Facebook, MySpace and College Admissions

Don't Let Social Networking Sites Sabotage Your Chances of Getting Into College

By Allen Grove, About.com Guide

In a 2011 survey of 359 admissions officers from top colleges, the education experts at Kaplan Test Prep learned that roughly 24% visit social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace to learn more about applicants. 20% Googled applicants. Be sure to check out the Kaplan press release. The bottom line: an applicant's online image matters, and it hurt applicants' chances of admission in about 12% of cases.

On a related note, a UMass Amherst study in 2011 showed that **100%** of colleges use social media in one form or another.

These numbers should be cause for reflection, but they don't mean you should quickly pull the plug on your Facebook or MySpace account. In fact, many college staff members and professors (myself included) have Facebook accounts and enjoy using them to network and connect with students. Also, more and more colleges are using Facebook to get accepted students in touch with each other before classes begin in the Fall.

As you apply to college, however, keep in mind who might be looking at your social networking sites:

- College admissions officers
- Teachers who are writing you letters of recommendation
- Potential employers for summer jobs and internships
- Your friends
- Classmates who aren't your friends

Once you get to college, you'll find that your exposure on social networking sites increases. Likely audiences for your online materials include:

- The admissions staff as they connect you to your roommate and other new students
- Your new peers at your college
- Your professors

- Potential employers, both on and off campus
- Your RA (Residential Advisor)
- That creepy kid who is obsessing over you
- The campus judicial board (should you get in trouble)
- Campus and local police (should you get in trouble)

So, what should you do to clean up your online image? Here are the basics:

- In short, [delete these 12 photos now](#)
- [Include these 15 photos that make you look good](#)
- Remove or block any photos that show you drinking alcohol, even if you were in a situation where it was legal
- Remove or block any photos that show you with people who are obviously under the influence
- Remove or block photos with rude gestures (someone who doesn't know you won't find that middle finger shot funny)
- Remove or block photos that are sexually suggestive
- Remove or block any photos that portray illegal activity
- Remove or block any photos that would make an admissions officer question your character or judgment
- Unsubscribe from any groups that show bias or bigotry (those "I hate Jane Doe" and "Old People Shouldn't Drive" groups suggest you're NOT the type of person a college wants to admit)
- Unsubscribe from any groups that promote illegal activity (again, the "I Love Getting Stoned" and "Budweiser Rules" groups will give the admissions folks reservations about your application)
- Remove contact information such as your phone number and address--not only is this a safety issue, but inclusion of such information shows bad judgment on your part.
- Choose an attractive and professional-looking photo for your profile picture
- Visit your site frequently to untag any unflattering photos your friends may have posted

Many people will suggest that you block access to your account so that no one but your friends can view your site. This is good advice, but some housecleaning is still a good idea. It's hard to keep track of your online friends once you have hundreds of them, and it's hard to know who might be looking over the shoulder of one of your "friends."

Also, realize that you can actually turn the tables on those nosey employers and admissions officers who might be snooping around your site. Use your site to make yourself look good. Think of it as a free place to promote yourself and *increase* your chance of acceptance. For example, you can

- Post pictures that show you doing constructive things (reading to kids, doing volunteer work, restoring a car)
- Post pictures that show you and your friends in a positive light -- colleges and employers want applicants with healthy social skills
- Post travel pictures -- those worldly experiences are a plus

- Join groups that have positive messages (breast cancer awareness, peace not war, and so on)

If approached thoughtfully, social networking sites can be one more tool to *help* you get into your top choice colleges.