How Private is Your Private Life? Facebook Settings for Job-Seekers

Since the dawn of online social networks like Facebook, your private life is only as private as your privacy settings. For many users, that means their private lives are an open book. As employers take to the internet as a means of checking out a job candidate’s desirability, content posted online can play a decisive factor in hiring. A June 2009 CareerBuilder survey found that:

- 45% of employers surveyed used social networking site information to screen out candidates.
- Over 30% of these employers reported not hiring candidates based on their online information.
- Most frequently, candidates were eliminated for posting information about drug or alcohol use, inappropriate photographs, negative comments about employers, or for using poor grammar or spelling.
- Even negative content on friends’ sites caused some candidates to be disqualified.

What can you do about it?

1. Google your own name periodically to see what comes up.
2. Eliminate all digital dirt before you begin a job search.
3. Use the privacy settings on Facebook to protect anything posted there. Since the whole point of Facebook is to be able to share information, you can create limited subsections of friends with whom you share information, opinions, photos, etc. that should NOT be seen by others.
4. Check your Facebook settings periodically. If you get hacked, your privacy settings may have all been lost.
5. Use a separate account or network for professional contacts. LinkedIn is ideal for this.

How do you change your Facebook settings?

- Log into Facebook and click on “Settings” in the top right-hand corner of the page.
- Select “Privacy Settings” from the drop-down menu.
- From there, it is relatively easy to explore and change settings, but you can also use the “Controlling How You Share” information at the bottom, right-hand corner of the “Privacy Settings” screen to learn more about privacy options.
- Recommended reading: Ten Privacy Settings Every Facebook User Should Know
- Here are some suggested strategies and privacy settings for job-seekers.
  - Use friend lists to sort your friends into groups according to how much information they should be able to access.
  - Consider setting everything to “Friends Only” (at least photos, tagged photos, friends list, education, likes, and contact info). (To access these controls, use the “Account” tab at the top-right, and select “Privacy Settings.” A page labeled “Choose Your Privacy Settings” will appear that has a link, “View Settings” near the top of the page. Then use the “Preview My Profile” setting to see the results. Note that you can enter any friend’s name to preview what that person will be able to see.)
  - If you like to post photos for your friends, remember that you can set different privacy setting for each photo album. Learn how at the “Ten Privacy Settings” link above.
  - Only let friends see photos and tagged photos. Do not turn off the option of receiving an email whenever a friend tags you in a photo. Check these, and “untag” yourself in any potentially problematic photos. You cannot be “retagged” in those photos.
  - Control who can find you by doing a Facebook search. (Use the “View Settings” link described above, then change the “Search for you on Facebook” settings.)
  - Disconnect all apps, if possible. (Use the “Apps and Websites” link at the bottom left of the “Choose Your Privacy Settings” page described above.)
  - Disable the “Instant Personalization” and “Public Search” features. (Use the “Apps and Websites” link at the bottom left of the “Choose Your Privacy Settings” page described above.)
  - (If all else fails) delete your account. You can always start over.