Digital hiring: what recruiters can see on your social media

Twelve years since worldwide adoption, we now have an entire generation joining the workforce that do not remember a world before social media. Without professional experience or understanding of what companies expect to see (and not see), tomorrow's workforce are faced with growing up and learning about the person they wish to become, publicly, traceably and ultimately, judged before they have ever had chance to prove their talents.

A quote comes to mind from Jonathan Margolis: "The most insignificant among us can address their thoughts to the whole world" from his FT opinion article. The challenge to be accepted and desired is one of the most human and while the tools are the same, the criteria for which we are judged are very different for children versus young adults entering careers.

Let there be no misunderstandings, your digital persona is now every bit as important as your CV and diligent recruiters will be looking for the best in you, and the worst, when putting you forward for a job.

Now, information regarding a candidate's geographical location, relationship, views, social and work activities can all be found, publicly, on the internet. Analysing a candidate's social media profile and posts has become common practice in companies around the world. According to a new CareerBuilder survey, the number of employers using social media to screen candidates has significantly increased to 70 per cent, up from 60 per ceent last year. This increase is a result of the growth in social recruitment, where in 2016, 84 per cent of organisations were recruiting via social media compared to 56 per cent in 2011.

A deep dive for recruiters includes using search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing to gather information on the candidate – this method is now being used by 69 per cent of employers, compared to 59 per cent last year. On top of this, each social media platform has a search function that recruiters can use to find the candidate and view their public profile and posts.

It is standard practice in the industry for recruiters to search for a candidate online to ascertain what information can be found before submitting the candidate's details to their client. While we endeavour to be objective, good recruiters will champion the values and culture of their clients in each individual assignment. They adopt the biases of their clients for cultural fit and ultimately, cannot put their reputation on the line by submitting candidates they feel would 'offend' the client.

So what are we looking for? While the majority of recruiters are looking for information that supports the candidate's qualification for the job (61 per cent); Half of recruiters would like to see if the candidate has a professional online persona; Whilst other key items include what other people are posting about the candidates (37 per cent) and for a reason not to hire a candidate (24 per cent). The most common discovery that can lead to a candidate not receiving a job offer is provocative or inappropriate photos, videos or information (39 per cent). This is followed closely by candidates posting information about them drinking or using drugs (38 cent) and posting discriminatory comments related to race, gender, and religion (32 cent). In 2017, 54 per cent of hiring professionals decided not to hire a candidate based on content found on social media according to research from Statista.

Rulings from the European Union's working party recommend making it illegal for employers to snoop on the social media accounts of their potential employees. At InterQuest we are making headway training all our recruitment staff on GDPR, as the new regulation will change the way we operate. Whilst this ruling in particular is non-binding, the Article 29 working party are highly influential and could persuade stricter EU laws to be governed in the future regarding social media vetting when recruiting.

In wake of Facebook's recent data scandal we could see tougher rules and regulations behind utilising data that is readily available on a prospective candidate's social media profiles. Already, any prospective employee must be told if their social media profiles will be audited as part of the recruitment process.

If you're job hunting, I strongly recommend reviewing your social media use. More than 4 in 10 employers hired a candidate based upon the content they found on their social media. Use these platforms to showcase your personality, interests, skills and projects for example, whilst keeping a professional, but human, persona. While in some great scenarios you will be advantaged by a good social media presence that contributes to the flow of ideas online, the real threat for candidates is social media profiles being used to filter out candidates who demonstrate undesirable values and behaviours.

Once you have secured the job, it's best to stay vigilant. 34 per cent of employers have found content online that caused them to reprimand or fire an employee. There is always the option of turning all your social media profiles to private therefore you are in control of who can view posts, photographs and such. However, if you're wondering whether to just stay offline, think twice before doing so, as 55 per cent of employers are less likely to call someone in for an interview if they can't find a candidate online.

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