

# SOCIAL MEDIA: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

by Ashley Collins, AgCareers.com Education Coordinator

As social media continues to evolve, it remains a hot topic in the world of collegiate recruitment. Additionally, the impact that social media can and will have on student employability is also a subject of high interest. While many students have become more vigilant with shared information and security settings on social media sites, there are still some practices they should consider to develop a professional online presence.

College students who are using social media may have set up their profile pages over six years ago.

Facebook added high school networks in September 2005, before many of today's college students even had their driver's licenses.

According to Facebook Statistics, the average user has 130 friends, if you'd like to know where you rank.

Students should keep in mind who they have befriended in the past and determine who could hurt or help them in their professional career.

In a recent article from *Readers Digest*, one Human Resources Director shared, "When it comes to getting a job, who you know really does matter. No matter how nice your resume is or how great your experience may be, it's all about connections."

So beware of who you are connected to via social media. That girl you met at summer camp three years ago, and haven't spoken to since, may be the daughter of the recruiter you met at last year's career fair, to whom you just sent your resume for a summer internship.

You've taken all the right steps to keep your photos and pictures private, but the six degrees of separation rule may come back to bite you down the road.

This can also come into play when it comes to co-workers and managers at work. The most recent data reports that the average age of

Facebook users is 38, which could mean that many of those using the social network are co-workers, managers, or supervisors of recent grads.

As you consider whether to send a friend request or accept a friend request from one of these individuals, think about to what degree you are posting information and if you feel this connection is worthwhile. This can be where turning to a more professional method of social networking, like joining **LinkedIn**, could be good.

You can then follow the rule of connecting with your non-work friends via one site and your more professional connections on another. Some sites like Facebook allow you to create customized friend lists and then control which lists see which information.

Finding a system that works best for you can allow you to stay connected to friends, family, and co-workers via social media while separating who can see what about you.

Beyond these cautionary tips, students can use social media to help them get noticed in a sea of applicants.

Being a smart and active user of social media can be one of the factors that will set you apart in a very competitive job market.

According to the *2010 Jobvite Survey*, 73% of companies use some form of social media to support their recruitment efforts. Fifty-eight percent of companies say they have hired candidates through social media.

More and more companies are adding social media sites to their marketing and recruitment efforts, and with the technology tools available, they can monitor and see who is using their sites.

Those students who make positive comments on blogs, wall posts, re-Tweet information, or



participate in online discussions or contests that companies launch via social media, will stand out among their competition.

Not only does this give you insight about the company that can be utilized in a networking or interview situation, but it also shows your eagerness to be involved in the industry and the company.

Take your presence to the next level. Create a virtual interview of yourself, post it to **YouTube** and include the link on your resume.

Create a blog that highlights your attributes and industry knowledge. Tweet from industry events you attend during your collegiate tenure. These are all examples of creating a positive social media presence of yourself as part of your job search process.

Social media can be a double-edged sword in the job search process. But, for those who take the proper steps to avoid being excluded because of their online presence, and put more effort in utilizing the tools to include them in the job search process; it is yet another powerful tool for building a strong career.