



7 Ways You May Be Destroying Your Digital Footprint

Have you Googled yourself lately? No -- seriously, have you? Because here's a sampling of everyone who has:

- ✓ The candidate contemplating working on your team
- ✓ The boss thinking about promoting you
- ✓ The client considering doing business with you; channel partners too
- ✓ Your lenders and investors
- ✓ The colleague assigned to work on your project
- ✓ Your competition
- ✓ The recruiter and hiring manager at that shiny new job you've got your eye on
- ✓ Association leaders, looking for expert speakers for that prestigious conference
- ✓ The influential members of that board you just joined
- ✓ The hot date you have this weekend
- ✓ Trade journal editors looking for authority columnists
- ✓ Media, looking for someone savvy to comment on the news
- ✓ The parents of your child's BFF... probably teachers too

When I Google you, the information I find online is what I call your "Digital Footprint." It's the random bits and pieces of your life that live on the interwebs... Your company bio, that old headshot you keep meaning to update, your wedding registry, video snippets from the company holiday party, Twitter status updates, even your 5K finish times from 1989 are floating out there. And of course your LinkedIn profile, typically in the first five search results, telling me where you've been, what you've accomplished, and that you're a rock star. Or not.

So, I'll ask you again: Have you Googled yourself lately? If not, here are seven ways you may be destroying your Digital Footprint:

1. You Don't Realize How IMPORTANT It Is. Your Digital Footprint plays an extremely critical role in today's hyper-connected, always-on, data-driven world. It's how I, like millions of other savvy professionals, often form my first impression of you. When I hear your name and can't place who you are or what you do, it's how I remember. And when I'm looking for someone with unique skills or expertise, it's how I find you. Or don't.

I'll never forget when I started working for a global software company... I would be on a conference call, getting introduced to colleagues around the globe, and I could see in real-time that they were checking me out on LinkedIn, even sending connection requests before our call ended.

Not convinced? Many people use email services or widgets that pull your *Digital Footprint* into my browser the minute I receive an email from you, or I type your name in the 'Send to' field. My CRM does this too. Technology talks to technology, and LinkedIn is what we might call a Chatty Cathy!

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2. You Don't Monitor It. The other day I met with a prospect – an architect who wanted to work with me to articulate his personal brand story and increase his visibility. While speaking with him I did a quick Google search and on the very first page I found an allegation that he had been practicing without a license. When questioned, he said it had long ago been resolved and he wasn't worried about it.

Wait... what? In addition to monitoring online reviews of your business, today you must also monitor online reviews of you! Create a Google alert for your name and carefully protect your social media space from being hi-jacked by anyone whose online behavior doesn't meet your exacting standards. I welcome respectful debate on my Facebook wall, but I don't tolerate hate, divisive or hurtful language, or any other commentary void of respect.

3. You Don't Optimize It. One of the most important aspects of your Digital Footprint is undoubtedly LinkedIn, so let me ask you this: When is the last time you've updated it? If I read it, would I understand your brand position? Your brand value? What else online needs updating? What may need deleting? You gave Twitter a shot, but it never really stuck... fair enough. But that anemic tweet stream that you abandoned a year ago? Clean that up!

You are the Chief Marketing Officer of Brand You, and as such, you *own* your narrative, and all evidence of it. Take care to guard it as you would your most precious asset.

4. You're Vague. If I Google you and still don't understand what you do, for whom, and to what end, we have a problem. In the world of personal branding, throwing a really wide net doesn't help you catch more fish; it ensures you don't catch any.

Your personal brand story must be specific... every word should count, and it is precisely that specificity that drives the law of attraction. As I say on the stage, "You can't get from the Universe that which you're not willing to ask for." Your ask is your articulation of who you are, what you do, and what makes you special.

If you sell to SMBs then say so. Worried you won't get the occasional enterprise bluebird? Why not say, "My focus is the SMB market, but we have solutions for enterprise clients too." Problem solved.

5. You Post Inflammatory or Inappropriate Content. I was scrolling through LinkedIn the other day when a certain status update jumped out at me. Someone in my network shared that he just had the most awesome workout, benched his personal best, and was feeling pumped. If he were a personal trainer this might be appropriate, but he has his own insurance practice, and his workout routine does nothing to remind me of what he does, or in other words, what a good business lead looks like for him.

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Then there's my Facebook "friend" the job seeker, whose posts include political vitriol and desperate diatribes about his search, often ending in wishes that he has a fatal heart attack to put him out of his misery.

Anything and everything you post online is public domain. Don't try to convince me otherwise. Maybe not legally, but if it's out there -- it is OUT of your control. I can screen shot anything and send it anywhere, and that's the problem. I can't even tell you how many human resource managers have told me horror stories of jealous co-workers ratting out their colleagues... printing out Facebook rants about how stupid the boss is in the hopes they can get a leg-up on the next promotion.

Think your prospects will agree with your political position or where you stand on women's rights? Think again and keep it offline.

6. You Have More Than One Profile. You've got a day job and you love it, but you also love being a jazz singer / voice over artist / Chicago Cubs blogger / emerging speaker / jewelry maker / adjunct professor by night. You're not sure how to stitch the two together, so you keep two separate profiles forcing half your network to only know half of your gifts. Worse still, someone looking for Sarah the SEO expert only finds Sarah the singer and moves on.

You are one person and should have just one story, just one profile. It is okay to have other interests, pursuits and passions. The most interesting people often do! The more fascinating your story, the better the read so share as much as you're comfortable sharing and own the variety in your life.

7. You Never Login. Personal branding is an action verb and when you're building your presence online, absolutely nothing happens until you login. Keeping your profile fresh, updating your status, and commenting on relevant posts all serve to keep your name in the social stream. Logging in is the only way to keep an eye on customers and strategic partners. It's a great way to see what hot topics are trending in your industry. And taking small action each week, consistently over time, is how you become known for that which you aspire to do.

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