US colleges help students polish online reputation

December 26 2012, by Carolyn Thompson

Samantha Grossman wasn't always thrilled with the impression that emerged when people Googled her name. So before she graduated from Syracuse University in the U.S., the school provided her with an online tool that allowed her to put her best Web image forward.

Now when people Google her, they go straight to a professional photo, her cum laude degree and credentials, and she credits it with helping her land a digital advertising job in New York.

"I wanted to make sure people would find the actual me," she said.

Some universities offer such online tools to their students free of charge, realizing that ill-considered Web profiles of drunken frat parties, prank videos and worse can doom graduates.

The trend is based on studies showing that most employers Google prospective hires and nearly all of them won't bother to go past the first page of results. The online tools don't eliminate the embarrassing material, they just put the graduate's most flattering, professional profile front and center.

"These students have been comfortable with the intimate details of their lives on display since birth," said Lisa Severy, president-elect of the National Career Development Association.

After initially supplying BrandYourself accounts to graduating seniors,

Syracuse University this year struck a deal with the company—begun by a trio of alumni—to offer accounts to all of its undergraduate and graduate students and alumni at no additional charge. About 25,000 people have access to it so far.

Online reputation repair companies have been around for at least a couple of years, often charging hundreds or thousands of dollars a year to arrange for good results on search engine result pages. BrandYourself, which normally charges $10 a month for an account, launched two years ago as a less expensive, do-it-yourself alternative after co-founder Pete Kistler ran into a problem with his own name.

"He couldn't get an internship because he was getting mistaken for a drug dealer with the same name," said co-founder Patrick Ambron. "He couldn't even get calls back and found out that was the problem."

An April survey of 2,000 hiring managers from CareerBuilder found nearly two in five companies use social networking sites to research job candidates, and 11 percent said they planned to start. A third of the hiring managers who said they research candidates reported finding something like a provocative photo or evidence of drinking or drug use that cost the candidate a job.

"We want our students and alumni actively involved in shaping their online presence," said Johns Hopkins Career Center Director Mark Presnell.

BrandYourself works by analyzing search terms in a user's online profile to determine, for example, that a LinkedIn account might rank 25th in Google searches of the user's name. The program then suggests ways to boost that ranking. The software also provides alerts when an unidentified result appears on a user's first page or if any links rise or fall significantly in rank.

Citation: US colleges help students polish online reputation (2012, December 26) retrieved 10 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2012-12-colleges-students-online-reputation.html