FACE TO INTERFACE – THE PROBLEMATIC RISE OF ONLINE PERSONALITY
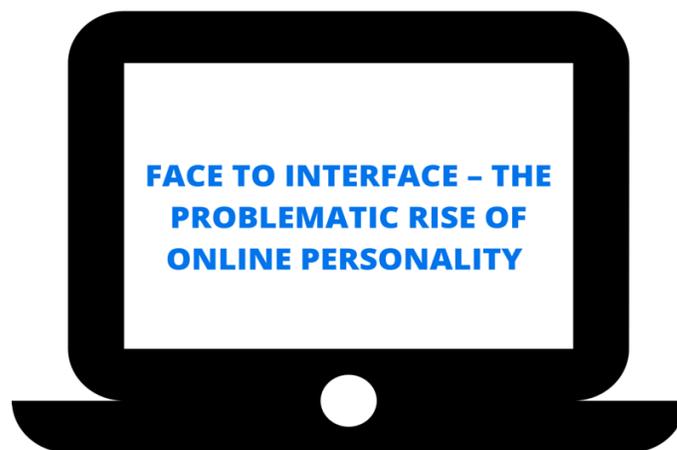
With increased reliance on social media, it is vital that companies avoid the pitfalls associated with a social networking personality. In the last 10 years, we have started hashtagging, filtering, snapchatting, facebooking and inmailing. Between Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn it is now entirely possible to construct a near complete and thorough image of yourself both professionally and personally whatever your industry and experience level. It is not only seen as recommended, but almost essential in today's climate to have some kind of online presence for yourself and/or your business. But has it all gone too far?

The numbers

The statistics speak for themselves. LinkedIn in late 2014 reported a rise of 45% in mobile users, from 29 million to 43 million. Approximately 2 new users join every second. 1 in 3 professionals on the planet are on LinkedIn. Facebook is no less impressive, reporting 1.3 billion users a month as of June 2015 as well as rolling out plans to provide internet in parts of the world which previously had none through phone plans. Instagram currently reports 300 million users per month, while twitter boasts 190 million unique users each month. With this in mind, it is very easy to say that social media is being used by both candidates and employers alike, making it all the more important to be cautious.

What is an online personality?

An online personality could be defined as a construction by someone on a social media or other online platform in order to give a representation of their life. This could be manifested in a number of ways, such as artists sharing inspirations and work on Instagram, or a LinkedIn profile with details of a professional life, or even a standup comedian tweeting funny anecdotes. An online personality is an attempt to convey a strong sense of your own personality on the internet so that people get a more complete image of you.

However, there are people with a large internet presence, or people who have used platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook to grossly exaggerate parts of their life both personally and professionally. This creates a distorted image which leads to assumptions being made, and ultimately an online personality which does not quite match up to the real thing.

A brilliant analogy for distorted online personality is hit US television show 'Catfish'. The show focusses on people who pretend to be someone they are not through online profiles in order to extract affection and sometimes even tangible gifts from people. In a professional context this translates to people being called to interview despite the fact they are grossly underqualified for some positions, whether it be due to exaggeration of professional roles or personal qualities.

The Problem

This problem is double edged. Should a very qualified candidate have no online presence, or despite their lack of skills on paper more than make up for it in personal touch, they are unlikely to be interviewed or in some cases even found. In fact there are many people who are looking to actively avoid recruiters by avoiding keywords in profiles so they do not come up in searches.

The final question looms the largest. With all this online personality, how are you going to find people with true talent? In a climate of facades, how are you meant to distinguish between the real deal and the fraud?

The Answer

The answer is multi-faceted and not necessarily straight forward. The first thing clients should seek to do is find as much information as possible. Traditional search firms return between 3 and 5 candidates per assignment. With the number of candidates shortlisted, it is likely that is less than 10% of the collated people. And the interview rate is likely determined by online profiling.

Thus it seems more prudent to supply clients with all of the relevant information and give a recommendation, rather than presenting 3 candidates based on your interpretation of the client's needs. You could find candidates that you don't think meet the client's every need but turn out to be perfect for the role or other similar roles within the business.

Another important requirement is a savvy and up to date work force that understand how to correctly navigate and use the internet to find talent. The difficulty in relying on online presence is that you start to completely rely on it without considering that older methods can be equally successful. Good recruiters are those who understand that the best talent available is not just on LinkedIn, and will use other online presences, sources with strong market intelligence and the older traditional methods of picking up the phone to expand on the information found as well. To simply rely on a key word search for one website is likely to pull up a small proportion of the talent worth looking for.

Another question is whether the right platforms are being used. While it is easy to search LinkedIn for a professional, there are other networking sites used by professionals to publish and share their work that should also be considered, such as Zing and The Dot. Medium is another good example of this. Created by the people behind Twitter, Medium is a site by which people can easily publish information. Using this could unearth strong potential or up and coming professionals that are not on LinkedIn or are screened out by filters. Thus it is necessary to diversify your sources of information when searching for talent.

Navigating this relatively new world is not easy, and many traditional search firms will be left behind in the race to best understand and utilize these new platforms. However, just as the best firms anticipate and adapt to the market, the best recruitment firms must do the same with the talent. Social media is key to recruitment and online personalities and sites such as LinkedIn are an essential part of the recruitment process in an ever growing digital world, but it is important to remember the affect that an over reliance on social media can have on the recruitment process if information is misinformed to ensure that candidates are qualified and quality is maintained during the hiring process.

For further insight, talk to us about how best to navigate the online talent pool and access the passive talent in your target market.