

# What does your NetRep say about you?

A study of how your Internet Reputation  
can influence your career prospects

Spring 2007

Commissioned by

**viadeo**

Primary research conducted by

**YouGov**<sup>®</sup>



## Overview



**Over the last few years, a range of tools have been made available which allow people to contribute to the web in a far more active way.**

It now takes just minutes to set up a personal blog site, upload a video clip to YouTube, post pictures online or add your own insight to a web encyclopaedia such as Wikipedia. At the same time, 'social networks' are creating huge interest with people that want not only to post information but also connect with others to exchange ideas and engage in dialogue online.

This research report was commissioned to look at the extent to which we are now using the web to share personal information online and to explore the impact of this. In particular, it sought to understand whether employers are starting to use personal information found on the web to make decisions about potential candidates and the extent to which people are using business social networks to try and present a more professional image of themselves to the world online.

To do this, the independent market research company, YouGov, surveyed 2,447 Internet users and asked them about the information they placed online about themselves and information about them placed by third parties. The company then also surveyed 600 employers across a range of company sizes and asked them if and how they used personal information from the web as a means to informing recruitment decisions.

The findings are startling and provide a wake up call to anyone who has ever posted information online.

### About the research

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. YouGov is a research company using online panels to provide research for public policy, market research, and stakeholder consultation. It has a track record as the UK's most accurate pollster. In all five of the YouGov polls where data could be compared to actual outcomes (including the UK general election, the Australian election, the Pop Idol contest), YouGov was within 1% of the actual result.

The findings are based on two surveys, conducted separately in March 2007 – one with consumers and one with employers.

Both surveys were conducted using an online interview with members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 115,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey.

YouGov plc make every effort to provide representative information. All results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information.

### Consumer survey

The total sample size was 2,447 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th - 12th March 2007. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

### Employer survey

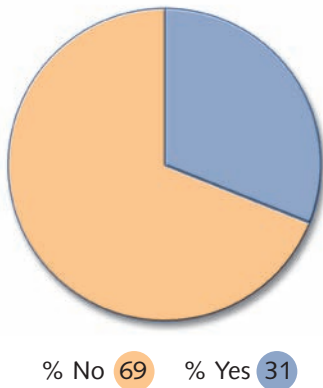
The total sample size was 597 Managers and Directors of companies with more than two employees. Fieldwork was undertaken between 1st – 7th March 2007. The survey was carried out online.

## Section 1: People's interaction with the new web

This researchers first asked respondents, drawn from across the UK population, about their interaction with the web in terms of posting personal information online.

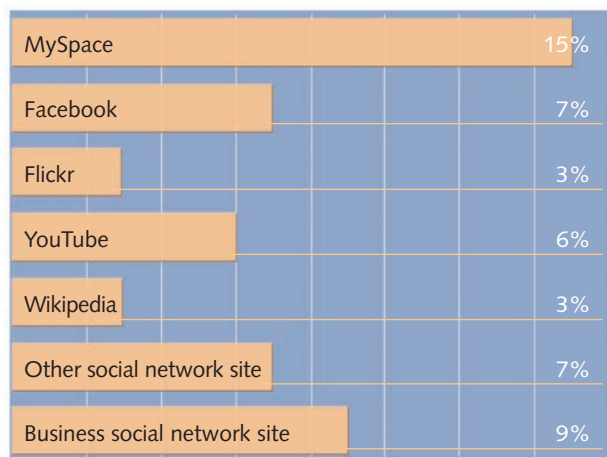
Despite the fact that most of the services allowing people to easily post online (such as free blogging tools, wikis and business or social networks) were only launched in the last few years, the research found they had been widely adopted across the population. Even when all age groups were questioned (including the older age groups less likely to be regular internet users), it was found that 31% of people had posted information online.

### Have you ever posted personal information online?



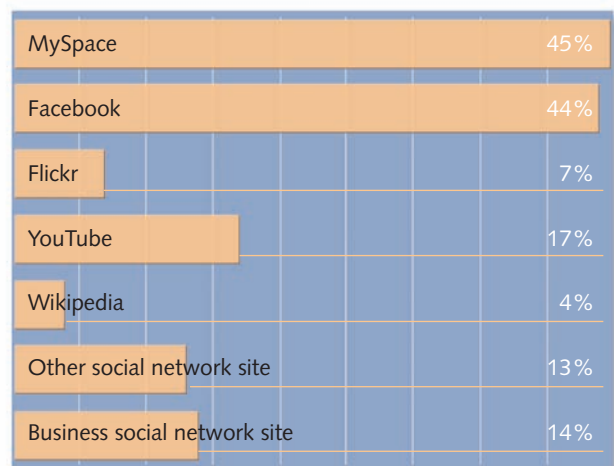
To find out which kinds of sites were most popular, the respondents were given eight options of particular site types, ranging from well-known social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook to picture and video sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr. MySpace was by far the most popular place to post online information overall.

### Have you ever posted personal information on any of the following sites?



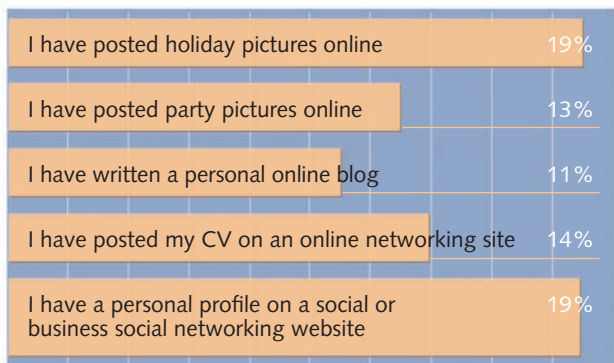
The largest numbers of respondents placing information online were within the 18-24 year old group – 45% said that they had posted personal information on MySpace, 44% had used Facebook and 17% had also posted material on YouTube. Some evidence emerged that this age group was also beginning to use business social networks (14%) which allow them to place personal information relevant to their professional career in an online environment targeted at business associates and employers.

### 18-24 y/o: Have you ever posted personal information on any of the following sites?



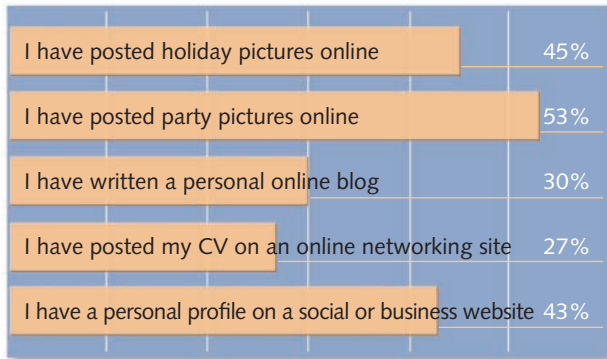
Respondents were also asked what kinds of information they were actively sharing online. Overall, one in five people had posted holiday pictures online, and one in ten had a personal blog.

### Which, if any, of the following statements apply to you?

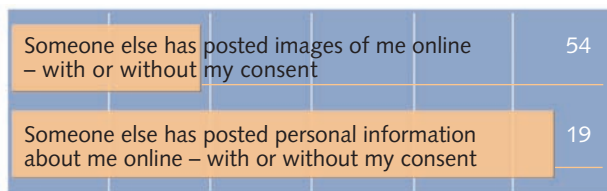


## Section 1: People's interaction with the new web

Again, the 18-24 year old age group showed much higher levels of activity - 53% had posted personal party pictures online, 43% said that they had a personal profile online and 30% had written a personal online blog.

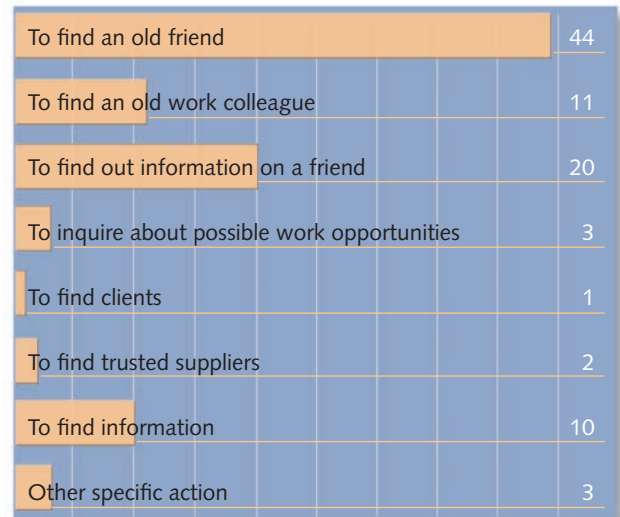


Perhaps most worryingly, it appeared that people did not always have control over what personal information was placed online for the world to view, particularly among younger respondents, with 54% of 18-24 year olds saying others had posted information about them with or without their consent.



The researchers also asked people why they were using social and business networks. The overwhelming majority of people said they wanted to find old friends (44%) or work colleagues (20%) and only small numbers were using such networks to search for work (3%).

### Have you ever used a business or social networking site to do any of the following?



## Section 2: What the employers say

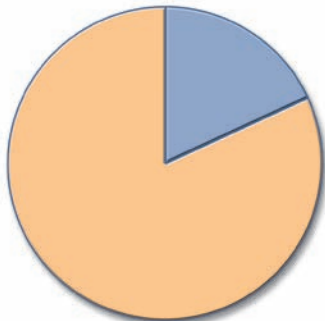
With so many people posting information about themselves online, the researchers wanted to see whether employers were using that information as part of their recruitment processes. To do this, they interviewed 597 managers and directors with responsibility for recruiting staff or making final decisions about candidates.



Respondents were asked if they had ever found information online about a prospective employee – in other words, information that the potential employee did not volunteer themselves.

Almost one in five (18%) of all respondents said they had found information online – a figure that rose to 20% when those specifically responsible for HR processes were questioned.

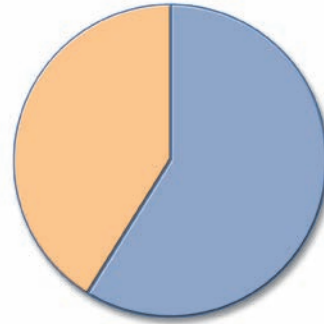
**Have you ever found information online about a prospective employee? (i.e.: information which they did not volunteer)**



- % Yes – have found information about a prospective employee online **18**
- % No – have not **82**

Furthermore, this information was being used by potential employers to aid their recruitment decisions – 59% of those that had found information about candidates on the web said it had impacted their decision about whether or not to employ that person.

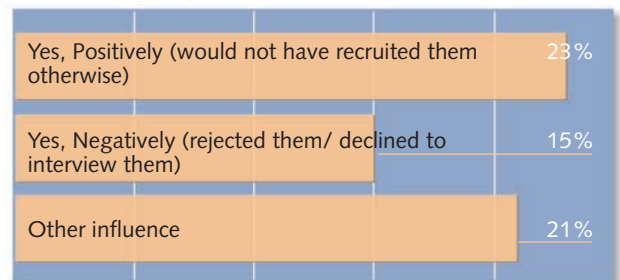
**Has online information about a potential employee ever influenced your decision to recruit them?**



- % Yes **59**
- % No – do not give much credence to online information **41**

Overall, the existence of online information had a positive effect for most employers, but 15% said that they had rejected candidates based on the information they found.

**Has online information about a potential employee ever influenced your decision to recruit them?**



The impact rose significantly when HR managers and directors were asked the same question – 25% said they had declined candidates based on their NetRep, and just 13% said it had a positive impact.

Respondents were also asked to give reasons why the information had influenced their decisions, offering some interesting insight into how online information can present a positive or negative picture of people to employers.

Many comments focused on negatives, which in turn led to the potential candidates being declined for job interviews:

## Section 2: What the employers say

- "His MySpace website showed a negative side to him including excessive alcohol abuse and disrespect for his job"
- "We found that the candidate was on the local police wanted list"
- "Found that the candidate was personally into some activities which did not fit ethically into my company"
- "The candidate had lied on the application form"
- "Found out the candidate wasn't who he said he was"
- "Showed potential for indiscretion, boasting about activities online"

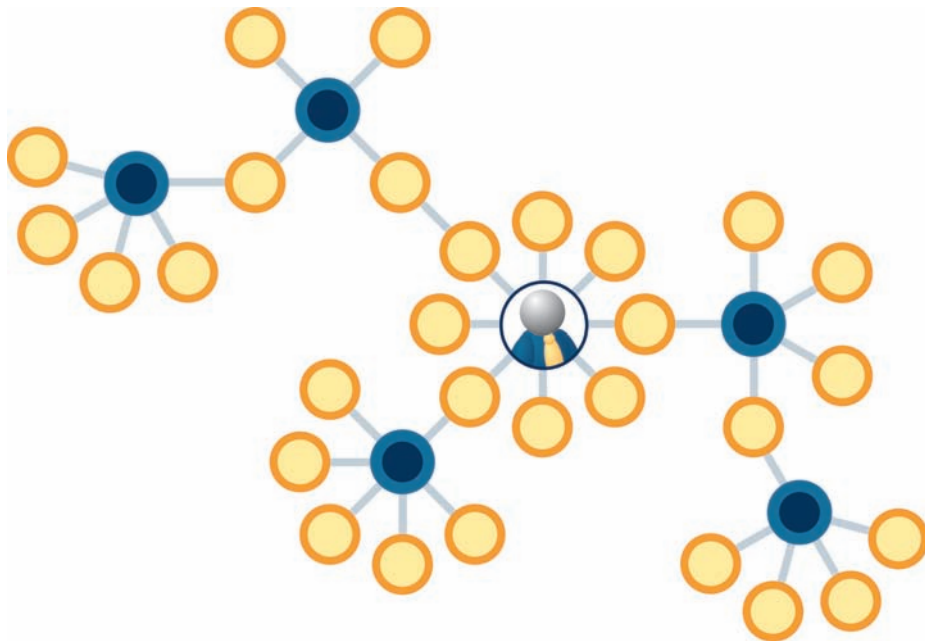
Many of the employers questioned did find supporting information which either supported or backed up a potential employees CV in a positive manner, for example:

- "Showed Internet skills through his own website"
- "Found achievements that I might not have known about otherwise"
- "Found out that the candidate had more to offer than she was revealing with an inadequately designed corporate application form"

The impact of business social networks as sources for employers to use both as part of their recruitment processes and for more general networking was also briefly explored. The research revealed that their impact is growing, with one in five (20%) of employers saying they used business social networks. Only 9% said they directly used them for recruiting employees at present. However, this may understate the true impact as many profiles stored on business social networks can be found through general searches on the Internet, for example using the Google search tool.

### Would you consider using/ do you use a business social networking sites for any of the following?

Networking with likeminded business people	14
Recruiting new employees	9
Finding new clients	7
Finding trusted suppliers	7



## Conclusions

Over the last 18 months, the world wide web has undergone a radical transformation. More than ever before, the web has become an interactive medium with all its users – and not just those with specialist technical skills - increasingly contributing just as much as they consume.

The advent of what is often referred to as 'Web 2.0', with its emphasis on enabling sharing and collaboration, has made it possible for just about anyone to contribute to the online world and people are adding new personal information every second of every day. The web is now alive with information about all of us as individuals: suddenly, everyone is leaving a 'footprint' online which may be extremely difficult to erase.

This research shows that we are posting all kinds of information about ourselves online – from photos and videos, to personal profiles and opinions. At the same time, we've been joining 'social networking' and 'business social networks' sites in our millions – particularly younger age groups. All of this is contributing to our personal online brand – our very own 'NetRep'. And it's not just us doing it – others are contributing to our NetReps too whether we like it or not.

Much of the information we are adding to the new web is often meant to be shared with friends or family and frequently relates to a particular time in our lives. But the web is, of course, a public network and information that is placed on it has a very long lifetime indeed.

The potential harm from out-of-date, conflicting and inaccurate information on the Web is amplified by the fact that internet search engines such as Google store or cache Webpages which makes them available online even after the author has removed the information in question. This makes it very difficult to remove or correct wrong or compromising information, which could be harmful to a person's career chances.

The research showed that when people who may not have been the original intended audience – potential employers for example - start to search for and find personal information it can have a major impact on their decision making processes. The rise of search engines such as Google, social and business social networks means that a potential employer is never more than a few clicks away from information about you.

In some cases that can be a positive thing, but with a quarter of HR managers saying they have rejected candidates based on personal information they have found online, we should all be taking note of what our NetRep says about us. What will an employer find when they Google your name? Probably more than you have bargained for - will they see the shocking party photos from Ibiza 1999 or 'drunk and in drag' on a stag night? What about your 'personal' blog on your MySpace page? Or an old CV on a job board you forgot about that may contradict your current status?

One way to clean up your NetRep is to simply remove all the information about you posted online. But whilst we could all probably do with removing outdated information, it often isn't desirable or practical to remove everything, particularly as cached pages live on. With employers increasingly looking to the web for positive information as well, another option is to begin building a professional, more formal presence on the web, for example, using a respected business social network that ranks highly in search engines and which employers can gravitate towards.

Some people surveyed were already doing this, building profiles and forming connections via business social networks. It seems likely that as the impact of people's NetReps becomes a more and more influential part of the recruitment process, this trend will continue.





Viadeo is one of the world's largest business social networks with over one million members across Europe with 3,000 new members joining every day. Members use Viadeo to find clients, suppliers, business partners, jobs and employees from all over the world online

Originally founded in 2003 by 200 high-flying entrepreneurs in France, Viadeo started as a private network of business people who realised that they could share key business information and solutions to day-to-day business problems if they networked together on the Internet. The network was opened to the public in 2004 and grew to over one million members in less than 2 years and has now become a truly international network where users can create profiles and network in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese and Italian. It will soon be available in other languages including Chinese.

For more information about Viadeo UK, please visit [www.viadeo.com](http://www.viadeo.com)

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