

Keeping online reputation clean important



John Deans

A good name is important in a small town. Positive news get around but bad stuff moves faster. Donate to local charity and you will likely be mentioned in *The Banner-Press*. Get indicted and you'll make the front page.

Like my favorite singer Miranda Lambert says, "Everyone dies famous in a small town."

Building Deans Consulting over the past 10 years and now Brenham Home Rental since 2008 I have relied on that same small town rule. Hard work, quality products and friendly service get noticed but those small mistakes or few personal conflicts can be heard like the train through Brenham.

A company's reputation and a person's honor mean everything. Businesses like Blue Bell with a good service record can last generations. Individuals can have a good name through work, church and personal relationships that open doors and grow opportunities for them.

People that have done others wrong pay for those offenses many times over in numerous ways.

Our reputations in town can now be overshadowed by our reputations online in this day and age. Twenty years ago when an employer wanted to find out about a prospective new hire he would call around to people to get the skinny on them.

That kind of analog background checking still goes on but there is a newer, faster and more anonymous way to investigate one's background instantaneously. With the Internet and Google along with dozens of other Web-based personal information gathering tools employers and even curious new lovers can discover things about their employment candidates or new mates.

People today not only have worry about the reputation around town but they now have to monitor and maintain good standing on the World Wide Web.

A person's reputation can be as critical digitally as what the locals think of them. In April of last year in my column "What NOT to do while looking for a job" we touched on things you should avoid doing online that may hurt your chances getting a new job. Today we will expand on that point and help you clean up your digital online rep.

One of the big things to avoid is a conflict with any law enforcement. If one of the sheriff's deputies pick you up for fighting out in Chappell Hill or drinking too much you will get a permanent scar online with the arrest and a court record that will never go away.

With tools like PublicData.com that bad night can haunt you forever and can be extremely difficult to erase.

Employers commonly do background checks and any charge of Class B misdemeanor or above will show up on almost every common criminal query. Talk about a good way to get your employment application dropped into the can quickly.

An easy way to keep your name clean from that set-in-stone online reputation killer is to obey the law. Don't steal, do drugs, drive drunk, or hurt people — sounds simple to me.

The next way to keep your online reputation clean is to not dirty it up yourself. Duhh!

Kids now and even young adults are putting pictures, captions and event descriptions of themselves on social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter that shine a negative light on their character.

Post a provocative picture of yourself online and it very well may come back to haunt you immediately, years or even decades down the line.

Get drunk at a party on a wild Saturday night, post some of those raunchy videos on YouTube that Sunday afternoon, and you may not have a job Monday morning.

Watch what you post on blogs since that is a permanent digital record that is picked up by Google easily. Bad things can

come back your way when you get into a digital brawl online with the blow-by-blow possibly having long term repercussions on your personal life, academic opportunities, and job offerings.

I have made my bed by posting numerous hard line right wing political rants over the years all over the Web with my conservative activism.

Lord help me if I ever need a job or help from a liberal — though I shudder to think of that kind of world. What I'm trying to say is be darn careful what you put about yourself online, since it is very hard to clean it up or make it go away.

There are ways to salvage your online reputation but it can take both time and money. If you are looking for a new job or a new mate, you will want to Google yourself to see what condition your online rep is in out there on the Web. You can also use sites like Pipl.com, Wink.com and PeekYou.com to view how others see you online.

First and foremost delete any negative, off color, or down right

stupid stuff from your social networking sites that you have control over. Don't shoot yourself in the foot digitally right off the bat.

Other things you can do is to submit positive news, articles, event highlights, and good press about yourself on numerous social networking sites. This will help the good things show up on the first pages of Google results and push the bad links about you to the later pages when are not viewed as much.

If you need help in getting negative information off the Internet there are companies that can clean up reputations for a fee. Companies like Reputation-Defender.com, ReputationManagementConsultants.com and numerous others can either lobby to have sites remove bad items, push down the presence of negative digital print, or just submit numerous good things about you to overshadow the bad stuff.

Bottom line: These days you may have to pay as much attention to your reputation online as your name around Brenham to

stay ahead in this technology advance world.

Next week's column: Computer noises.

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