

Digital reputation: candidate concern or recruiter revelation?



Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram ... social media is very much part of our everyday lives. Whether we are aware of it or not, as we interact on the web we leave digital footprints. The posts we share, tweets we send, updates we add to our Facebook profiles, etc., all contribute to our digital reputation. But can our digital reputation affect our chances of getting a new job?

“Digital reputation, in the context of social recruiting, refers to an HR professional or hiring manager’s opinion about a job candidate’s contribution or presence on social media (e.g. online profiles, blog entries, comments, images).”



Digital reputation affects hiring decisions

The IBM Smarter Workforce Institute’s latest research confirms what we might have suspected; most of those surveyed who use social media in recruiting say job candidates’ digital reputations are a factor in their hiring decisions – 42 percent say it affects their hiring decisions to a great or very great extent (Figure 1).

Figure 1: How far digital reputation affects hiring decisions



Source: WorkTrends™ 2015 global survey (HR and hiring managers who use social media in recruiting N=4,017).

HR and hiring managers not only use social media to verify a résumé, they’re also looking for other insights. For example, most of them believe digital reputation provides useful information about a candidate’s expertise and fit. They are also confident that candidates with good digital reputations will succeed in their organization. Given such widespread

use of social media for checking up on candidates, job seekers may want to review their digital footprint to ensure it's not negatively affecting their chances of getting that dream job.

However, it's not only job seekers who need to be wary of digital reputation issues; recruiters should be aware of the following:

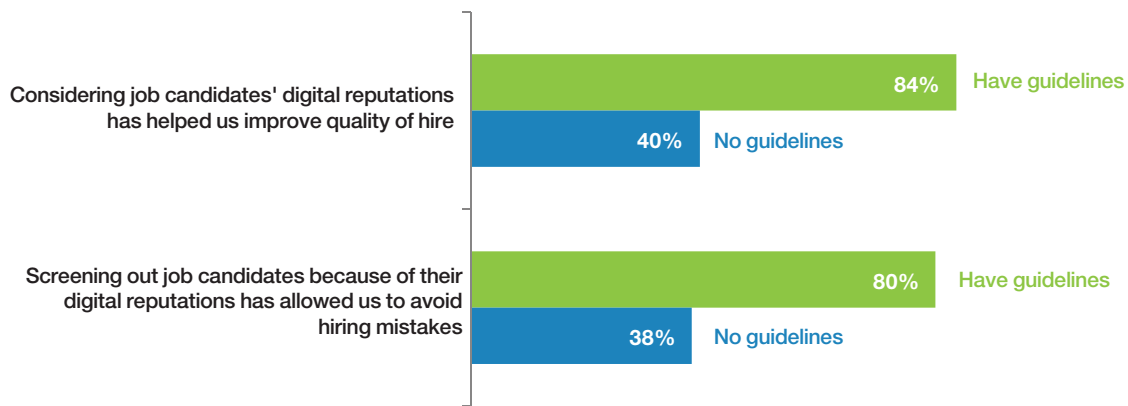
- The use of social media profiles has not been established as a reliable and valid method to assess a job candidate's expertise level and job or organizational fit. You could get an inaccurate impression of someone and even pass on a great candidate.
- Social media profiles may provide personal information on race, gender, national origin, religion, marital status, pregnancy status, and disability status that could (consciously or sub-consciously) affect recruitment choices, and might even lead to discrimination.

To minimize the risks of bias and to ensure the most accurate insight into a candidate, I-O psychologists recommend proven personality, psychological and behavioral assessments to accurately evaluate job and organizational fit.

Guidelines help improve social recruiting

Some organizations have produced social recruiting guidelines to help HR and hiring managers navigate the potential issues and it appears to be working. As shown in Figure 2, double the number of HR and hiring managers in organizations with guidelines say screening out job candidates because of their digital reputations has allowed them to improve quality of hire compared to those in organizations without guidelines.

Figure 2: Organizational guidelines help make the most of digital reputation



Source: WorkTrends™ 2015 global survey (HR and hiring managers who use social media in recruiting N=4,017, those with guidelines N=2,536, those without guidelines N=448)

Implications

For job candidates:

- Don't assume that your Facebook (or other social media) profile is off limits for a recruiter. It's very likely to be used to check up on what you've said in your resume and even whether you're the kind of person recruiters think would fit well in their organization.

For more on the role of digital reputation in recruitment, download the full IBM Smarter Workforce Institute white paper: Could social media mischief cost you that new job? [Click Here](#)

For recruiters:

- The validity and legality of using social media information to screen job candidates have not been established, so be cautious.
- Social media profiles may not be an accurate representation of the candidate's true self or potential. They could be unbalanced or lacking in relevance to the world of work.
- Ensure your organization issues guidelines on how someone's social media profile should be used in the recruiting process and especially when making employment decisions, and be aware of potential privacy issues and legal challenges.