rejecting them on the basis of what the web has revealed. That's over a third of potential employees who can trace their failure to a single web page, comment or image. Even if you find nothing on your name, you may still be in trouble. Arguably, a non-existent online identity speaks volumes about you. Building a positive online profile is now a major factor in job-hunting. So how can students go about it?

Perhaps the best way to ensure that your online identity helps, rather than hinders, job applications is to create new, positive content on the web. Fortunately, this is pretty straightforward, with 'Social Media' tools providing quick and easy ways to upload content. So, use blogs to express your opinions, share your thoughts, and potentially position yourself as an expert in your field. A well written, considered blog creates a trail of expertise for employers to see, and also serves as a valuable networking tool. Just remember the golden rule for any new content you add to the internet: 'imagine the MD of your dream company is reading it!'

Another valuable way for students to bolster their online profile is to register with a web-based society that employers interact with. The recently launched Bright Futures provides the perfect example. Formerly the Student Industrial Society (SIS), Bright Futures allows work-savvy students to network with some of the UK's top graduate recruiters. As well as running on-campus, regional and national events, Bright Futures also has an innovative website ([bright-futures.org.uk](http://bright-futures.org.uk)), where students can add their online 'wiki' profile, to be viewed by an impressive list of potential employers.

Bright Futures Director, Simon Reichwald, comments: "In an increasingly competitive graduate marketplace, it's more important than ever for students to stand out from the crowd. Web-based information is being used more frequently in the selection process, and becoming more easily accessible, so students must work hard to protect their online identity. Bright Futures enables students to interact with top employers and present a really positive picture of themselves."

There's one other task; cleaning the muck that has already been spread. For content you've added, this is not too difficult – simply destroy the evidence! Edit your MySpace page, change your MSN nickname, remove those risqué online photos and delete that dodgy blog entry. If someone has posted derogatory comments about you, act fast. Get in touch with them, asking for a retraction of any false information and putting a positive spin on anything that is true.

Burying your digital dirt is an ongoing process, but an essential one to safeguard your career prospects. With employers increasingly turning to web-based recruitment and evaluation, online identity management should be a concern for all students. However, with the right strategy, all you should have to worry about in an interview is living up to your online identity.

**For further information about Bright Futures, please visit [www.bright-futures.org.uk](http://www.bright-futures.org.uk). Simon Reichwald is available for interview and pictures are available on request.**

**Ends**

**20 April 2007**

## **Note to Editors**

Bright Futures was formerly known as The Student Industrial Society (SIS), a professional body with graduate employability at the fore, focussed on enhancing direct collaboration between industry and the student population. Formerly run by CRAC, the Society has now been taken over by Simon Reichwald, Managing Director of Graduate Success; a specialist graduate-recruitment company.

Having been re-branded and repackaged, it's now an even more attractive proposition for UK businesses. As a not-for-profit organisation, it invests monies directly back into events and services to benefit its student and corporate members. The society offers genuine value and appeal to students, due to the close partnerships between student committees and members, corporate members and the national Bright Futures team.

### **For further media information contact:**

**Andrew Lacey**

**apt marketing & pr**

**Email: [andrew@aptmarketing.co.uk](mailto:andrew@aptmarketing.co.uk)**

**Tel: 01242 250692**

**Mobile: 07813 890818**