

• Social networks are fun — but revealing. Employers are now using them to learn more about their applicants.

Before a job hunt, put a lid on tweets

By DAVID PHELPS
dphelps@startribune.com

Rose McKinney recalls one job candidate who blogged and tweeted herself directly out of a job interview.

This was not an entry-level job or a rookie mistake. The potential job position was a midlevel account manager. The candidate was experienced.

"On paper she looked solid, someone worth talking to," said McKinney, president of Risdall McKinney Public Relations. "But on blog spaces and in Twitter conversations she was negative and critical of other agencies. I imagined what she would say about us and our clients."

Electronic faux pas were once considered the legacy of college students and 20-somethings who would post beer-sodden pictures of themselves and friends on MySpace. But with the rapid advance of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter from phenomenon to near-obligation for multiple generations, employers are learning that grown-ups can be just as knuckleheaded as freshly scrubbed college grads when it comes to leaving digital impressions.

Amy Langer, co-founder of Salo, a placement firm for the financial services sector, had one job candidate for a controller's position who didn't get the job after the employer took displeasure with a negative political posting on the candidate's Facebook site.

"It's becoming part of the vetting process," Langer said. "It makes sense. Social networking was all about personal posts, but now it's leaked over to the professional side and nobody knows how to handle it."

"The mistake people make is they pour too much of themselves out there," said Gillian Gabriel, a headhunter for advertising and marketing agencies who looks at LinkedIn post-

Networks continues on D7 ▶

ZSW

THE ART OF HAGGLING D3

Finding life's thread brings meaning **D6**

money+business

STARTRIBUNE.COM/BUSINESS • SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2009 • SECTION D

Job seekers better off to keep a lid on tweets

◀ NETWORKS FROM D1

ings as well as Facebook and Twitter when evaluating prospects. "They talk about personal issues — divorce, sick parents, recovery programs. If someone is having a big issue in life, are you going to take that chance [and hire them]?"

Gabriel said one job candidate with whom she had contact went to her LinkedIn network after she didn't get an agency job and described a scenario where her ideas were at odds with the agency's. "She made a poor decision," said Gabriel, who was part of the candidate's LinkedIn network. "Not only didn't she get the job but she publicly pegged herself as a bit of a troublemaker."

David Gerwitz, an author who specializes in technology and security issues, said social networkers need to realize that their electronic entries will last for years and years.

Online forever

"Every tweet, every post is being actively indexed by different search engines," Gerwitz said. "It's going to be avail-

able in perpetuity."

Sometimes it may not be what you post, but what someone else posts on your site that causes problems.

Pat O'Donnell, a recruiter and career counselor, said one of her clients, a 45-year-old, \$200,000-a-year executive, suffered serious career damage when a boyfriend posted a seminude picture of her on her Facebook page that stayed on the page unbeknownst to the executive for three months.

"Everyone sees those pictures," O'Donnell said. "There's a host of things you can't control."

O'Donnell said a survey by the Electronic Recruiter Exchange found that 60 percent or its members checked with LinkedIn as part of the job-checking process.

"I can tell in a flash if someone can sell themselves," said O'Donnell, who referred to LinkedIn as a "business brochure" for honing an image and showing qualifications.

Social networking and use of those sites in the hiring process has become a hot topic among hiring managers. The Minne-

sota chapter of Human Resource Professionals is devoting its fall meeting in October to the topic.

"The biggest problem is if you are on the Internet with personal information, hiring managers are going to see it," said Donna Ploof, a member of the chapter's board of directors. "If you're bragging about drinking at a party, that might not be a good thing — for yourself or your company."

Hiring managers say they often gain access to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn through friends of friends. Often a job applicant is already linked to someone at a company where a job is being sought or belongs to professional groups to which an employer already has access.

"In the business of networking, people know people," said Langer. "You have to decide what you want your social media face to be. It's like talking in an elevator. You don't know who's listening."

In an instance of reverse networking, McKinney had one job applicant who became virtual friends with as many

current Risdall McKinney employees as possible, thinking that would give him an in when interviewing. It had the opposite impact.

"It was too much," McKinney said. It seemed a bit too

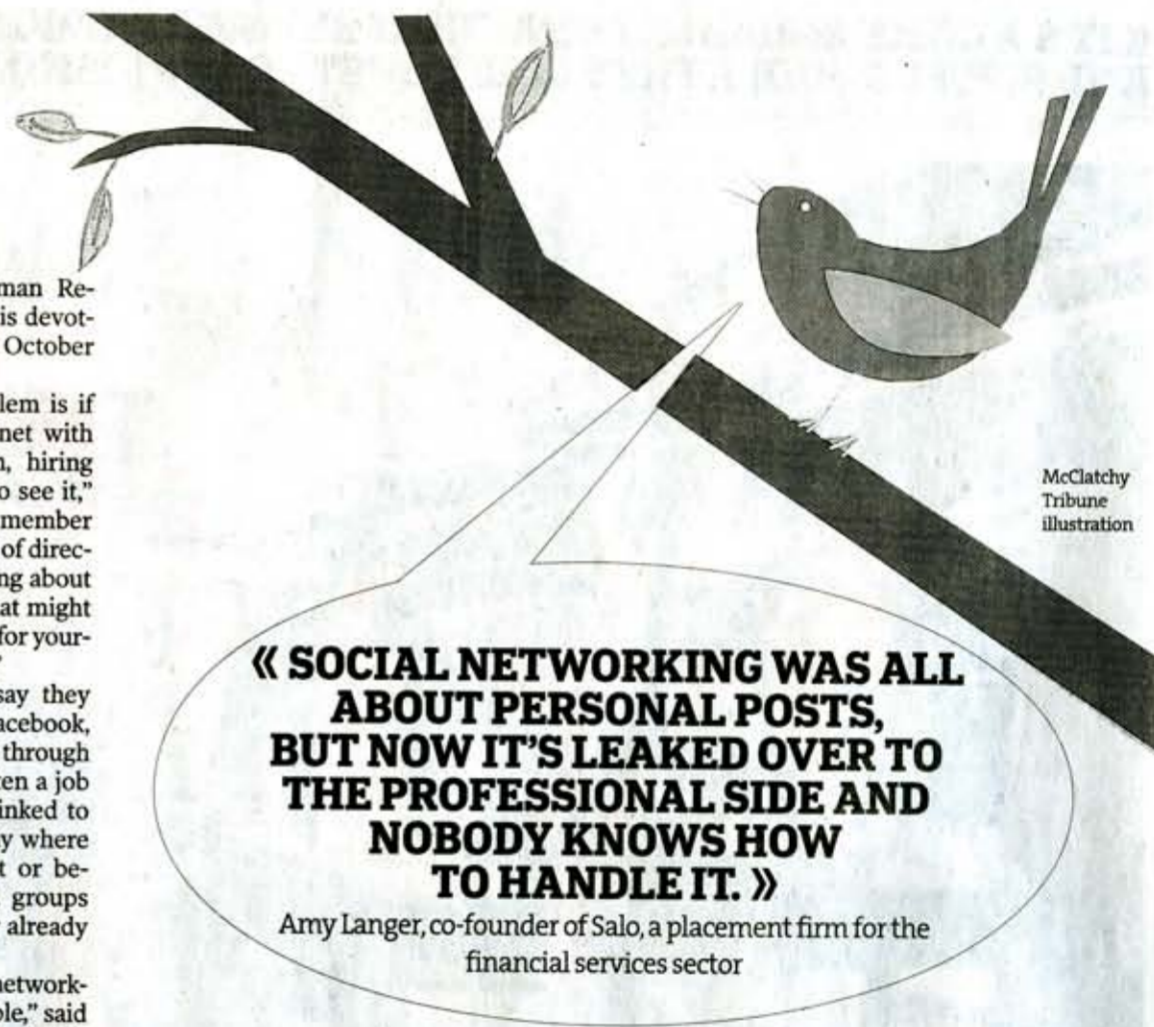
aggressive. It was overkill. Interviewing is not a group exercise. It requires some professional decorum."

The candidate was not hired for the midlevel job.

"It's a subtle skill to job-

hunt," said Gabriel. "Every employer has 200 applications on the desk. They want to go with the option where you know you won't have a problem."

David Phelps • 612-673-7269



« SOCIAL NETWORKING WAS ALL ABOUT PERSONAL POSTS, BUT NOW IT'S LEAKED OVER TO THE PROFESSIONAL SIDE AND NOBODY KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE IT. »

Amy Langer, co-founder of Salo, a placement firm for the financial services sector