# Transform Your Digital Footprint Into a Valuable Career-Building Asset

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One of the first things graduates are told as they head into the working world is that they need to audit and clean up their digital footprints.

Back in 2019, one young woman was rejected from a marketing internship due to the company finding bikini photos on her Instagram account. Even if the idea of you posting swimsuit pictures of yourself on social media sounds about as likely as getting elected the next president, many professionals internalize the idea that any kind of digital footprint can only be a bad thing.

While there are undoubtedly privacy concerns, particularly for mature professionals who did not grow up with social media, a strong digital footprint can actually be an important tool in your arsenal when job seeking. Here's why you need to stop thinking of your online self as something to hide and start thinking of it as an opportunity to market yourself.

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## You are the product — so market yourself

Ultimately, the relationship between a hiring company and a

job applicant is transactional. They're hiring you because of what you can do for them (the job responsibilities), and you want them to hire you because of what they can do for you (pay you). There may be some other motives mixed in, but you get the gist.

And what do you do before you buy a product? If it's an important purchase, you should probably do some research. The same thing applies to hiring managers. Around 77% of employers hit Google when they're considering a candidate. If you've climbed the corporate ladder already as a director, vice president or executive, you're probably well aware of this fact and have been sure to hide the photos of you partying away in your college days from your Facebook profile.

But there's more to your digital footprint than hiding the bad stuff.

Going back to the business and product comparison, online research for a potential purchase isn't always about avoiding red flags. Sure, employers might be looking out for negative reviews, but a lot of the time, management is hoping to find something positive and informative.

Think about how organizations research other companies that they are purchasing items from to make sure they are not a scam. They could be looking for a product demonstration on YouTube, or a blog article explaining everything about the product. There's no reason you can't do the same thing for your own online presence.

## Using the tools of a business

Now that you've started thinking like a business, it's time to put it into action by using the same digital channels and tools as companies for your own marketing efforts.

Concepts like SEO and digital marketing aren't just for

businesses – use them to stand out in the labor market yourself. If a recruiter Googles your name and finds your blog focusing on marketing or professional development, that looks a lot better than a few private social media profiles.

You can also use SEO and marketing to make your profile more visible on LinkedIn for people who weren't searching for you initially. Posting engaging content might mean that decision-makers at companies will come across your profile, and using the right keywords in your profile summary will help recruiters find you.

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## You can't please everyone

If your digital presence is nothing more or less than a corporate headshot and an outline of your resume and accolades in neutral language, nobody is going to dislike what they see so much that they rule out the possibility of hiring you. But they're also unlikely to hire you based purely on this kind of basic information.

Businesses know this, and that's why they aim their product at a specific market segment. You can do the same. You don't have to appeal to every potential employer, just the ones who you want to work for.

For example, if you make a blog post tearing down companies that carry out environmentally unsustainable practices, you may be unpopular with the firms you criticize. But if you want to work for a company that's a leader in this space, they may value the fact you're outspoken.

However, if you want to toe the line and stay somewhat neutral, that's okay as well. It's natural to be cautious about what you post online, especially if you're worried about saying something inappropriate. A great way to mitigate this

fear is by focusing on creating content that boosts others or helps advance their careers. Posts that could potentially make others look bad or harm their company's reputation are best avoided.

## A quick caveat

As with anything, there's some nuance here. Although a digital footprint can be a useful tool, you still need to be mindful of your security when posting online. Check your privacy settings on social media so people can't see sensitive information like your date of birth or pictures of your children, and try to avoid including too much personal data in any content you post.

It's also not a good idea to start swearing or posting anything offensive. But you knew that already, right?

Finally, if there's anything you don't like about you online, submit a personal information removal request form with Google to have it removed.

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## Time to put yourself out there

With most job seekers in the market focused on creating a clean digital footprint and minimizing their online presence, going in the opposite direction can be a fantastic way to start out. As long as you protect your security, stay positive and put some thought into your content, you should be good to go.

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