

Digital Dirt And Tattoo: Easy To Do, Hard To Lose

By Joyce Lain Kennedy

June 8, 2007

DEAR JOYCE: Allow me to add to the advice you gave a parent for a college-graduating daughter who seems to be slow looking for employment.

Our firm recruits for upper-management-level positions. Tell the daughter to avoid making mistakes to be considered by firms like ours in 10 or 20 years. It is critical to remember that networks, computer systems and the related databases are not much different than a tattoo: easy to get on and nearly impossible to get rid of.

Anything she does today, be that at MySpace or simply the resumes and general employment-related mailings that she is sending out, will be somewhere in cyberspace in the future. Already, simple search processes by an experienced researcher will unearth any such footprints. In the future, more powerful search engines will make it impossible to miss them.

Among specific considerations:

-- Even the e-mail address used to send messages is analyzed for relevance. To name just two examples, Havard.com (or other name universities) and AOL.com imply something about the person and about his or her past and interests. Our assessment may not be what seems obvious.

Harvard.com suggests a fine education, but when we receive a resume sprinkled with too many Harvard references, we may view it as pretentious, with all that implies. Moreover, is his or her Harvard background the singular "accomplishment" the candidate offers? Believe me, we get the Harvard connection with one mention.

AOL.com, also a fine Web site for many people, carries the image with us of "soccer moms' network," complete with recipes and other home arts. When a candidate sends us a resume asking for a job as president of a \$50 million company and it comes from AOL.com, we wonder if it's his wife's Web site and he's using it because he's out of work and he lost his professional e-mail connection.

-- Job titles are only a general description, and one should not be shy to inquire about the range of opportunities in a chosen field. However, it is not helpful to apply for a CEO or VP position as a recent college graduate; we see such foolishness every day, and data systems have a long memory.

-- Having a social net account is no indication for computer-literacy. If a resume highlights MySpace or similar "experience" but not the usual programs (at least Word, Excel, PowerPoint, a database program, and so forth), it is as if the candidate's primary interest is to play computer games. Nothing wrong with MySpace or games, but if not in a related industry, such digital activities have little relevance for professional employment. Nor do they give any indication that the person will be a dedicated worker -- and may be the opposite. -- Egon L. Lacher, JRB & Company, Boca Raton, Fla.

DEAR EGON: Many thanks for underscoring the dangers that lie ahead for unsuspecting new graduates who aren't cautious about planting online information that can become digital dirt.

NOTE TO MULTICULTURAL WOMEN: A signature feature of Working Mother magazine -- Best Companies for Multicultural Women -- appears in the June issue. While the magazine contains details, alphabetically the top 20 are:

Allstate Insurance, American Electric Power, American Express, Chubb Group of Insurance Companies, Citi, Colgate-Palmolive, Credit Suisse, Deloitte & Touche, Ernst & Young, General Mills, IBM, JPMorgan

Chase, Merck, Metlife, PepsiCo, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Procter & Gamble, Sodexo, Verizon and Wal-Mart.

Two comments: (1) The winners, who self-nominate, are concentrated in the Northeast. Come on, Midwestern and Western companies, throw your hat in the ring for the 2008 award list. (2) Headquarters policy doesn't always translate to each company establishment if the local boss doesn't buy into the policy and can evade it without penalty. Still, the honor of inclusion on a best-companies list is an encouraging sign for job seekers.

(E-mail career questions for possible use in this column to Joyce Lain Kennedy at jlk@sunfeatures.com; use "Reader Question" for subject line. Or mail her at Box 368, Cardiff, CA 92007.)

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