

FAIRFIELD COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

All aTwitter : *HR trolls social networks*

BY RYAN DORAN

Appeared on January 26, 2009

Booming online social networks have become a strong focus for recruiters, giving employers a more complete view of job candidates than is often presented in rose-colored biographies.

“The networking sites are the trendy thing right now that has everyone scrambling to understand and utilize,” said Maureen Mackey, principal and co-founder of Mackey & Guasco Staffing Associates in Darien. “Bottom line, it is networking made very simple.”

According to David Lewis, president and founder Operations Inc. in Stamford, sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter all should be taken seriously as hiring resources. “In fact these sites offer the current job seeker a better chance of being the source for their next job than a job board,” said Lewis. “They have taken the world of networking, which always delivered an easier path to hire, and put it within easy reach to anyone with a PC and the willingness to complete the information requested on these sites.”

According to Lewis this has harnessed the always present power of getting an interview through cronyism. “Anyone not using these sites, who is looking for a job, is severely missing the boat,” said Lewis.

According to Fred Dinyan, co-founder of YourLeap in Stamford, he sees social networking sites as useful for an alternative perspective. “However, they are typically used as a supplement to job boards not a replacement,” said Dinyan. “Candidates typically use job boards to find what jobs are open, they then use social networking sites to try to connect more directly and stand out from other applicants who merely respond to the job board posting and get put in a bin with countless other responses.”

According to Dinyan, Business related networking sites such as Linked In are a valuable tool to find and connect with candidates; Facebook and MySpace are used less frequently since they are less business focused. “The

major job boards are still the preferred method of finding candidates,” said Dinyan. “Furthermore, the job boards are well aware of the issue and are creating relationships with social networking suites. CareerBuilder for example has teamed up with Facebook to place targeted ads.”

According to Chris Russell, founder of AllCountyJobs, these sites poses such influence because they are where the next generation work force is “hanging out online.” “It’s imperative that companies engage them on their own turf,” said Russell. “Companies need to do things like establish a Facebook group or MySpace page to cultivate relationships for those who might be interested in working there, and candidates need to maximize their profiles on these sites to include keywords and their resume history.”

Lewis said employers also may find some insights through these sites that they would not receive on a resume or with a job board. “In fact, one of the warnings we issue students in our Job Search Essentials Workshops is to be careful not to cross the line between posting information of a “professional personal” nature vs. information that is of a “personal personal” nature,” said Lewis. According to Lewis, employers can and will look at these sites to gain insight into a potential future hire and who they really are.

“When it’s out there to be viewed people will look, said Allan Goldberg, co-founder of YourLeap. “Given human nature they will likely judge based on this information. And, you’re not just letting a few friends in on your personal life on these sites, you’re pretty much opening the door to the entire Internet universe.”

According to Russell, the sites also allow employers to get to know candidates on a much more personal level. “It’s really about communicating, not just advertising,” said Russell. “It’s your chance as an employer to give job seekers a peek at your company and its culture through interaction with people.”

According to Lewis, job boards are centric to the job seeker and employer and that is their greatest appeal: “The lack of specialty and focus on the social networking sites tends to make the job board still more attractive for the employer. Further, most job seekers get how to use the job boards; not as true when it comes to social networking sites.”

Russell agreed that the social networks are not an equal alternative to job boards.

“Job boards are not going away, so they still represent a quick and easy solution at targeting a job to candidates immediately and getting resumes,” said Russell. “Plus some candidates are not really used to employers reaching out to them on social networks yet so they are more prone to use a job board. I think you have to look at each of these tools as part of your overall recruiter’s toolbox. Each has its place.”

Since the social sites are not intended to be employer resources, ethical concerns arise.

“Most businesses see this as a way to overcome what ground they have lost in the effort to secure a true, valid, unbiased, complete reference from prospective hires,” said Lewis. “No one gives these anymore.” According to Lewis searching for someone online may yield insight that goes beyond what anyone can or will say about a candidate during a reference call. “It can really tell you a ton about the candidate that even a background check will miss,” said Lewis.

According to Lewis, personal information like political affiliation, personal interests and sexual proclivities are often easily obtainable as well as statements made with

pictures. “All potentially cross the ethics barrier,” said Lewis.

Russell said people are more aware of their digital profile than they once were. “Employers are definitely watching, like it or not,” he said.

According to Dinyan, the legality is vague on the ethical issues. “I advise all my friends, particularly when it comes to their children, to be cautious about what they put on the Internet,” said Goldberg. “If for no other reason than simple identity concerns.”

According to Dinyan, there are also services that archive the social sites daily, so information candidates put on social networking sites, even if taken off, has the possibility of being accessed at a later time.

According to Lewis, the use of the social sites reflects the increasingly inclusive recruiting process. “To the candidate, it means they have to be on their toes,” said Lewis. “To the employer, it means you either take the high road and skip this step, but miss out on some interesting and possibly valuable info, or join the crowd and use the avenues available to you, keeping in mind you walk a slippery slope if and when you allow for what you learn to eliminate an otherwise perfect candidate, now possibly forcing you to divulge the reasons why someone is not being hired.”

According to Russell, some companies may see this as losing control of their message. But the world is a different place now. “Transparency is part of the new world of work,” said Russell. “People want to know what it’s like to work at your organization so use them to showcase the best of yourself, and let candidates get to know you on a much deeper level.”