

As private and professional life are increasingly moving to the Internet – particularly through online social networks – each user creates a cyber-identity with variable levels of details and ability to control its use. It becomes increasingly important to care for one's reputation on the Internet because of the far reaching effects it could have. To recover a once failed reputation is quite difficult. This is a common lessons learnt by individuals and companies.

Online reputation influences recruitment opportunities

As defined on [Wikipedia](#) , "reputation is the opinion of the public toward a person, a group of people, or an organization. It is an important factor in many fields, such as education, business, online communities or social status". One example where reputation matters is the employment selection process. A lot of vacancies nowadays are posted online. Private and public companies or organizations often offer online channels for applying for a position. On one side the applicant submits a curriculum vitae "tailored" to the position. On the other side the head hunter is nowadays in the position to verify the data and find additional information through a quick online search. Some information may pertain to other people having the same name, but [vertical search engines](#)

like

[ZoomInfo](#)

and

[123people](#)

offer opportunities for refining the searches. Other example is private past or present personal data, which one might not want to see online. Social network websites are an excellent source of personal information human resources personnel for profiling applicants. Unaware of the potential consequences and of the opportunities for investigators to aggregate dispersed data and thus accurately profile individuals, many people publish "sensitive" personal data online, thus from time to time, compromising their application for a job.

Dealing with negative information

As written in a [previous post about privacy](#) , the Internet is full of personal data, which have been stored on different servers in the past. One has to take into account that basically nothing can be deleted once it is published. Google is aware of the challenge and offers to erase certain content, which is quite a tricky process. Therefore,

[Google has suggestions on how to manage your online reputation](#)

. Google's first suggestion is "Think twice before putting your personal information online". Even Google acknowledges how difficult it is to redress negative information. Therefore it suggests to "proactively publishing useful, positive information". In other words, one of the most powerful conglomerate of online recommends you to be farsighted and strategic when posting personal data online.

Collecting personal information

As a test, did you ever type your name in a search engine and looked at all the results? The [MIT Media Lab has a little application](#)

, which does all that in one search and takes you on a journey through what is found under your name. The application collates all the data it can find about the name you entered from the Internet.

[123people.com](#)

performs profilings based on personal data aggregation from different sources. Not surprisingly, there are services offered such as

[Online Reputation Management](#)

(ORM) particularly for companies. "ORM is the practice of consistent research and analysis of one's personal or professional, business or industry reputation as represented by the content across all types of online media." The services scan the web for mentioned products or company names and check whether they are positive or negative and are alerted in the latter case.

First steps to protecting one's reputation

Unfortunately there are quite a few cases where individuals were discriminated and harmed through offensives or other kind of [online attacks](#) . This could even grow with the expanding social web and the easiness to publishing online. As individuals do not have the time and resources to set up a reputation management system, one should be cautious about what to publish and make public. But some steps can make a difference such as the

[privacy settings in Facebook](#)

, where one can select exactly who can see what, and separate friends from colleagues and vice versa . A reputation management system is basically a simple or advanced monitoring system, which makes you aware what is said about you. A simple version is

[to create a Google alert with your name](#)

In general, one should look carefully where to publish something - whether it is a secure and private environment or public as [Twitter](#) . In the latter case, within minutes information can be read by thousands of people. One good example are mailing lists which may be considered as private, but often have an open accessible archive and their content is therefore indexed by search engines.

Author: Christian Kreutz

