E-Professionalism Dos and Don'ts

by Tracy Evans and Amy E. Gerwitz

Because businesses have entered the world of e-commerce — and government has entered the world of e-government — "e-professionalism" seems like a natural title for the professionalism challenges career services and recruiting administrators are facing today. Electronic professionalism encompasses so many different areas it is almost overwhelming at first. The signs of the rapid expansion of the role of electronics in our lives over the past decade include e-mail, cell phones, texting, BlackBerrys, Bluetooth, iPods, Portable Play Stations, web search engines, websites, blogs, and, the most colossal of them all, social networking sites.

These new gadgets and websites offer such creative ingenuity they are hard to pass up. E-mail and the Internet give us immediate access to information and communication; social networking sites allow us to meet new people without leaving our home; and cell phones speak for themselves. The latest in technology brings much pleasure and gratification to students and professionals alike, but comes with consequences as well. We teach our students how to be professional in interviews, at social functions, and in an office setting. However, what happens in cyber space and beyond is spinning out of control and so is our ability to manage it.

These e-professionalism dos and don'ts offer some basic guiding principles to maintaining professionalism in the electronic and information age. Save them, read them regularly, and suggest that your students do the same.

Top Ten E-Professionalism Dos

1. Do a regular online search of your name (Google, Yahoo, Ask). If necessary, consider hiring a company to "clean up" your online image.

2. Keep your online profiles private, letting in only those you trust and know personally. Check friends' profiles on a regular basis to monitor what pictures and comments are being posted about you.

3. Record a professional voicemail message at home and on your cell phone. Employers may think you have a beautiful voice if you choose to sing your message, but they won't be impressed with your professionalism. This includes using a professional sounding ringtone on your phone.

4. Treat your e-mails like professional correspondence or conversations, using correct grammar and only saying those things you would say to someone face to face. Avoid using slang or abbreviations in your e-mail communications.

5. Professional online networks such as LinkedIn are a great way to market yourself in a professional manner.

6. Personal web pages are a great way to market yourself, but be sure they stay clean and safe.

7. Do use the Internet to research potential employers or professionals you'll be interacting with so that you are informed about

them professionally and personally when you meet them.

8. Always follow up on electronic communications. As convenient as they may be, they are sometimes unreliable.

9. Check your e-mails and voicemails on a regular basis — especially if you set some aside hoping to spend more time on them later, as these are easy to forget.

10. Use your work computer for professional purposes only; save online shopping and playing games for home.

Top Ten E-Professionalism Don'ts

1. Don't risk putting inappropriate content on the Internet, including on social networking sites, blogs, message boards, YouTube, etc. Don't assume that just because you don't put inappropriate content online, others can't or won't do so, and their content may include your name or pictures, etc.

2. Don't assume that even though your profile settings are private, employers and others may not see them.

3. Don't assume that employers are not conducting electronic background checks on you; they are and will continue to do so.

4. Don't over blog unless the content is professional. In particular, don't put anything about your employer in a blog; employees have been fired for this.

5. Don't put inappropriate content in your home or business e-mail; messages may be circulated to others.

6. Don't have an inappropriate e-mail address such as *hotmama@aol.com,* and don't use the same e-mail address on your résumé that you use for your online presence unless the online presence is completely appropriate and positive.

7. Don't click "send" on an e-mail without double-checking to make sure you are sending it to the correct recipient and without rereading the content, especially for "reply to all" messages.

8. Don't wear a Bluetooth accessory in a meeting, at a lunch, or in other business settings. Not only is it unattractive, it is also distracting and rude.

9. Don't text in the middle of meetings, lunches, etc. If communicating with someone is that important, excuse yourself from the conversation and text in private.

10. Don't wear your iPod while working; leave it at home or save it for personal time.

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