ICT15F - DL Lesson 7 – Managing Your Digital Footprint

Adapted from http://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/lesson/trillion-dollar-footprint-6-8

http://www.yourseoplan.com/i-googled-myself/

Watch: http://www.commonsensemedia.org/video/modal/2078100

Filling out a form, sending an email to a friend, posting a photo, and pretty much everything one does online – even the simple act of visiting a website or using a search engine – leaves a trail. This trail, called a **digital footprint**, is made of bits and pieces of information on one's computer and on other computers and servers around the world, which allow other people to learn about you.

Have you…

- Created a profile on an Internet site?
- Filled out a form online?
- Chatted on AIM or GChat?
- Sent an email?
- Typed your name into Google? Were there any results about you? Allow students to provide examples of what they found.
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Active Management

When someone Googles you, what comes up is a record of online experiences of anything that you or someone else with the same name has had. You can leave this to chance, or you can take charge and take steps to make sure that the top hits that come up with your name are the things that you want people to see.

What Can You Do to Actively Manage Your Online Identity?

- **Set up a Google Profile.** Google will sometimes display your profile picture and link in the search results for your name. Although the listing may not be prominent, it's accompanied by a thumbnail photo, which goes a long way toward getting people to notice it! Even better, you have 100% control over your profile contents. It's very easy to set up a Google Profile. Just go to http://www.google.com/profiles and click on the big "create a profile" link.

- **Regularly review Google's ORM (online reputation management) tool**, called "Me on the Web."
  http://googlepublicpolicy.blogspot.ca/2011/06/me-myself-and-i-helping-to-manage-your.html

- **See something bad? Ask the owner of the page to update or remove it.** Almost anything can be removed from a website – if the site owner is accessible and agreeable. After all, most website owners want updated information just as badly as you do. If you can find contact information for the website that bears outdated or improper information about you, obtaining an update or removal may be as simple as asking for it. Be sure that you are very specific about the page or pages that contain the problem, and clear about why you want it changed.

- **Crowd out the results.** It's likely that you won't find anyone who's willing or able to change the offending content for you. Items such as archived forums, news and media content, and postings by people that simply hate your guts are destined to stay out there indefinitely. Your best bet will be to try to outrank them on the search engines. Strategies for outranking your competitors can – and do – fill many websites and books. Some quick and easy ways to start are:
  - Start posting comments in blogs or forums using your full name. Choose big, popular forums that are likely to have a good presence, and make sure that the pages are accessible without a login. (And, before you get any big ideas, make sure they're relevant comments, or else when you Google yourself you'll be embarrassed by your own spam messages.)
  - If you have the opportunity to build your own web page within the website of your school, employer, or any organization of which you are a member (many schools offer this to their students and staff), be sure to do so. A nicely written bio page would be a welcome result on a Google search for your name!
  - Create a second Facebook Profile where you post only the best of you. Make it public but don't friend anyone on the account so that you can't be accidentally tagged or have negative postings on the profile page that are beyond your control.

- **Use your middle name.** Often, problems with Googling yourself arise because there are other people sharing the same first and last name. For example, there are two authors on Amazon.com named Jennifer Grappone! If you are plagued by this type of problem, you might wish to incorporate your middle name into business correspondence, add it to your personal signature on emails, use it in forum and blog postings, and be sure that it is included on any web content about you.

- **Consider Using No Name At All.** Some content stays on the internet for a surprisingly long time. Use your full name as described in the previous bullet when you're making professional postings, but consider using a "pen name" for dating profiles or other material that you may not want to show up in 10 years when a potential employer is Googling you. And go anonymous for some of those rants that you can't resist!

- **Buy Your Domain Name**. If you can, consider buying your name as a domain. Usually yourname.com is usually the best, but if it's not available, consider buying yourname.ca instead. You can search for availability of domain names at http://www.webnames.ca/domainSearch.aspx

- If all else fails, consider **paying your way to the top**. There's even a company designed specifically to help you with this: Naymz, at https://www.naymz.com. The basic service allows you to create a free personal profile page on their domain. The premium service will sponsor ads listing your profile page in Google, MSN, and Yahoo!

Task: Respond to the discussion posting "Managing Your Online Footprint"