

Guarding your Online Reputation

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Just between friends, right? Just you, me, and a few hundred million of our closest friends. Once upon a time casual conversations with friends and family stayed with friends and family (for the most part). Today, we have found new ways to share what's on our mind with those around us. Paper notes, hallway/water cooler conversations, and phone calls have given way to tweets, posts, blogs, profiles, emails, online forums, IMs, and SMS messages.



Does this migration of communication to a more technical venue matter? The answer is a resounding YES! More to the point



there is a problem of how long this information will live and who will have access to it. This problem is primarily the result of the ever-hungry beast or beasts known as **The Internet search engine!** Internet search engines are designed to crawl the Internet and consume vast amounts of information, categorize it, and

make it available to planet earth ... forever (or a very, very long time). So those few careless words may be permanently associated with you!

This is a big deal in our information age. In our society a person's online "persona" has become an ever-increasing component of their physical world reputation. We have already seen posts made in an individual's private, online life have long lasting impacts on employment, college select process, legal battles, and other important areas of life.

We must change how we view these new mediums of communication. We must assume that somehow, someday this

information will be exposed to a broader audience and most probably be made available to the search engines. So with this in mind, the following guidelines may help you make better choices when it comes to posting or sending online content.

Since there is a real chance the entire world may see your posts, always ask yourself (before posting) would you send this information/pictures/etc. if you knew one or all of the following would be viewing the content?

- **Current and/or Future Employer**
- **Current and/or Future Boyfriend, Girlfriend, or Spouse**
- **Parents or Children of Boyfriend, Girlfriend, or Spouse**
- **Your Family (*Parents, Children, Grandparents, Siblings*)**
- **Future Colleges & School Administration**
- **Community Organizations & Clubs (*Everything from High-school sports to Political Organizations*)**
- **Mass Media (Newspapers, TV, Radio, etc.)**
- **Prosecuting Attorney or Opposing Legal Counsel**
- **<< Other groups & organizations that are most relevant to you now and in the future >>**

But let's not end on a sour note. If you know the world will be watching, take the time to BUILD UP your online reputation. How can this be accomplished? Simple, choose words and content that is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable and that are excellent and worthy of praise. I wish I could take credit for this wisdom but these words were actually written by the Apostle Paul (Phil 4:8) nearly 2000 years ago. (*some things are true regardless of time or medium*)

Finally, be careful what you say ... but not too careful! There are times when you should speak up and speak out. In-justice, oppression, hate, and other evils should be addressed, even if it will cost you! So be wise with your words and be bold. Good luck!