

FEATURE

What Can MySpace Do For You?

[By Charisse Dengler]

With 150,612,524 people on MySpace these days, it's pretty safe to assume that just about everyone has a MySpace profile, and whether someone has 3 friends or 300 friends, MySpace profiles tell a **WHOLE** lot about a person. So much, in fact, that employers are using social networking sites such as MySpace and Friendster to help them make hiring decisions.

Julia Barlow Sherlock, Career Services Director at Central Michigan University, is an expert in this area. She thinks that social networking sites have changed the way employers hire by giving them extra information to consider.

"It just gives them an additional avenue in which to search for information on an applicant," she said. "Since it is a self-reporting system, I think that employers consider it to be a honest window into a candidates' 'personal' life."

Over the years, many employers have grudgingly acknowledged the fact that the resume is basically a marketing tool meant to advertise a candidate's best features. Many times, information on resumes is misleading, exaggerated, or completely false. When trying to hire the right person for your company, this misinformation can be extremely frustrating.

In addition, even with background checks information can sometimes be false, but with MySpace and other social networking profiles, employers can find out the nitty-gritty truth about a person from their favorite bands to pictures of their weekend exploits. When asked if she thinks the information on social networking sites is relevant to a person's future employment, Sherlock said she can see how it would be interrelated. She also thinks that sites such as these are helping employers to avoid hiring mistakes.

"I think that the information that is located on someone's site speaks to their character," she said. "If the information that is self-reported

(by the candidate) could be seen as a potential conflict with an organizations philosophy, there could be a potential problem."

On MySpace, all it takes is a person's first and last name to locate their profile—unless, of course, they have either registered under a different name or have set their profiles to "private." This privacy setting blocks a person's profile to everyone besides that person's "friends" or the people that the person has approved.

While employers might be praising the evolution of social networking sites such as MySpace for making their hiring decisions a little easier, job seekers around the nation are more than a little peeved at the prospect of being spied on by potential employers. In fact, a lot of young people consider it unethical to dig into someone's personal information in this way. Sherlock disagrees. She thinks that, since the sites are open to the public, there is no ethical violation in taking a look at them.

"It is a public forum," she said. "Employers are not investigating private sites. Anyone can have access."

When asked if she thinks the creation of social networking sites is an overall good thing, Sherlock said she believes they have become an asset to the business world by facilitating communication and allowing professionals to link up and pass on opportunities and information.

"I think the birth of MySpace and the likes was inevitable and can prove to be of value

in particular with networking activities both personal and professional," she said. "Many universities have sponsored sites such as inCircle for just that reason. Again, it is a public forum, so anything you put on sites like these is fair game."

What Sherlock was referring to when she mentioned inCircle are the social networking sites set up by colleges and universities so that their alumni can benefit from the same type of social networking that is done on sites such as MySpace in a more professional environment.

As a career services director, Sherlock's advice to students on how to avoid any negative consequences brought on by social networking sites is to be highly selective in what they put on their personal profiles.

"Only put information that you would want your parents to see," she said. "Once it is out there, it is out there for a very long time. You don't want anything that you might have done during your college student time to embarrass you 10 years from now."

ON THE NET

MySpace
www.myspace.com

Friendster
www.friendster.com

Stanford's inCircle
www.stanfordalumni.org/services/ext/incircle/login.html