

## You've Got to Google Yourself

Aurora Meyer, Missouri State Teachers Association

People who insist they don't have an online identity are just fooling themselves. If you've ever run a local 5k, commented on a friend's unsecured Facebook wall or had a friend snap a picture of you at a party, you have an online profile and Google will find you.

When was the last time you Googled yourself? Even if you aren't currently looking for a job, you need to be checking yourself out online at least monthly to know what is out there. Credit card and mortgage companies are searching you. As is that potential romantic partner or new book club friend. Old flames and identity thieves are also using Google to find out about you. This isn't vanity searching, or ego-surfing, as dubbed in the 2009 Time Magazine article, *Why Google Wants You to Google Yourself* <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1893965,00.html>, it's common sense.

Start typing your name in the search bar. See what helpful suggestions Google adds for you. Does it automatically include your hometown or current residence? Your employer? Your Facebook or Twitter profile? Make a note of these suggestions and Google each one separately.

Go through the first 10 pages. Check the image results. Look in the News section, even if you do not think you will be there. Do not just stop at Google. Try Bing, Yahoo and any other search engines. You cannot be proactive unless you know what the search results are saying (or not saying) about you.

Be objective. Is this the online image you want to portray? With a few keywords, it is pretty easy to build a complete profile of a person. Google results can reveal where a person lives and works, as well as their level of education, their contact information and if the person has a criminal past. It can also reveal likes and dislikes, in addition to how a person interacts with others.

It is not too late to change your online image. If you have a common name, try using your middle initial on the items you want to be associated with you, such as academic papers, committee membership rosters and other professional endeavors like LinkedIn.

If the original results are unfavorable, for example a Target wedding registry or Amazon Wish List (do you really want the world to know you wanted four sets of satin sheets or a nose hair trimmer?), first try changing your username on the offending site to a pseudonym. If that does not work, the second method is to begin creating content on other sites. Google uses an algorithm to determine the search results. While no one knows exactly what the algorithm is, the more content you create will eventually push the unfavorable results lower on the list. Another caveat to this second step is that the more popular the site, the higher up it will appear on Google's result list. That means a Facebook or Ancestry.com profile will be above a Picasa account. The second part takes time, energy, and effort.

Google provides additional help on managing your online profile.

<http://support.google.com/accounts/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1228138>

After doing a thorough search, follow up by using Google Alerts to see when something new about you appears online. You can set the alerts to include blog posts, news articles, videos, and more. <http://www.google.com/alerts>