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Updating work history also must include cleaning cyberlife

By VALERIE WHITNEY, Business writer 

DAYTONA BEACH -- Social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, may be great places to let family and friends know what is happening in your life, but they also are increasingly becoming a tool for hiring managers to weed out job candidates.

Thirty-five percent of employers reported in a recent CareerBuilder survey they use social networking sites to screen potential employees, up from 22 percent in 2008. Another 11 percent of employers indicated they planned to start using the social networking sites, the 2009 survey found.

Of those surveyed who conduct online searches and background checks of job candidates, 29 percent use Facebook, 26 percent use LinkedIn and 21 percent use MySpace. Also, 11 percent search blogs, while 7 percent follow candidates on Twitter.

Tyler LeCompte, operations manager for Daytona Employment, said his agency definitely visits such sites. "We take into consideration how you put yourself out there," LeCompte said this week in a telephone interview.

Brandon Young, president of the Volusia/Flagler Society of Human Resources Management, said employers look at social media sites as a means of getting a better "read" on the candidate.

"They might be looking for common friends and associates. They could be looking for professional associations" and other insights to the personal side of the candidate, Young said.

Young's advice?

"Don't have unprofessional pictures or comments on these pages. Do have associations to professional organizations and groups. Be professional in your approach," he said.

Thirty-five percent of employers in the survey said they found content on social networking sites that caused them not to hire the candidate, including provocative or inappropriate photographs or information. Another 53 percent were turned off by candidates who posted content about drinking or using drugs, while 44 percent looked down on candidates who bad-mouthed previous employer, co-workers or clients.

Job candidates also need to take care when it comes to resumes. September, in fact, marks the 10th observance of International Update Your Resume Month, as proclaimed by Career Directors International. The group was originally founded in 2000 as the Professional Resume Writing and Research Association.

"The month of September was selected because it is the perfect time to start a new approach to career care-taking. While children are embarking on starting the new school year, adults should also be taking stock of their professional attributes and career value by updating their résumés," said Laura DeCarlo, president of the Florida-based association.

Tom Dezell, a professional resume writer and author of the book "Networking for the Novice, Nervous or Naive Job Seeker," said there are several common flaws he finds when evaluating resumes for clients.

One of the most important, Dezell said, is they are written in a passive voice and often patterned after the job description.

"They don't focus on what people really want to see. You have to find a way to tell them what you did" that will grab the reader's attention as soon as possible, he said.

Another flaw, Dezell said, is the failure to understand the online resume process. Be sure to include keywords associated with the industry. Also, he cautioned job seekers who use the spellchecker button for proofreading. The button's function can be rendered useless when paired up against words written in capital letters, he noted.

Young, executive director for human resources at the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University campus here, said people should update resumes to keep them fresh by updating duties and accomplishments.

This also is the time to possibly take off very old jobs that would not relate to the current position, he said, as well as personal information including hobbies and other things that could indicate material status or age.

LeCompte said updating a resume is important for job seekers who have been out of the market for a while. It gives them an opportunity to explain what they have been doing. "No gap in employment looks good," he said. "But if you made getting a job your job, that is a good thing."

Meanwhile, Ford Myers, a career coach and author of "Get the Job You Want, Even When No One's Hiring," said job seekers should be mindful of sending out hundreds of resumes. "Unsolicited resumes are considered garbage, scrap paper and wasted effort. Secretaries kill them, human resource managers file them away and hiring decision-makers pitch them," Myers said.

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