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## Personal doesn't mean private online

- Study: 42 percent of employers check job hunter's out online
- Some universities offering online safety classes

**CHICAGO, Illinois (AP)** -- Walls of an auditorium were covered with thousands of sheets of paper -- printouts from MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and other online sites that were filled with back-stabbing gossip, unflattering images, and details about partying and dating exploits.

Each posting was easily accessed online, no password needed. But seeing them on paper -- and in some cases, being asked to read them aloud -- grabbed the attention of members of the North American Federation of Temple Youth, who gathered earlier this year at a camp outside New York City. That each of the pages mentioned their organization in some way only made it that much more embarrassing.

"They saw themselves and often their friends, completely open, all the way around the room," said Dean Carson, president of the group for Jewish youth and a freshman at George Washington University. "It was very shocking for a lot of people."

It's just one of a growing number of instances in which people who blog and use social-networking and video sites are realizing just how public those spaces can be.

That realization, in turn, is causing many of them to reconsider what they post -- or at the very least, to do more to protect their privacy.

Chuck Sanchez, a 25-year-old Chicagoan, recently deleted references to his public relations firm on his MySpace page after everyone from a job applicant to his fiancée's mother found the page.

"It's simply not worth it," he says. "I want my personal site to be just that: personal."

Rachel Hutson removed some photos from her college sorority days after she took a job as a civilian working for the military. She's also made her Facebook and MySpace profiles private, so that only friends she approves can see it.

"I just don't want certain people to find me," says Hutson, who's 23 and lives in Newport News, Virginia.

When it comes to posting personal information online, predators and other criminals are, of course, always a concern.

But it goes well beyond that as more adults -- teachers, parents, university admissions counselors and prospective employers -- become savvy about searching online spaces. Sometimes, personal information lives on in the archives of Google and other search engines, no matter how much people try to get rid of it.

"Everyone at this point -- even if it hasn't happened to them -- has heard about someone who's gotten in trouble at school, with a parent, a coach, because of something that's been posted online," says Susannah Stern, an assistant professor of communication studies at the University of San Diego who studies young people's online habits.

"They're now more conscious that information they post online can be used in ways they didn't intend it to be," she says. "And I think this awareness is healthy -- for adults or kids."

Today, the rule of thumb is: If it's in the public domain, it's fair game.

Jeff Krakauer, human resources director for the legal services company Juriscape in Pasadena, California, says he recently began looking at social-networking profiles -- especially for candidates for whom he's "on the fence."

So far, what he's seen hasn't swayed him one way or another.

"But if something was really wild and way out there, it would cause me some concern," he says.

Hearing more stories like those prompted career counselors at the University of Dayton to survey employers in their database about their use of Facebook. They found that 42 percent of the 326 who responded said they would consider factoring a Facebook profile into their hiring decisions. Some of those employers also said they'd already rescinded offers because of things they'd discovered online.

"I do think it's an invasion of privacy," says Melissa Bush, a business major at the University of Dayton. "But when you think about it, anything you post online is open season."

When she interviewed for an internship last summer, her interviewer told her upfront that they'd be checking her Facebook profile. She didn't worry because she's careful about what she posts -- but lately, she's been deleting messages from friends that she deems inappropriate.

"If you don't want people to read it, don't post it," Bush says. "If you don't want people to see a video, don't post it."

It's a point that officials at universities are beginning to emphasize, with some offering classes and seminars on online safety and ethics.

At least one public service campaign, sponsored by the NBC television network, also reminds viewers that, "When you're online, you're in public."

"We're just beginning to see some awareness," says Gregory Hall, a psychology professor at Bentley College outside Boston who addresses some of these issues in his "Cyber-psychology" course.

"Just like everything else that we've seen develop socially on the Internet, the social norms are the last thing to develop," he says. "It's what I refer to as the 'Wild West Syndrome.' It first gets settled and the laws and the norms get established."

For their part, the young leaders of the North American Federation of Temple Youth came up with a resolution asking members to think about how their postings reflect on themselves and the organization. They dubbed the ongoing project OurSpace -- and already, some people have deleted their MySpace pages, cleaned them up, or made them private.

"We're not against free speech or anything," Carson says. "We just want to educate ourselves, especially our leaders."

Hall, the Bentley College professor, says many young people don't realize how much information they're revealing online -- even when they think they're being careful.

Often, it happens in conversations they post on one another's pages -- details about their personal lives; information about in-person meetings; and sometimes even their class schedules.

"Because of this developmental sense of invincibility, we see the same risky behaviors unfolding in the virtual world that we see in the real world," Hall says.

Some teens, though, think adults worry too much -- and say that deleting too much personal information defeats the purpose of social networking.

"I know how annoying it is to look for people and it being impossible to find them," says Tyler Belden-England, a high school freshman in Pittsburgh who uses MySpace and other sites.

His profiles include the name of his high school, for instance, so that friends can more easily track him down.

"But I'm not going to be stupid about it," he says. "We all get messages from weird old men who are like 'hi' -- but nobody replies to them."

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