

Social media is meant to be fun and informative as well as a useful networking tool, but we should also be wise to its pitfalls. Here, **Sally Jack** provides top tips on managing your online reputation.

Click, connect... take care

As mobile devices become increasingly intuitive and responsive, sharing information online is now dangerously easy. An innocent-seeming comment or image on your personal profile can be (and often is) misconstrued, with potentially devastating repercussions for your professional reputation (and that could include disciplinary hearings, suspension and even a criminal record).

There is a perception that social media is the preserve of the 'young'. However, the stats say otherwise: 73% of UK internet users have a social media profile and 63% of these are adults. Additionally, 95% of UK internet users use Facebook with 84% of those using Facebook as their main platform. (Ofcom survey (*Adults' Media Use and Attitudes*, April 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/kzs4nld>)

As senior leaders, you are already acutely aware of the online dangers faced by children and young people, with schools and colleges helping students steer a course through the internet's murkier waters.

But what about your own digital footprint? Do you know what information about yourself is already out there, and who can access it? Also, what do you post, and to whom? No one is suggesting you can't be yourself online, or that you are always on duty, but it is worth taking the time to review your online presence – and take precautions.

When it comes to good online practice, bear in mind that 47% of employers check an individual's online profile

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during the recruitment process, and 41% have stated 'online reputation' as a reason not to recruit (figure from www.saferinternet.org.uk).

What's online about you now?

Give your digital footprint a health check:

- Regularly review your online profile: type your name into Google and other search engines and assess the results.
 - Any information you wish to be removed, first check if this can be rectified via the platform's account settings, or contact the site administrator and request its removal.
 - Information that Google will remove, and how to request this, is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/mdwa4ky>
- Other search engines should also provide this information in their help or support sections.

Protect your profile

- Amend your social media platform passwords regularly, and make sure they aren't easy to guess.
- If you stop using a platform or website, deactivate or delete the account. It can then no longer be found, and this also guards against the account being hacked.
- Review the security settings on your social media accounts:

the default setting on many is 'public', which makes finding you easy, particularly for determined students.

- Keep antivirus and software programs up to date: older software is more vulnerable to attack.

Focus on Facebook

As the highest volume of internet users in the UK use this platform, there are some additional points to consider:

- Click Settings/Privacy on the top right-hand side of your Facebook page.
- Review and edit the three options: 'Who can see my stuff', 'Who can contact me?' and 'Who can look me up?'
- Further guidance is available here: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/help/325807937506242/>

Images on Facebook

Consider sorting images into separate albums and setting controls per album depending on who you are happy to see them. For example, general holiday pictures may be viewable to everyone, whereas photos with family members could be 'friends only'. Security advice for other popular social media platforms can be found in their help and support sections.

Social media mantra

Keep this social media mantra in mind before you commit 'comment to keyboard':

Further information
ASCL's guidance paper *Social Networking, Social Media and Email* provides information and guidance to leaders and their staff when considering their use of social networking sites (see www.ascl.org.uk/social-media-guidance).

Check your organisation's policies and procedures covering internet and social media use.

UK Safer Internet Centre website (operators of #SaferInternetDay) includes advice for education professionals, parents and students, together with a Professionals Online Safety Helpline <https://tinyurl.com/m89g4co>

In addition, call the ASCL Hotline on 0116 2991122 for help.

- **Think twice, post once** (or not at all): re-read your post, could it be open to misinterpretation?
- **Never post, tweet or email in anger:** would you be happy with your comment remaining online ... forever? Your views may also be shared by your friends to their own networks, over which you have no control.
- **Keep professional boundaries up:** avoid interacting with, initiating contact with or becoming friends with current students via your personal profile. If they ask questions online, speak to them in person at school or college.
- **Don't forget the day job:** ideally, school or college-related conversations and photos should stick to teaching and learning. You may believe you are keeping your comments strictly between Facebook friends, but do you know who your friends are friends with?
- **Is it yours to post?** Be aware of copyrighted material and whether you have the right to post this content. ASCL