

Developing Your Professional Image

Before you begin your search for an internship or job, you should do an image audit to figure out what kind of messages you might be sending to employers without even realizing it.

By making careful decisions about the information you share with the public through a variety of mediums, you can build and maintain a professional image.

Even the best resume and cover letter could be undermined by mixed messages you send through a variety of mediums. Thanks to technology, there are several components of your identity, from cell phones messages to online profiles, you should consider before beginning the job search process.

Cell Phones

First, decide if it is a good idea for you to include a cell phone number in your contact information. If you decide to list a cell phone number on your resume, be sure that you have caller ID and can check it before answering any calls. Be sure not to answer calls from employers in loud locations that might convey the wrong impression. For example, if an employer calls while you are eating dinner with friends in a noisy restaurant, let the call go to voicemail and then call back from a quiet location as soon as possible.

Voicemail and Answering Machines

What message will greet prospective employers if they call when you cannot answer the phone? Hopefully not one that is five minutes long, includes music, and has you singing a silly song. Record a message such as, “Hi, you have reached James Madison. I cannot come to the phone right now, but please leave a message with your name and phone number and I will return your call as soon as possible.” Make sure that you do return their call as soon as possible—the longer you wait, the more disinterested you will appear.

E-mail Address

Aim for a professional sounding e-mail address, like your first and last name or initials. You may prefer to use your JMU e-mail address or create a new e-mail account just for job search correspondence. Your friends might be amused by your clever or sarcastic sounding e-mail address, but employers will not be impressed.

Mailing Address

Many students debate about which addresses to include on their resumes. For most students, it is appropriate to include both your school and permanent addresses. What is most important is that an employer be able to reach you if needed. If they have difficulty finding you to extend a job offer, they may stop trying. If you wish to list only one address because of space considerations, choose the one that is most reliable and can be reached most quickly. Opening a post office box might be a good idea if you want to receive mail at school, but do not want it sent to your apartment.

If you are in transition during the job search process, include the dates you will be at each location. For example, “Current Address...(until May 30, 2007).”

Online Profiles and Blogs

You may think employers are clueless when it comes to blogging and social networking websites like Facebook and MySpace. However, employers not only know about these sites, they use them to investigate applicants and employees. What will they find if they discover your profile? Make sure any profiles, photographs, blogs, groups, or other forms of information that you have on your online spaces will cast you in a favorable light.

Realize that employers do not judge you solely from your resume, cover letter, and references. Employers will also infer information about you from your behavior and attitude. By making careful decisions about the information you share with the public through a variety of mediums, you can be successful in building and maintaining a professional image.