



YOUR ONLINE IMAGE



You are the young manager of an ice cream parlor that is beloved by local families. You are looking to hire some teens for the summer, when the shop is open late every evening. You require an application and at least one reference. It occurs to you that you could look online to find out a bit more about the applicants.

Where would you look? And what might you find that would make you *not* hire someone?

You are finally old enough to join a social networking site and set up your own profile. You spend a lot of time making the profile look cool and you have links to many friends. Your mom makes her own profile and asks you to be her “friend.”

Is that fair? Explain your thinking.

You have a social network profile and are smart enough to use the privacy settings to keep your stuff away from the eyes of people other than your friends. A friend of yours thinks a silly photo of you in your underwear is funny, copies the photo, and places it on her public profile.

How might you feel? What might be the unintended results of such a photo in a public place?

You work at YXZ University. You have to choose a few talented high school students to spend six weeks on your college campus between their sophomore and junior years.

What would you want to know about these students before inviting them to live on campus? What could you find out about them online?

You are a high school principal concerned about the reputation of your school online. So you Google the school’s name. You check around a site where students rate their teachers. You look at blogs and social networking sites.

What kinds of things would you be concerned about finding? What would you do if you found these things?

You are a college freshman. Your cousin, who is a high school freshman, asks to “friend” you on a social networking site. You like your cousin and don’t want to hurt his feelings, but you say “no.”

What are some reasons you might not want your cousin to see your profile and friends?



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You are the young manager of an ice cream parlor ...

Think About It

Employers want to know if applicants are honest and reliable. An ice cream store manager might also like to know that employees are good role models for the many young patrons of the store. So the manager might look at social network profiles for references to illegal activities, such as underage drinking or theft, foul language, or questionable photos. Given a choice of two applicants, he's likely to choose the one with the "clean" profile. Fair play or not?

You are finally old enough to join a social networking site ...

Think About It

It's likely that your mom is worried about the things you do when you are out of her sight. It's normal for parents to worry that their kids are safe. It is also normal for teens to want to just hang out and have some privacy from adults. So what should you answer your mom?

A friend of yours thinks a silly photo of you in your underwear is funny, copies the photo and places it on her public profile ...

Think About It

Anything on the Internet can be found, copied, and shared, or even hacked. You may set your profile to be viewed only by friends, but its contents may end up being viewed by people you don't know—or don't want to know! Should these possibilities affect what you decide to put up on your profile?

You have to choose a few talented high school students to spend six weeks on a college campus ...

Think About It

College officials have the right to view social network profiles and read blogs, but should they do so when deciding to accept a student to one of their programs? Explain your thinking.

You are a high school principal concerned about the reputation of your school online ...

Think About It

How can the things students say online affect their school's reputation, for better or worse? Is it fair that the principal reads stuff that you posted from your home computer? Why or why not? Should the principal discipline students who criticize or make fun of their teachers and coaches?

You are a college freshman. Your cousin, who is a high school freshman, asks to "friend" you ...

Think About It

Right now, you are in high school. What if your little cousin from the fifth grade wanted to see your profile? Why would you, or why wouldn't you, show it? Now imagine being that college freshman. If you use your profile to talk to other students your age, should it be "off limits" to others?



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GET THE FACTS

Matching Audiences and Images

Being a teenager means finding out who you are. You do this by experimenting with the ways you act, how you speak, what you choose to wear, how you style your hair, the activities you try, and the friends you choose.

We all put a lot of importance on the impressions we make on people. Think about the impressions you make by just the clothes you choose to wear.

In school you might choose to identify yourself as trendy, grunge, retro, classic, preppy, or athletic. In a house of worship, you probably dress a bit more formally and conservatively. At a park, pool, lake, or ocean, you may spend the day wearing only a bathing suit. You know your audience changes depending on where you are, so you decide what image or impression you want to make for each different audience.

Your Online Audiences

Deciding how to present yourself online is a bit more complicated. For one thing, you cannot always know who your audience is.

Social networking sites may feel as private as hanging out with your friends. In reality, they are vast public spaces where privacy settings may or may not provide the kind of privacy you expected.

Do you know that...

- The content you post on profiles and blogs sticks around the Internet forever—even after you decide to take it down.

- The information, photos, and videos you post about yourself can be found easily by searching, sometimes even if you thought you marked them private.
- The content you create—photos, drawings, videos, writing—can be copied by anyone and used for any purpose without your permission.
- Even if you use privacy controls offered by social networking sites, there are always invisible audiences, that is, audiences you didn't intend to see your stuff. Sometimes you might not care, but other times you might.

Who Else Controls Your Image?

It's not enough to think about how *you* present yourself. Your friends on social networks, video and photo sharing sites, and blogs may also share information about you. Check around. Are your friends posting photos of you and tagging them so that everyone knows what you are doing? Do your friends leave posts on your profile that reveal more about you than you want others to know?

Be CyberSmart!

- Explore the privacy tools on the sites you use and decide how public or private your stuff should be.
- Consider your “invisible” audience when you post online. And remember that there is no guarantee of privacy online.
- Monitor what others are posting about you in comments, photos, videos, and blogs.
- Read the Privacy Policy or Terms of Service of any network you join. Understand what information about you is collected and how it is sold to and used by others.