

Online Reputation



Key Points

- Managing an online reputation is important—it can have a significant impact on the life of an individual in a number of ways, including employment prospects, relationships, and college admissions.
- Companies have an important role to play in helping their customers protect and cultivate their online reputations, by offering relevant education and guidance, and by creating content policies that help customers better manage their content.
- Governments should balance helping their citizens protect their online reputations with the right of free expression.

BACKGROUND

Worldwide, people are living more of their lives online than ever before. It's where many go to promote themselves, spend time with friends, and find employment, education, and even a spouse. A 2010 survey¹ found that 19 percent of the marriages in the United Kingdom and 17 percent in the United States originated online. Since 2010, nearly three quarters of U.S. job seekers use the Internet to find employment.

Research also shows that what appears about an individual online can have a significant impact on their prospects for employment and education. Microsoft research² in 2009 found that 70 percent of U.S. hiring managers and 41 percent of U.K. hiring managers had rejected a candidate because of information found online. A 2012 survey³ found that 35 percent of admissions officers in the United States "discovered something that negatively impacted an applicant's chances of getting into the school."

Because a simple online search can reveal a great deal about an individual, there is increasing interest in online reputation, and in particular, one's *digital footprint*—the trail left by online activities such as blogging, posting comments or pictures, gaming, and social networking. While a positive digital footprint can enhance a person's employment and other prospects, a negative one caused by inappropriate photographs or rude comments left on online can damage those prospects.

In 2011, a Microsoft survey⁴ of 5,000 adults and children in Canada, Germany, Ireland, Spain, and the United States found that 90 percent have done something to manage their online profile, but only 44 percent actively think about the long-term consequences their activities have on their online reputation.

¹ *Recent Trends: Online Dating*
cp.match.com/cppp/media/CMB_Study.pdf

² *Online Reputation in a Connected World, 2009*
www.microsoft.com/security/resources/research.aspx#reputation

³ *Kaplan Test Prep's 2010 Survey of College Admissions Officers, 2012*
press.kaptest.com/research-and-surveys/kaplan-test-preps-2012-survey-of-college-admissions-officers

⁴ *Online Reputation Management: Parents and Children 8-17, 2011*
www.microsoft.com/security/resources/research.aspx#onlinerep

MICROSOFT APPROACH

Education and guidance. The Microsoft Safety & Security Center offers guidance for appropriate Internet use, including tips on how consumers can protect their online reputations and avoid, block, and report inappropriate behavior.

Policies. The Microsoft Terms of Conduct do not allow customers to “upload, post, transmit, transfer, distribute, or facilitate distribution of any content” that “defames, defrauds, degrades, victimizes or intimidates an individual or group of individuals.” Its Services Agreement states that “Microsoft may remove your content without asking you if we determine it’s in violation of this agreement.”

Technology tools. Microsoft offers features that help customers manage their digital footprint in its products and services. The Microsoft Personal Data Dashboard—a central location for personal information associated with selected Microsoft products and services—helps customers control how that information is displayed. Xbox LIVE enables customers to manage information about themselves.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Microsoft believes that governments must balance helping citizens protect their online reputations with the right of free expression.
- Companies can help their customers protect and cultivate their online reputations by offering relevant education and guidance and by creating policies that help them better manage their content.
- Microsoft supports legislation that provides a safe haven for companies that engage in online moderation of behavior and content by not increasing their liability for engaging in that moderation. Examples include Section 230 of the U.S. Communications Decency Act and the European Union Directive 2000/31/EC.



Helpful Resources

Microsoft Code of Conduct
aka.ms/code-of-conduct

Microsoft Services Agreement
aka.ms/services-agreement

Microsoft Personal Data Dashboard
aka.ms/dashboard

Microsoft Safety & Security Center:
Take charge of your online reputation
aka.ms/reputation