



Is your Digital Reputation a Smokin' Gun?

- **1997 – Social media made its first entry into our lives.**
- **2003 – Launch of the professional network, LinkedIn.**
- **2004 – Facebook brings our personal experiences online.**
- **2006 – Twitter makes headway as an accessible social networking space.**
- **2010 – Instagram explosion.**

The motive was simple – to create a virtual space for easier social networking for our lives' professional and personal aspects.

How did this social media boom impact search and hiring trends? What year was your digital identity born?

Kingsley Gate Partners works with clients spanning across industries and geographies, but one common discussion point when analyzing a potential hire is their digital reputation. Where does one draw the line? Should we take into account the potential candidates' social media footprint? Do firms have to be extra vigilant about their online positioning?

We bring you this perspective piece based on insights gathered from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States.

YOUR DIGITAL IDENTITY



Have you ever noticed how, when you click on an ad just for curiosity, you are flooded with similar ads on your phone or computer for the next couple of weeks!

Today's digitally driven world monitors every aspect of our online reputation. We have unknowingly become a part of a multimillion-dollar 'Reputation Economy' that focuses on our browsing behavior, time of browsing, websites accessed, curiosity, and buying behavior. This 'economy' affects not only you but also all those who work with you, be it a potential employer, employee, business partner, or investor.

Simply stated, your digital identity is your 'Google resume.' This online resume includes but is not limited to your work experience, accomplishments, and personal opinions. What you say, or how you may have said it, could have severe implications for your future – especially considering that almost 70% of employers use popular social media platforms to screen candidates. These may range from your professional updates on LinkedIn and Twitter to your more personal opinions stated on Facebook and Instagram.¹

With the continual development of the World Wide Web, information is now more readily available than ever. Organizations can easily find out all relevant information on potential candidates with just a few simple clicks, which may not have been readily available via redundant paper resumes, cover letters, and references. Who is to say that ten years from now, modern technologies like artificial intelligence will not further speed up the process to unearth information you thought was long gone?

Add to that the fact we're currently dealing with pandemic-led forced digitization that is adding more scrutiny on each individuals' online presence - you have yourselves questioning your digital reputation.

There are different reasons why companies run these background checks. One could be to analyze and confirm a good culture fit for the firm, while another could be an exception to watch out for any red flags that may deter the final offer. So, where do we draw the line? How ethical is this practice? What are the laws surrounding such liberties? How do we eliminate the unconscious personal bias that may emerge from profiling personal social media handles? If and how can technology help?



DIGITAL REPUTATION AND TECHNOLOGY

The past few months have seen more scrutiny placed on a potential candidate's digital reputation through social media, content, and background checks than what may have been the case in 2019. With no luxury of time being dedicated to face-to-face meetings, companies are more hesitant and taking extra precautions before making hiring decisions virtually. These additional measures provide empirical evidence that digital reputations are more paramount in the hiring process than ever.

Outside of the typical Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn content, firms are increasingly looking at candidates' publications and video content to provide them with additional data points and a more holistic view before making hiring decisions.

When it comes to analyzing social networks, common sense seems to be the best strategy to approach this regardless of the employee level. Take your professional networks, for example. LinkedIn has fast become the corporate social media platform or 'digital resume' and is the place to 'see and be seen,' make connections, hire, network, and engage in the occasional sneak peek. Twitter comes second in the hierarchy for professional social media platforms and is used to stay updated on the news in a quick, cohesive manner.

While organizations are dealing with this subject with caution and a certain amount of discretion, there are no definitive guidelines on the methods to approach social media screening. Retained search firms are innovating ways of handling this subject effectively while staying within the legal & data privacy framework. Between the legality of what an approach stands for and how readily available information in the public domain gets used, there is a fine line on how digital reputation-based recruiting is controlled and managed.

A few of these innovative ways include deploying digital capabilities at the front-end. Most economies are leapfrogging onto a mobile-first world. While research indicates that 95% of recruiters rely on social media information for reviewing a prospective hire, 70% of employers did not hire an applicant because of online content. 66% consider Facebook and 53% Twitter for the same.²

Such methods have resulted in a spike in IT service management companies specializing in reputation management. One such service is Fama Technologies – an AI-based software solution firm that identifies problematic behavior through online posts and other publicly available content to highlight undesirable traits such as sexism, racism, or hate speech. Such analysis has seen a 12-15% increase in altering the hiring decisions and employment of a potential candidate, as stated by the company's CEO Ben Mones.³

However, digital reputations are as crucial for the organization as they are for the individual.

Firms are increasingly more vigilant – particularly today – on how their reputations might get redefined, basis the way they're dealing with the humanitarian crisis. Business decisions are getting characterized by effective communication, transparency, and empathy.

These are necessary with the influx of review platforms like Glassdoor that allow candidates to fairly judge firms and get insight into the culture, hiring process, and the management. There might be

negative repercussions that lead to disengagement or lack of trust before the hiring process has even begun. Therefore, firms need to pay close attention and be well-prepared to address these concerns or, better yet, raise them proactively.

The next and most crucial question we approach is the ethicality of screening digital identities.

WHERE DO YOU DRAW THE LINE?



Digital reputation is real and, once built, is hard to manipulate in short to medium term. We are still discovering our social media lifespan and its effects, but in the interim, it is vital to pay attention to what we may be posting online. The impressions we send out have the potential to influence our lives significantly – professionally and personally.

While there is the looming ethical question of how far one can use social media platforms to judge a potential candidate, the introduction of tight data protection laws in some regions results in limited digital screening by employers. Europe, for example, introduced the General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR – ensuring a legal ground for ‘snooping.’⁴

The EU takes data protection seriously, which provides an added layer of reassurance for Europeans with GDPR, stipulating that employers should only view social media profiles where the information is relevant for the position.⁵ When translated, it highlights that while platforms such as LinkedIn are fine, Facebook and Instagram are more than likely not suitable – although there has been little evidence of the enforcement of this so far. However, the introduction of such law sensitizes both the employees and employers, resulting in a fine line for less well-capitalized companies who cannot afford to make a CxO mis-hire due to negligence in the due diligence process.

Other regions like Latin America also have such labor laws that protect workers and executives from getting excluded from the recruiting processes. A senior HR executive leader stated that for concluding C-level executive searches, some firms and clients use independent third-party firms who scan these public social media platforms for them as a background check. “This is in the case of any tricky subjects so that any doubts can be clarified smoothly,” she adds, also safeguards the executive in line for a new job opportunity.

When it comes to C-level recruitment, 360° references carry more value as a ‘footprint image’ than one’s digital reputation. Letters from former bosses, peers, and subordinates bring in-depth information about the executive and make a significant difference in the final say of a potential executive candidate.

That said, there is still a majority of the world that does not necessarily have such data privacy laws. As a candidate, how do you ensure that your digital reputation does not affect your prospects?

- **By recognizing your audience and sharing only relevant information with each one. It is essential to establish clear boundaries between your personal and professional space. Set guidelines on the information you would like to share, which again should be consistent across platforms.**
- **By choosing the right tone and demeanor when establishing your digital identity. It's prudent to make a periodic assessment of your image to see how people react to your posts. This will help you realign your strategy towards your online goals. As a rule of thumb, it's best to keep from sharing any sensitive information, be it political, financial or public!**

On the other hand, for organizations, a robust digital identity resonates with the ability to correctly nurture your brand, communicate effectively, and drive followership. It is a manifestation of a progressive mindset and leadership in this digital age. This kind of leadership augurs well in the world of business today.



HIRING TODAY

Six months into 2020 and COVID-19 has changed the rules of hiring altogether. We are headed to a future that can potentially replace your resume with your online reputation. Are you prepared?

According to a majority of the world working remotely – as high as 81% according to a survey conducted by Kingsley Gate Partners – one of the most significant changes and challenges we're seeing is talent and people management. Leading organizations like Twitter and Square have announced indefinite work from home, while others like Facebook are working from home until the end of the year.

When it comes to the hiring process, talent organizations are redesigning the framework and creating educational tools for hiring managers when interviewing over a video to make sure they are prepared for technical glitches that could occur during the video interview. The definition of "having chemistry" and the likeability and personality of an individual are now being gauged via video platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Webex.

According to a recent report by Gartner, as many as 86% of organizations are conducting virtual interviews to screen and hire candidates. At Kingsley Gate Partners, we, too, encourage the use of technology to remove unconscious bias and determine the right fit using our proprietary online tools like Athena and the Attribute Selector.^{6,7}

Being digitally present is almost mandatory these days, and there is no definite blueprint to what one can post on social media. With no "Ten Commandments" to follow, it is safer for executives to keep a moderately low profile on social media – particularly LinkedIn – while they can be more vocal on other platforms where they have the option to accept friend requests. We also felt that there should be a filter that prevails between the corporate contacts on professional networking platforms and those that should be transferred to other platforms based on the level of proximity and friendship you share.

With artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data gaining momentum, a mindful approach is required to craft your personal brand online, whether it's LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

What also matters is the choice of people you allow to follow you. Keeping a low profile and moderate positioning is the best alternative once the individual and the corporate "personas" are not completely dissociated. In case an executive is more vocal, organizations should look at establishing agreements outlining their communication practices, government relations, ombudsman, etc. to avoid unnecessary surprises. Such measures also ensure transparency and posture alignment, and above all, keeps the shareholders happy as well.

SOURCES

2 Survey results and data from Jobvite, Captera and Career Profiles

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