

Online posting can have very serious consequences

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Social media has opened many opportunities of communication, but can be risky. Family and friends are not the only ones who might want to know what people are really like in their private life. Photo by: Kritina Lee Knief/Getty Images.

Dear Student,

This year, 10 high school students were admitted to Harvard University. But then Harvard changed its mind about them and decided to not let them in. Why? They belonged to a private Facebook group that shared pictures and messages that could have been hurtful and upsetting to other people. Was Harvard right to make this decision? What about freedom of speech? Do young people know the dangers of social media?

I'm a business teacher at a college and a job services counselor. I have also worked as a recruiter to help companies find the right employees. People now have a personal "brand" which is how you appear to the world. I've seen how social media becomes part of a person's brand. Your brand can help you or hurt you.

People who work in college admissions, future employers and even dates have one thing in common. They are likely to search for you on social media sites. What will they find? They will make decisions about you based upon it.

Here's what you should know. Don't end up like those students who applied to Harvard.

1. Social Media Posts Disappear, Right?

Let's be clear about one thing: You've been building your online presence since your first Snapchat. Think the posts disappear? Think private pages are private? Think again.

You might feel like your life and opinions are no one's business. But you can't always control who sees what you post. Everything you post could be saved by your friends (or people who aren't your friends). You might make a public post that you think is private — or, you might post to the wrong account. How easy is it to find something you believe is hidden? Easier than you might think!

2. Do Employers And Colleges Actually Look At This Stuff?

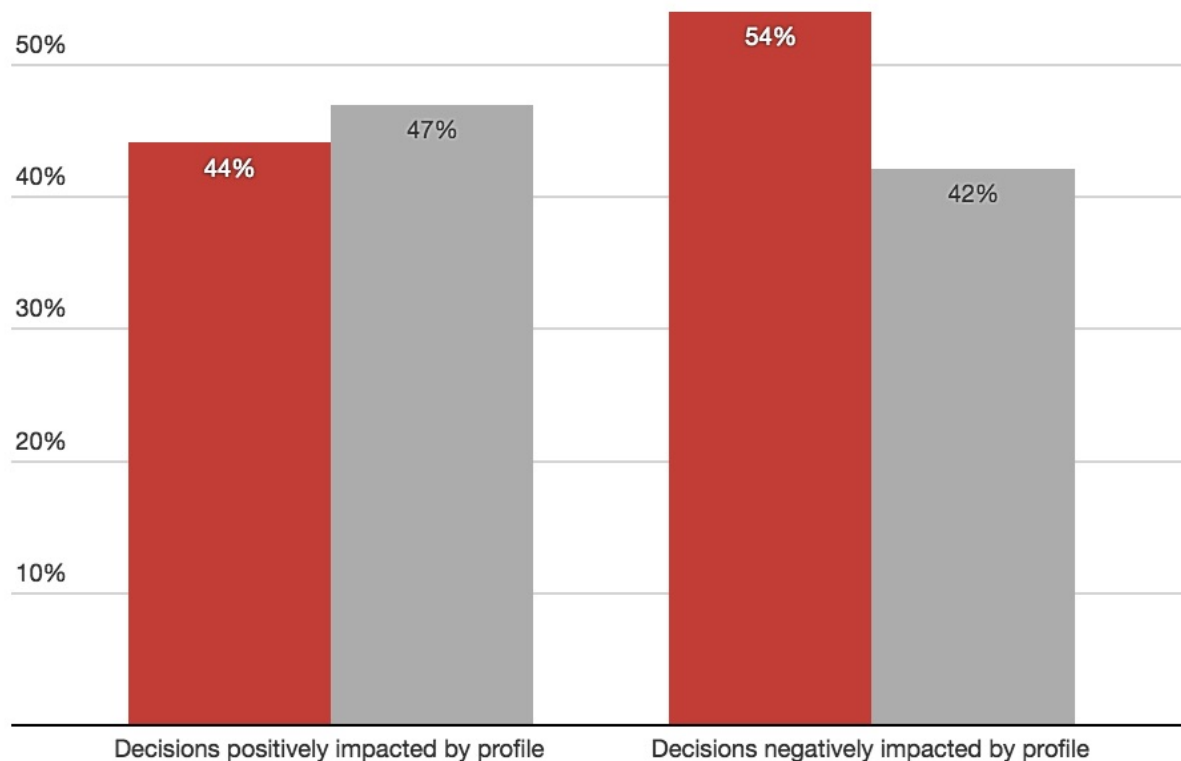
College admissions officers and employers want to learn about you, and are very likely to look at your social media posts. The job website CareerBuilder performed a social media survey in 2017. It showed that more employers than ever are searching social media accounts of people who apply for jobs. The survey found that:

- Six hundred percent more employers use social media to screen people than they did in 2006.
- Seventy percent of employers use social media sites to learn more about people who apply for jobs.
- Thirty-four percent of employers found bad information online about people who worked for them. This information caused them to scold or even fire those people.

Can your social media profile impact your future?

[Kaplan](#) and [CareerBuilder](#) surveyed hundreds of professional and academic recruiters to find out how social media is used to research candidates. Of those who use social media, many reported that their decisions were impacted.

■ Employers ■ College Admissions Officers



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This is common at colleges, too. In 2017, Kaplan Test Prep surveyed over 350 college admissions officers. It found that 35 percent have looked up applicants on social media. Many said social media affects their admission decisions.

3. What Are Recruiters Watching Out For?

So what type of content should you avoid posting online? Stay away from posting:

- Damaging or embarrassing photos or videos
- Mean or hateful language or remarks
- Politically charged attacks
- Spelling and grammar mistakes
- Complaining or bad-mouthing

4. What Can I Do To Build A Positive Online Reputation?

Remember that social media is not all bad. In many cases it helps recruiters get a good feel for who you are. It will also give them an idea of how well you will fit within the company. The CareerBuilder survey found 44 percent of employers who screened people applying for jobs using social media found good information about them. This information actually caused them to hire those people. This good information includes:

- Your education and experience are what the recruiter wants.
- Your profile picture and summary is professional.
- Your personality and interests are similar to those of the company or university.
- You're involved in your community.
- You have positive, supportive comments.

5. How Do I Clean Things Up?

Research. Both the college of your dreams and your future employer could Google you. So you should do the same thing! Also, check all of the social media sites you use, even the ones you haven't used for a while. Get rid of anything that could send the wrong message. Remember, things can't be unseen.

Bottom line: Would you want a future boss, college admissions officer or blind date to read or see it? If not, don't post it. And if you already have, remove it.

Sincerely,

Your Career Counselor

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