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DIGITAL REPUTATION

CONSULTING CORNER

HOW ARE YOU FARING ONLINE?

YOU may be a CEO (chief executive officer), student, fresh graduate or businessman, but the one common thing you share with each other would be the use of social media on a regular basis.

Everyone is hooked on social media in one way or another. Information is being shared every minute. As of late last year, there were 2.46 million shares on Facebook alone every minute. Each one of us contribute to that number in some way. Just pause for a moment and think about how much information that actually is. I am sure the number is much higher now.

So what happens to all the information that is shared? Everything stays online in some way. That can be good or bad depending on what we've been busy posting in the past. Whilst we are quick to share stories and post updates on social networks, the one thing we don't often think about is the impact of our posts, the actual audience and lastly our very own digital reputation.

In this day and age, digital reputation counts for something. That is why you find top CEOs and politicians paying lots of money to public relations (PR) agencies and digital specialists to help manage their digital reputation. But what about the rest of us who don't have that kind of money to spend on hiring a PR agent?

Firstly, let's understand how our digital reputation can affect us.

● IT MAY COST YOU THAT DREAM JOB

If you are a jobseeker, a common practice for the human resources department or the person hiring you is to do small "research" about yourself online to better understand you. If the information that appears is not the best, it can definitely impact your chances of securing a job.

● IT MAY COST YOU A RELATIONSHIP OR A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

You may have posted something nasty, or shared something inappropriate many years ago and have forgotten about it. All it takes is for someone to find that information, if it is public, and then share it online again.

The information can suddenly become viral or be used against you. Even websites or blogs which have been deleted for years can still be looked up online using the *Internet Wayback Machine*, so nothing ever truly disappears.

● YOU MAY JUST GET FIRED FROM YOUR CURRENT JOB

I know what you're thinking. Yeah right? *Time* magazine published an article middle of last year titled "10 Social Media Blunders that Cost a Millennial a Job — or Worse". I actually remember an employee in my previous company who lost his job.

Through some research online, it was discovered that he had falsified some of his professional certifications.

So now that we've established the impact of having a poor digital reputation, what can we do?

Here are some tips I'd like to suggest when it comes to managing our digital reputation.

● THINK BEFORE YOU POST OR REACT ONLINE

We have to remember that we are ultimately responsible for everything that we post online.

No one else is accountable for our actions. What we think may be a great post, may actually be offensive to some. If we are sharing information publicly, such as posting public updates on Facebook or tweeting openly, we have to accept that not all comments or criticism will be fair or positive and not everyone will agree with us.

If we do get some negative feedback, how we handle it also reflects on our personality and professionalism.

● USE THE T.H.I.N.K. METHOD WHEN POSTING ONLINE

I've seen this being used in various types of situations and I think it works well when it comes to posting on social networks.

Is what I am saying, texting or typing, **T**rue, **H**elpful, **I**mportant, **N**ecessary and **K**ind?

Following this guideline helps us pause and think for a moment before posting something online that could damage our digital reputation.

● ADJUSTING THE SOCIAL NETWORK PRIVACY SETTINGS

This is not just about our digital reputation but also protecting ourselves online. If we feel that the information shared online is personal and private, it may be wise to adjust the privacy settings to match that.

If you are tweeting personal information and photos, then having an unprotected Twitter account may not be the best option for you. I've met up with some people who often would like to be labelled as "Thought Leaders" and are often posting intriguing as well as controversial information on their social networks.

And when someone comments on it or challenges them, they get all worked up, deleting the comments and over-reacting. If you feel you are one of those people, then having a private profile would be a better option as opposed to one that is public.

FINAL THOUGHTS

To conclude, our digital reputation is something that we should take seriously as it can have a huge impact on our daily lives. Being responsible online (as well as offline) goes a long way in helping us establish a good and healthy digital reputation.

It's never too late to start but don't forget that a good digital reputation is not all. You still have your offline reputation to manage.

■ V. Kugantharan is the founder of Yourwebsafety.com, an organisation that advocates digital literacy with a focus on social media and online safety. His aim is to create awareness on the potential privacy issues out there through the misuse of the internet and to empower users to make the right online decision. If you would like to get in touch with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com