



## Digital Parenting: What Is Your Teen's Online Reputation?

If you have a son or daughter at school, who is interested in attending university, you need to be aware of what is and what impact your child's online reputation (Digital Tattoo) can have on their future.

Soon it'll be that time of year when university & college bound seniors start gearing up to submit their applications in anticipation to get that awaited message, "ACCEPTED".



Scenario: - Just like many university bound students, Sam couldn't wait to hear back from his number one choice. Finally, the day came. He logged on to his account and saw that he had not been offered a place or even an interview. Shock and disappointment set in. He knew his GCSE / AS results were border line, but he was very

active in athletics and even held leadership roles in a couple of clubs at school. Could there be another reason he didn't get accepted? As the admission committee reviewed applications Sam was right on the fence. What kept him from getting in? Why had they "Denied" him? Well, the answer lied at a computer terminal sitting on his desk. Sam had created a wreckless online reputation that was to haunt his future. With a simple Google search, the admission department saw Sam chugging booze at a party, getting frisky with a girl, and they even got to read some of the derogatory remarks Sam had posted online. It didn't take long for the admission committee to make their decision "DENIED ADMISSION".

Teens / Young Adults aren't always aware that what they post online can easily be traced back to them. Now more than ever, teens need to make good choices online as well as offline. The internet serves as a valuable tool and resource to colleges, potential employers, businesses and even community leaders. Have you ever been guilty of Googling a friend of the past? What about checking out the credentials of a new colleague on LinkedIn or Facebook?

Research in cyberspace is becoming common practice in the educational environment as well as in the workplace. Prospective college/university bound students should be careful and take their online reputation seriously. According to a [Kaplan survey](#) of 386 college admissions officers in the US,

more than 80 percent use social media in the admissions process, primarily to recruit prospective students. Another study found a significant proportion of US schools are continuing to research students via search engines (13%) and social networks (19%). The institutions surveyed reported looking for information about "the student's activities or interests." Social media sites are beginning to provide an insight into the lives of prospective students. As more and more teens are exposing themselves online, college representatives will continue to search the internet to see just what kind of information is available about their applicant. What they see may have an impact on the admissions decision. So, it appears that online research is becoming a valuable tool in the admissions process.

It's important to help your child polish their online reputation. The good news is there are some proactive measures we all can take to build a good online reputation. There's also some clear "No No's" when it comes to the virtual world. Review the list of Do's and Don'ts with your teen so that he or she can have a clear shot at their dream after high school.

Here are the top do's and don'ts when it comes to creating a good online reputation:

*DO...*

- 1. Assume whatever you post online can be seen by millions.
  - 2. "Follow" or "Like" the college/university or business that you're applying to online.
  - 3. Create a catchy video of yourself doing something good for the community or others. For instance, if you're involved in a fund raiser, a community clean up, volunteering at a homeless shelter, or with an organization like Help for Heroes etc, get some footage and post it.
4. Create a mini media portfolio or personal website. If you've received an award or recognition in the local paper odds are it's out there electronically. Keep electronic scrapbooks that highlight your accomplishments. You could even do this by creating a Catchy PowerPoint of yourself to send to potential recruiters or employers. If you post this online, be careful not to give out any other personal information than the media has already released. Creating an electronic portfolio is a great way to showcase your talent.
5. Blog. But be sure to own it. Blogging about community or worldly things is a great way to put a positive spotlight on you. Keep it clean with your opinions and don't talk bad about anyone else. For example, if you disagree with a politician on an issue then state it as a disagreement and build your case as to why. Don't badmouth others. If you decide to showcase yourself through a blog, you may want to purchase your domain name so that it belongs to you and no one else can steal your name.
6. Start building your own positive online reputation and keep it up to date. This means if you blog do it consistently (a couple of times a month). Keep adding accomplishments to your online portfolio or website. Become a search engine detective and frequently scan the internet for information about yourself.
7. Think of yourself as two people when you're online. There's the business side that's pursuing future dreams and the fun side to share with your friends. If you set up the fun side with privacy settings, you can still have a good time with your friends. Just don't put stuff out there that you wouldn't mind sharing with the world, the internet is not a place for secrets. When your blogging or creating something for others to view keep it polished and make it serve the greater good.

### *DON'T...*

1. Invite college/university admissions, instructors or employers to be friends on social media sites. Again, keep the business side separate from the friend side.
2. Provide a silly email address like [yougogirl@zzz.com](mailto:yougogirl@zzz.com). Keep it professional. Your email address can create lasting impressions. For example, [2hotforyou@xxx.com](mailto:2hotforyou@xxx.com) is not the address that you want employers or college representatives emailing you at.
3. Have questionable pictures posted online. Ask yourself: Does this picture show the side of me that I want a potential college representative or employer to see?
4. Assume that if you delete something it's gone for good. It's not. So, the best advice is to not post it if it's questionable.
5. Ever verbally attack a person online (or offline). If you're upset about something, cool off and figure out the best way to approach the situation.
6. Respond in an ugly way to something that's untrue. If a rumour's been started and you feel the need to respond, keep it simple. Something like "That's untrue" is enough. If you keep going back and forth you'll look guilty. So, regardless of whether you did it or not, don't give out too much information.

### *Other things to consider...*

- Remove all negative comments or posts that you can about yourself or bad things you've posted about others.
- Block those who are determined to take you down.
- Report any abuse to site operators.
- If you've made a mistake by slamming someone online (even offline), simply apologize. Don't go into too many details online. A simple "I am sorry, I was wrong." or "Sorry that I hurt you." is enough. A detailed apology needs to be done face to face with only the person that you've wronged.
- Start putting positive information about yourself on the internet. Get friends and even family to partake in posting your praises online.
- Google yourself periodically. This way you know what others will find.

By following these quick simple tips, you can create a positive online image that will help and not hurt your chances of getting into the school of your dreams or that job you desire. It's up to you to either use the internet for the wonderful tool it is or abuse it and risk losing out on some great opportunities.