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BALANCING ACTS | MAGGIE JACKSON

## Your past is lurking online

Failure to manage one's Net reputation can stall a career, but there are methods to help

Are you managing the "virtual you," or letting it run wild?

Cyberspace is a messy soup of the personal and professional, visible to all with just a few mouse clicks. Snapshots of drunken antics posted on Facebook or indiscreet tidbits from a blog are easily uncovered by employers and recruiters. Alternatively, a stylish web portfolio featuring a blend of your work and life achievements can bolster your job hunt.

A positive online persona is so crucial to career success these days that even invisibility can be a drawback. If people Google you and find zilch, you may not look like a player. The Web is for real, a new world that even nontechnies can't afford to ignore.

"The Internet has completely changed the way we  
**BALANCING ACTS, Page G17**



JOHN MARIC GLOB FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

James D'Amico's woodworking is one facet of his life that he highlights on his "Web portfolio."

### INSIDE TODAY

#### To inspire

Good teachers, and leaders, make folks feel they are joined for important goals.

**The Corporate Curmudgeon, G4**

#### Straight answer

When you're asked for your salary requirement, give it!

**Job Doc, G8**

#### A broker at last

Shut out in the '60s, a New Hampshire woman finally gets her shot at the investment business.

**Transitions, G14**



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JOHN-MARC GROB FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

D'Amico, who's seeking work in a nonprofit, talks with Carolyn Vásquez, community outreach director for a YMCA.

## Managing your online persona is vital

### ► BALANCING ACTS

Continued from Page G1

do executive searching," says Kathleen Yazbak, a managing director at Bridgestar, a search firm in Boston for the nonprofit world. She says she invariably scours the Web to learn about candidates.

Reputation management is an unavoidable aspect of digital living. We check out the new nanny, a prospective date, a candidate. Nearly 77 percent of recruiters said last year that they use search engines to check out candidates, and 35 percent have eliminated a candidate due to such a search, a survey by ExecuNet found.

Career expert Della Giles Googles herself frequently, and advises others to do the same. "It's about managing your online presence and putting your best foot forward," says Giles, head of BlueSteps.com, the career management service of the Association of Executive Search Consultants. A recent survey of 351 members found that 75 percent had searched the Net for data about themselves.

It might sound silly to check up on yourself, yet you may not fully know the extent of the cybertrail you've left. You'd never bring snapshots of a silly frat reunion into a job interview, but now the interviewer can see them all.

"Cyberspace has immediacy, but much of it also has longevity and indelibility," says Davia Temin of Temin and Co., a reputation management firm in New York. "It's really easy to sit down and write a blog entry at 3 a.m. and vent your spleen, but those things catch up with you."

Once you've taken a good look at the virtual you, be proactive, whether or not you have "digital dirt" to hide.

After years running his own business, James D'Amico wanted a change. He sold his printing firm, took some time off and since the fall has been looking for a job in the nonprofit world that would build on his long volunteer experience. To bolster his search, he hired Kirsten Dixon of the Exeter, N.H.-based firm Brandezo to cre-

### James d'Amico

EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO



### Intro

James d'Amico is the founder and former CEO of a multimillion dollar corporation who is bringing energy and fresh ideas to the nonprofit sector. A passionate, entrepreneurial leader with a strong service orientation, James acts creatively and nimbly in response to the unexpected and often nontraditional in

D'Amico's home page emphasizes his business acumen and caring outlook.

devoted to his background and interests — to use as a high-tech resume. Dixon charges between \$3,500 and \$5,000 for such portfolios.

"It's a sexier package," says D'Amico, who highlights his volunteer work, triathlons, sideline woodworking business, and career experiences at jamesdamico.us. "With a two-page resume, it's like 'uh oh, here comes the job-seeker.'" D'Amico, who lives in Mendham, N.J., says the positive response he's gotten from the site has opened doors and boosted his confidence.

Former college president Uma Gupta had a different goal when she began a blog last year. Her tenure as president of Alfred State College in Alfred, N.Y., was colored by an anonymous blog assailing her style and leadership. Last June, she resigned to take a job as a senior adviser to the State University of New York on science and technology diversity. Though she's not job-hunting, Gupta uses her blog to combat her detractors' still-visible Web presence.

"The Internet is a great tool, but it's also a great weapon," says Gupta, who started a blog at Dixon's urging to focus public attention on her accomplishments.

A blog is a good reputation booster because search engines value content that's

percent of her clients have digital-dirt issues. On the other hand, this means that inappropriate content is also highly visible. Temin just worked with an investment manager who started his own chatty ghost-written blog to draw in new clients. Oops — his conservative, wealthy clients were not amused.

A blog or Web portfolio isn't the only way to polish the virtual you. Some sites, such as linkedin.com, allow users to create and manage their own profiles. As well, remember that you're creating an impression on others when you're e-mailing, texting, or calling, just as when you meet them in person. Hint: Don't try the screening interview on a cellphone from the airport waiting lounge.

Late last year, Yazbak eliminated a qualified candidate from consideration for a top strategy job because her style was all "snippets and interruption," recalls Yazbak. "I just got the sense that the cell phone never got switched off and she didn't have any step-back thinking time." Sadly, the candidate's virtual persona killed the deal.

Balancing Acts appears every other week. Maggie Jackson can be reached at