

## **What Does the Web Say About You — And Why Does it Matter?**

In your school, you're probably known for more than just your name. You may be the star basketball player, the most likely to succeed, or the best dressed. You work hard to earn your reputation through hours of practice, dedication to studies, or commitment to fashion. But how would you describe your reputation on the Web?

At school, it's important to have a favorable reputation, and it's the same with your reputation online. The good news about online reputations is that you can create the one you want. But the bad news is that if you've created a questionable online reputation, you could have problems getting into the college of your choice or getting the summer job you want. Some colleges and employers are checking the Web to learn about potential candidates, and because Web content is accessible to anybody who wants to search for it, information can be interpreted in ways you never intended. And online content can surface even years after it's posted.

### **How to Get the Online Reputation You Want**

You want to create an online reputation that represents who you are but doesn't embarrass you when your teacher, parents, or future employer finds you on the Web. Here are a few simple suggestions to consider when you're putting yourself out there:

- **Choose your photos thoughtfully.** If you're trying to get an after-school job, make sure potential employers can't search the Web and find photos that make you look irresponsible or like you might be a bad employee. Instead, think of adjectives you want people to use to describe you, and choose photos that suggest those adjectives. For example, if you want to be described as active, post a photo of yourself snowboarding.
- **Create appropriate page layouts.** Many people have their own Web site or belong to an online community like Facebook or MySpace. Creating your own layout and design shows great technical savvy, but

- don't include illegal or lewd graphics in your design. Your soccer coach won't think that drug paraphernalia make cool icons.
- **Watch your language and content.** People change the way they talk depending on who they're talking to. You'd describe your weekend differently to your friend than you would to your teacher. You can't always control who reads what you've posted online, so think of your voice on the Web as one that has to fit anybody.
  - **Get noticed for doing what you love.** If you enjoy extra-curricular activities or have a special talent, let people know. You can highlight these on your site by linking to the nonprofit where you volunteer, or linking to the sports section in your local paper. When colleges and employers have a lot of applicants, you want to catch their eye when they start filling positions.
  - **Always know what the Web says about you.** Do regular searches on your name and e-mail address to see what people find when they search for you. If your Web site or social networking page pops up and doesn't look flattering, update it. Also, if an employer brings up online information during an interview, you'll want to be prepared.

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