



To Blog or Not to Blog?

by Jon Jacobs - August 30, 2007

Visibility and Web-savvy are useful when job-hunting. So, should you merge those goals by starting your own financial Web site or blog? In most situations, experts say no. "I do not see candidates at this point generating their own Web pages, although I think that is coming," says Joe Ziccardi, chief executive of Cromwell Partners, an executive search firm. For a chief financial officer, financial analyst or trader, Ziccardi says, "there is a very low likelihood at this time that you need to have your own Web page."

Many a guru in both branding and career management seem to urge just about everyone to become an active member of the blogosphere. Professionally focused personal sites, they say, can help candidates showcase their expertise, avoid being digitally invisible or "un-Googleable," and drown out potentially negative information ("digital dirt") that search engines often turn up.

However, self-employed professionals have more to gain from this kind of visibility than those in full-time jobs, says Vicky Oliver, author of books on job hunting and marketing. A digital presence also can help career changers and recent graduates demonstrate interest and knowledge in a field they're breaking into.

Quality is Vital

If you do start a blog or Web site, maintaining high quality is your essential challenge. "Each of us needs to now become the steward of our own PR and be careful of what we are saying in the public domain," says New York career coach Phyllis Rosen. Moreover, most professionals - especially those in finance - must determine whether it's feasible to launch a site without running afoul of their employer.

Candidates will benefit only if their site's content is sophisticated enough to be taken seriously by professionals in the same field. That's a tough standard to meet, especially for someone just out of business school with little experience, says Rosen.

Beyond demonstrating professional knowledge, she says a Web site must satisfy three further conditions if it's to succeed as a career advancement tool: It must show the candidate can write well, perform thorough research, and think and connect dots in a strategic way.

"If you're not a good editor of your own work, then the results can be hard to read," notes Oliver.

Self-descriptive material, such as a portfolio manager's investment style, strategy and accomplishments, is fine for a personal Web site, says Sandy Gross, managing partner of Pinetum Partners, a retained search firm serving the hedge fund industry. As for actual work product, she recommends candidates limit themselves to work they previously published in a credible, copyrighted medium, such as an academic or professional journal.

Potential Backfires

Blogs present additional challenges. Unlike regular Web sites, blog readers expect new content to appear on a daily (or sometimes more frequent) basis. That raises the stakes for both time management and quality control.

Web "usability" expert Jakob Nielsen has argued in favor of "writing thorough articles â€¦ published on a regular schedule," while warning against posting numerous short comments in blog discussions. Critiquing the high-frequency blog approach, Nielsen wrote, "even if you're the world's top expert, your worst posting will be below average, which will negatively impact on your brand equity."

Not only that, notes recruiter Joe Ziccardi, but "if you start blogging, you could put yourself in harm's way in terms of your current job." He notes that finance is a highly regulated business, and Wall Street employers strictly control who may give speeches, talk to the media, or represent the company in public settings.

Apart from compliance issues, an employer also might worry about loyalty and possible leakage of proprietary information through an employee's site.

"People have to be very careful when they self-brand," says Ziccardi. "You don't want to give (your present employer) the impression that you're out on the market, saying, 'Hey, make me an offer.'"