

Managing your online reputation

Love it or hate it, the Internet is fast becoming the first place people turn when seeking information. Whether you need a quick recipe for dinner tonight, checking the weather before heading to the beach or driving directions to a place you've never been before, the Internet puts it all at the tip of your fingers.

Internet search engines such as Yahoo, Dogpile and Google have made it incredibly easy to find information on virtually any topic you can imagine. The popularity of Internet searches has even changed our everyday language – have you noticed that “Googling” is now a commonly used verb? “I just Googled my boss, and you'll never guess what I found...”

The relatively recent explosion of online social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and MySpace make finding information about people fairly easy. Even a novice computer user can create a personal profile and post it online, and millions of people already have.

Internet search engines successfully scour the public content of the world wide web and generate a list of “hits” or Web sites which contain the term you searched for. But be forewarned: the search results make no distinction between professional content such as your profile on your company Web site, and personal content such as your latest post on YouTube or your MySpace.

Personal information is so widely available that hiring managers and recruiters are starting to use Internet searches as part of the applicant screening process. If a potential employer or business partner Googles your name and finds a video of you and your friends having a food fight, I'm guessing that's not the kind of image you want to project.

In this world of easy access to per-

Career Wise



By Michelle St. Onge

sonal information, your online reputation can be just as important as your real-life reputation.

Savvy women of the North Country, take my advice and research your personal online footprint the next time you log on. Google your own name and investigate the hits that come up.

If you like what you find, congratulations! Just remember that things change quickly in the virtual world so you can't rest assured for long. It's a good idea to monitor your online reputation about twice a year.

On the other hand, your personal Google search may yield nothing. While this may lead you to breathe a sigh of relief, this can also be the sign of a missed opportunity. If you had an online profile, a potential business partner seeking informa-

tion about you would be directed to a positive image of you that you have control over. One simple click could be all it takes to get them to act favorably in your direction.

Chances are excellent that your name has been the subject of a google search, no matter who you are or what circles you frequent. The online social networking trend is just beginning to blossom, so now is good time to jump on the bandwagon.

It makes good sense to take a proactive approach and make sure that you present a positive online image to the masses of inquiring minds at the other end of an Internet search.

Michelle has served in various roles as a counselor, educator, and trainer in both higher education and corporate settings. An experienced group facilitator, educator, and career counselor, she is committed to helping people discover and achieve their potential.

Michelle and her young family recently relocated to the North Country, which is closer to her native Vermont.