

## Clean Up Your eLife

Recently, a young professional called in sick to his office for several days in a row. So far, so good, no big deal. Unfortunately, he wasn't sick, he was lying. More unfortunately, while he was "sick" he went to a costume party dressed as a fairy, complete with pink leotard and magic wand. Most unfortunately, he posted pictures of himself at the party looking rather trashed on his Myspace page. OK, maybe these aren't unfortunate incidents, just dumb ones.

As fate would have it, his manager's attention was somehow drawn to the pictures on the employee's Myspace page. The next day, the manager sent the employee an email. It was short and succinct. The email included a copy of the picture and said, "Hope you're feeling better. You're fired. Nice wand." Oh, yeah, and by the way, the email was copied to the entire company email list.

The moral of the story? The things you post about yourself on the Internet can get you fired and can even do irreparable damage to your career. They can damage your reputation within an industry and prevent you from getting future jobs.

Events like that one are not isolated.

For instance, a few years ago, a young political consultant put an

advertisement on a very provocative dating website, including a rather interesting photograph of himself demonstrating his “abilities.” Not only that, he did it at the height of an election season. Well, politics can be an ugly profession (just looking at the guy’s pics proved that), but once the political opposition found his date-site ad, it was on the front page for a few news cycles. I don’t think he’s worked in politics since.

Companies want people of good reputation representing their company. What you do outside the office DOES have an impact on how you are treated inside your office. It does not always seem right, but it is a reality. It is also lawful in some cases for you to be fired for things posted on the Internet even if those things have nothing to do with your work activities. In fact, I recently read an article about a fire chief of a small town being removed from her position for sexy poses posted on various websites, even though the pictures were taken years before her appointment as fire chief.

Internet searches of employees are the newest tool used by companies to be sure they have the best and brightest. More line managers, human resource staff, and hiring managers are using the Internet as a way to find out as much information on their employees as possible. And what they’re finding is not always a good thing. Take a look at some of these story headlines pulled off the Internet:

- “Texas Probation Officer...Fired For Nude Internet Photos”
- “Teen Patriots Cheerleader Fired for Swastika Party Pics”
- “Teacher Fired Over MySpace Photo”
- “Kentucky Paramedic Beaten, Fired Following Internet Post”
- “Miss Nevada USA, Fired Over Naughty Internet Pictures”

There are hundreds of other stories out there just like this. What you put on the Internet can be there forever. The last thing you want to do is to have embarrassing pictures of you puking in a toilet at a college kegger, baring your private parts for a string of beads at Mardi-Gras or anything else like that for all to see until eternity.

So, how do you clean up your eLife?

First, do you have a personal site on a social network website, like Facebook.com, Myspace.com, etc.? If so, go through all of your pictures and postings and remove all compromising pics, foul language, disturbing logos, quotations, etc. Delete any postings or pics that may imply illegal activities. Delete postings that can be considered crude and rude. Don't forget any postings that may sound dark, rageful, or anti-social. If your manager sees that you have a tendency toward anarchy, you may not be long for your current job, much less a promotion.

You may also need to go to the pages of your friends and others in your network to see if you're tagged in pictures on their page. If you don't like what you see, then you should ask that person to please remove them from their site.

Next, check your email names and chat handles. Some of the names I've seen can be pretty, let's say, personal. For instance, if you use `neuroticwitch@blahblah.com`, or `spankme@wahwah.com` as your main personal email address, you may want to change it now that you're in the professional world.

The same goes for your IM handles. If the AOL or Yahoo world knows you as `sexy_rose_bud`, then it maybe time for a change. The chances of that coming back to bite you increase the more employers comb through your eLife.

Did you know texts, IMs, and chats can be saved. Just ask a former mayor of Detroit. He was sent to jail based on thousands of text messages he made to his alleged mistress. The text messages were made using Detroit-city owned devices. The wireless carrier actually had a complete history of all of those text messages saved in their database. They were brought out at trial and cemented the case against the mayor. Most people don't know it, but a lot of wireless

phone companies save text messages in their company databases.

It's the same thing with IMs and Internet chat sessions. These "conversations" can be saved by either the hosting company or the people involved in the chat session. So, for instance, if you've been having a hot and steamy flirt session with one of your co-workers, you better hope it doesn't go bad...because all of those sessions could be saved and could one day end up in your boss' email inbox.

What about Youtube or other videos that you may have on-line? Have you looked through those to see if there's anything that could compromise or jeopardize your career?

What about blog posts? Have you posted extreme views on politics, gossiped about people you know, disrespected coworkers, management, clients, etc? Check it out and clean it up. You may have those feelings, but why do you feel you need the whole world to know about them?

Have you Googled yourself? I'm sure your employer has or soon will. What will they find? You would be surprised at how much is on-line about you. It could be high-school athletic performances or other types of reviews in a local newspaper. But what about an arrest for a DUI? Look, there's not much you can do about things you'll find. But you need to know what's out there and be prepared to explain it to someone who is going to ask you about it.

As an aside, there are processes in many states to allow people to apply for expungement of criminal convictions. An expungement removes all criminal records from police and court databases thereby making them unavailable for background checks. A qualified attorney can provide more information about this legal process. Of course, it is only likely to be successful for minor convictions. But in this day of heightened security concerns, any derogatory information can potentially be harmful to your career.

Remember, the Internet is a wonderful thing, but it's like a bad STD. People post the most intimate, private, and personal thoughts and images, somehow thinking that people really care and that nobody beyond their friends will ever see. But once it's out there, it may be there forever and it may have life-changing consequences.

As a new professional, one of your primary jobs is to protect your valuable reputation. Nothing at this point is more important to you than how people see you. As our society moves forward, it will be harder and harder to keep personal and professional lives separate since it is so easy to transmit images and thoughts to anyone and everyone.

Make sure you are using your eLife to post an image of responsibility, trustworthiness and professionalism.