Managing Your Online Professional Identity
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EDITOR’S SUMMARY
Confusion around names and identity features can undermine professional standing, but it can be avoided by carefully managing one’s online personal and professional identity. It is advisable to routinely check hits on one’s name online to be sure desired information is not clouded by mistakes or misinformation or overshadowed by another with the same name. Professionals should create personal e-portfolios and tie them to LinkedIn and other appropriate social networking sites. Active participation on those sites helps boost search returns tied with one’s professional identity. Promotional websites such as Vizilibity.com can be made more effective by adding keywords to highlight interests and achievements, while MyWebCareer.com evaluates one’s networking profile. By customizing privacy settings, one can limit access to personal information. Managing personal information takes time but is critical to be sure online information accurately represents your identity.

KEYWORDS
personal information  social web
social networking  knowledge management

Your professional web identity says a lot about you. But do you know what it is? How often do you Google your name to understand what your professional identity is? Since 2005, when 75% of search firms regularly used Google to investigate job candidates, that habit by potential employers has increased now to 90% [1]. So your name on the web is important. But is your information clear and accurate? What can you do to enhance searching and better control your identity? According to James Alexander, founder of Visibility.com, about 2000 people on LinkedIn share names with persons on the FBI’s most wanted list [1]. What can you do if this confusion is true for you? There are steps you can take to ensure that the real you stands out on the web.

When you want to improve your personal identity search, you can add keywords that are specific to your address or job such as title, workplace, city or state. Then, you should do a quick evaluation from the point of view of the employers or collaborators you want to work with so that you can be sure to list what you found that they would like to read about you. Also, did you find anything you didn’t like about you? Date and summarize in a log your professional Internet identity. Make it a habit to check periodically and use different browsers to find as many web identities as may be out there for you. Setting aside a time once a month or quarterly to maintain this identity allows you to manage the information and control the knowledge about you [2]. We will give you tips below to change your identity.

Basic Tips for Managing Your Professional Online Identity
On each site you have a presence be sure to maintain a level of professionalism that emphasizes your skills and interests in a positive light. Correct any mistakes, such as spellings of emails and name variations on any
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site, especially on your employer or institution’s website [2]. Minor typos can prevent your being located or correctly identified.

For your basic personal identity, you may already be using social networking tools such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr or Twitter. But for your professional identity set up a career-based social network page through tools such as LinkedIn. Also, consider creating an online portfolio. This step can be done by taking your resume and converting it into an electronic format, with links to publications, research papers, presentations and other samples of accomplishments. There are cost-free tools for creating an e-portfolio that do not include ad displays, for example, Pbworks, Google Sites and Wordpress. Minimal fees are charged for maintaining more detailed sites. Then to be sure your portfolio is used and that you are found by searchers, add links to it from your social pages: LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, Flickr and Twitter. Finally, on all these social pages, develop a profile and update it periodically [2].

A special note about LinkedIn: As a social networking site for sharing career information and establishing a professional identity, LinkedIn has become very successful and preferred by many Internet users connecting with others in their profession. Check it and become active on that network by accepting invitations and monitoring what associates and colleagues are doing. Keeping active and current in LinkedIn will also help bring your professional profile and preferred identity to the top of searches on most search engines [3].

Additional Steps

There is more that you can do to affect results of web searches. For example, you can register on promotional websites such as www.vizibility.com. Vizibility.com supports tools that make it easier for people to find you online. You can provide specific keywords that highlight new degrees or trainings, list subject areas from recent publications or presentations and emphasize old or new research interests. For example, use the tools provided by Vizibility.com to help others find you on the web. Also, you can effectively use the “SearchMe” link button to lead people directly to your web identity by adding them to your resumes, business cards or email signatures [1]. This way, you are ensuring that when employers and other professionals search for you, they find the information you want them to find. Your professional, online existence is essential. In this technology-driven society, you are expected to maintain a professional online presence. Otherwise, you might run the risk of being overlooked or seen as not progressive enough [2].

Another option is to sign up for sites such as www.MyWebCareer.com. This website evaluates both your social and business networking profiles. MyWebCareer tools also review and critique your overall network presences and define your search engine footprint to generate a personalized career score. Changing the score and controlling your professional identity on the Internet are up to you.

Using social networking to your advantage and doing what is required for personal knowledge management can depend on you and the time you take for social networking. First, you can use LinkedIn and other social sites to network and build connections among others in your field of study or work. Just as you network by attending conferences or taking courses for professional development, you can network on the web. Someone may know of a grant, research project or job that would interest you and further your career. To keep in touch, you might add the URL link for your LinkedIn profile to your contact information on your curriculum vitae and online portfolio, thereby making you clearly available [3].

However, you also need to protect yourself and your connections. So first of all, customize your privacy settings. You never know if a friend or a friend of a friend could become one of your potential employers [2]. If you are on Facebook, where a new version of Facebook has been released, it is advisable to create a new list on Facebook for your professional friends. You should customize it so that professional friends and associates can only see what you want them to see. Mainly, you want to manage online knowledge about your professional self, so be sure your Facebook profile is private if you don’t want others browsing your personal updates, photos and non-business comments. Keep updating to polish and control that identity [3].

Summary

Knowledge is gained from doing activities. In this paper, we offer a few suggestions for real knowledge management of your online identity.
Organizing your social network connections to manage your professional online identity starts with searching and analysis, “Who am I online?” Next, you can build profiles and portfolios and then possibly code descriptors to enhance your brand on the web. No matter your profession, your web identity has become an important aspect of who you are. Managing personal information and knowledge about yourself is a never-ending task, but we think it can start at a simple level and be creative. Most of the tips and suggestions we provide here were shared during a workshop presentation at the 2011 ASIS&T Annual Meeting and are intended as hands-on activities as well as introductory information.

**Resources Mentioned in the Article**

