



Guide to Defensive Googling

By Susan P. Joyce, Job-Hunt.org

[The ideas in this tip sheet were first published [here](#).]

Have you Googled yourself recently? Nearly 100 million names are Googled every day.

Because of all that searching, you can be sure all those interested in learning more about you – including recruiters and hiring managers when you are searching for a job – will try to learn more about you with a Google search. So, to make sure what they will find is accurate and appropriate, make sure to regularly monitor your online reputation with “Defensive Googling.”

Being inappropriately visible in search results can be very damaging to your job search, your career, and even your social life.

We are all aware that recruiters relentlessly research job candidates, but that's only part of the research that is happening. People also research those they have met -- or are meeting -- socially and for business.

A 2018 CareerBuilder survey revealed that:

- **47% of employers have rejected applicants because they could not find any online visibility associated with the applicant's name.**
- **48% of employers Google their current employees (10% do it daily).**
- **70% of employers research job applicants via social networks.**
- **However, only 30% of job seekers worry about their online reputations. BIG MISTAKE!**

You must know who and what is found when your name is Googled (or Binged, etc.)

The actions of someone else – who has the same name you have – could be sabotaging your job search.

Recruiters who Google the name you put on their application or in your resume will be unaware that the “bad” person Google showed them is not you. Result: opportunity lost! Perhaps, many opportunities.

Mistaken Online Identity Is a Major Issue – Defensive Googling Is the Solution

Since the best defense is a good offense, find out what is available online related to your name. If you don't know about a problem, you won't be able to address it. When you do know that someone else has the same name, you can differentiate yourself from the individual(s) with the problem.

You need to use one version of your name consistently for your job search and career. I call that your computer “screen name.” Your name is one of the most important keywords for your job search -- critical for your personal online reputation management and personal SEO.



What Is Personal Online Reputation Management?

Most online reputation management instructions are focused on businesses and their online reputations. Personal online reputation management is online reputation management for individual people.

Personal online reputation management is paying attention to what is visibly associated with your name in a search engine's search results, and doing your best to positively impact what is visible at the top of the search results, particularly the first page of search results.

Google is the most widely used search engine, so the first place to focus your attention is on Google's search results.

This is how it works:

Google provides a quick, inexpensive “background check” when you apply for a job.

When employers Google your name — and more than 90% of them do! — what they find will support or — possibly — destroy opportunities for you. These employers are trying to avoid making a “bad hire” or wasting time interviewing someone who isn't really qualified or a good “fit.” A quick Google (or Bing, etc.) search shows them much about you or about someone else using the same name.

Google brings opportunities to you!

Currently, employers use Google (and Bing, etc.) to find potential job candidates, people who qualify for the jobs they are trying to fill. If you have the right keywords in your social profiles, particularly LinkedIn and Facebook, your profile will be found. Ideally, you will be considered for opportunities without even knowing or applying for them.

You can positively impact Google search results yourself (for free).

The resources listed in this tip sheet, below, will help you to choose the best version of your name for your job search and career and to find the best keywords for you to use in social media enabling opportunities to find you.

Do you know what those employers are finding when they Google you? You should know because not knowing is head-in-the-sand insanity.

1. Search Google (and Bing) on the name(s) you have been using in your resumes, job applications, and other job search documents.

You need to know if someone who has the same name you have is causing you a problem in your job search to avoid using that version of your name.

To search -

Type the name you usually use on your resume into a Google (or Bing) search bar with quotation marks around it, like this: “Robert Smith”

Enclosing your name within quotation marks tells Google and Bing that you want those words in a phrase, side-by-side. Otherwise, the search engines will show you results where those two words appear anywhere on the same web page, regardless of how far apart or unrelated in context.

If you typically include your middle initial, middle name, or some other configuration, search for that version of your name, too.

2. Carefully study the first two to five pages of search results.

Look for anything negative that an employer would see associated with your name (even if it is NOT about you).



This could include photos and videos as well as standard web pages, blog posts, comments on blog posts, news items, public records (like court dockets), and other information readily available online.

If you find something inappropriate associated with your name – something that would make an employer put your resume in the “reject” pile rather than the “possible” pile – you have a potential problem.

The problem could be someone with your name who has been arrested for drunk driving, posted inappropriate photos of themselves in social media, been accused of being a tax cheat, contributed racist, sexist, or other nasty “*ist” comments on blogs, or hundreds of other things.

If that entry is on the 8th page, and moving down toward the 9th, it may not be a big issue. But if it is on the first page or the second page, pay close attention. Monitor that entry. You need to find a version of your name without something bad associated with it.

3. Continue to search using different variations of your name until you find an “undamaged” version or a version that is undamaged in your location.

A clean version of your name doesn’t have anything negative – from anyone – associated with it, but it is still your real name. Check all the versions of your name you can think of – with your middle name or middle initial, etc.

My favorite example of smart name usage is the famous actor, James Earl Jones. There are probably very many people named “Jim Jones” in the world, and one is definitely infamous. But James Earl Jones is distinctive! He could have called himself “JJ,” “Jim Jones,” “Jimmy Jones,” “James Jones,” or even “James E. Jones.” But there is no confusing him with anyone else now. He claimed a clean version of his name, and made it famous.

4. Claim that version of your name with LinkedIn.

The best place to take ownership of your name is LinkedIn. Recruiters use LinkedIn relentlessly and consistently, making it the perfect place to grab your professional name.

If you must, add (or remove) a middle name or middle initial. A woman can add her maiden or married name. You can also add other identifiers to make your name unique, like a college degree or professional certification. You are not changing your “legal name” -- you are only changing the professional identity you make visible online.

5. Consistently use that version of your name for your job search, work, and career.

Use that professional version of your name and use it consistently for your job search.

This will enable recruiters and others to connect your job search, career, and business documents to your:

- LinkedIn Profile.
- Resume
- Cover Letters
- Email address
- Email signature
- Business/networking cards
- Job applications
- Meeting badges and name tags



- Online professional visibility (LinkedIn, professional associations, etc.)
- Anything else related to your job search or career

Keep everything “in sync” particularly in relation to your LinkedIn Profile.

6. Set up a Google Alert on all versions of your name, including the “clean” version.

Keep track of what is happening to your clean name in case someone else using that name does something that makes it unusable.

Google Alerts are free and will notify you when something new associated with the name appears in Google search results.

7. Use a different name or identity for other online activities.

If you like to argue online about politics, religion, sports, or some other controversial topic publicly on the Internet (Facebook, etc.), separate the professional you from the you who gets into unprofessional online disagreements by using another name.

Separate your professional identity from your private life to keep your professional reputation as clean as possible. Use a different version of your name, and use a different email address as well when you rant about politics, sports, or religion.

Online Reputation Management Is the New Reality

Today, with over 100 million name searches a day on Google, this is NOT “vanity Googling” or “ego surfing.” This is “defensive Googling” – enlightened 21st century self-defense for your career!

Defensive Googling is just the beginning of an online reputation management program, and it shouldn’t be suspended when you have started a new job. Mistaken online identity is a permanent risk for all of us in the digital age, unless we have particularly unique names.

Bottom Line

Being appropriately visible today is a requirement for most careers. Invisibility kills opportunities. So, be appropriately visible and be sure that when someone looks for you, they find the real you. Don’t be a victim of mistaken online identity when someone who shares your name misbehaves publicly. Know what is going on for you!

About Susan P. Joyce

Since 1998, Susan has been Job-Hunt’s chief writer and editor, publisher, editor, and webmaster. **Job-Hunt** is one of the top employment portals on the Web. She is an expert in Online Job Search, Reputation, and Personal SEO.

Susan has been quoted in hundreds of articles, books, and websites including TIME, FORTUNE, Business Week, The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and many others.

Additional resources on this topic published online by Susan include:

- 1. Guide to Personal Online Reputation Management**
- 2. Guide to Defensive Googling**