

Is your image Google-proof?

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Want to make embarrassing internet search results go away? Here are some tips from the experts.

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Fuzzy image... executives would do well to manage their online reputation.

[Have you Googled yourself lately?](#)

It's been dubbed the vanity search but it had the opposite effect when Melbourne music promoter Michael Trkulja typed his name into Google a few years ago.

Topping the search results were photos of him with a well-known underworld figure. When Google refused to remove the link, he successfully sued for defamation and was [recently awarded \\$200,000 in damages](#).

It's not an isolated incident. Many business execs can tell you how they – or a convicted felon of the same name – have fallen foul of the search engine algorithms.

Among them is Alastair MacGibbon managing partner of internet security consultancy, Surete Group. He felt the effect first hand when he was employed at eBay a few years ago.

"One day I looked up my own name and found an online petition of people demanding my sacking," he says.

Though it didn't affect him professionally, according to MacGibbon, the incident illustrates how the internet has turned the professional branding world upside down. "Before you could carefully stage manage your image but these days, this is often out of your control," he says.

He says for those with a strong online presence, the positive content will drown out the negative over time – as it did in his case.

For those who don't, a whole new specialty dubbed online reputation management has grown up to help.

One reputation specialist is Gerry McCusker, founder of Engage ORM and author of PR



Gerry McCusker, founder of Engage ORM and author of *PR Disasters*. Photo: Supplied

Disasters. He says it's not his mission to help his clients bury the truth. Instead he helps them build a more balanced search engine snapshot.

However he notes there is plenty that execs can do for themselves. "The tools are affordable, open source, free and quite user friendly so everybody has an opportunity to get their fair share of media voice."

Emergency physician and medical blogger, Dr Mike Cadogan agrees. He describes himself as a professional reputation advocate and as the team physician for a number of professional rugby players, has become a dab hand at also nursing online identities back to health.

One of those who he helped was Alex, a Perth-based professional at the top of his field. When potential clients typed Alex's name into Google, however, detailed family court documents relating to his recent divorce topped the list of results.

The problem was easy to fix using everyday tools, according to Cadogan. "It took just 30 minutes to do and 48 hours later those search results had fallen to page 3 and 4," he says.

"People don't understand how many free resources are available to help them manage their online identity," he says. "It's very easy to promote content if you want to."

Here are four do-it-yourself steps from the experts:

1. Demonstrate ownership

You can boost search engine rankings and gain more control over your Google footprint by demonstrating your ownership of information, says Cadogan.

He suggests you create several simple but professional profiles that best reflect your current image. He suggests Google+, Facebook (using maximum privacy settings), Twitter, LinkedIn, about.me, Gravatar and if you are well-known, Wikipedia. You can even buy your own domain name for under \$10.

2. Link your content

You can magnify the ownership effect on your rankings by linking the profiles and websites in which you've demonstrated ownership together, Cadogan says.

He suggests you use BrandYourself.com, a do-it-yourself site that walks you through this process.

3. Keep the information flowing

If you want to boost your online "share of voice" you must commit to creating a fairly steady stream of new content, according to McCusker.

He suggests blogs, articles, media releases, photos, video clips and presentations, and use of well-targeted search engine keywords.

According to Cadogan, it helps your rankings if Google knows you are the author. When you do post, he says, make sure that a web link, say to your About.me page or Google+ profile, is included in the content or embedded in the HTML code.

4. Prioritise search-friendly media

McCusker suggests you target your content creation efforts at the platforms that get the best traction in search engines.

He says visual content like photos, infographics and video footage (use simple online video creation tools like SpotMixer and Animoto) do especially well so target sites like YouTube, Flickr, the photo sharing site, and presentation hosting service, SlideShare.

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