

Google Identity BY GARRETT WASNY

15 Ways to Manage Your Google Identity

According to a 2005 Harris Poll, nearly one quarter of online adults had Googled a co-worker, employee, potential employee, boss, client, date or other acquaintance for more information on their background. I suspect that number is much higher in reality, probably more like 90 percent, but people don't want to actually admit they Google snoop (but of course everyone does, practically all the time).

Lesson: just as you use Google to find out about the world, people around the world are using Google to find out about you. Good or bad, they're judging you and making decisions about you based on what Google reveals. For many, Google is where people get a first—and perhaps lasting—impression of you, so professionals of all stripes need to be more aware of and proactive in shaping their Google identity and their personal brand in cyberspace.

Some may think, "Google is a huge multi-billion global search corporation and what they say about me is totally beyond my control, so why bother?" This is so not true. Individuals have a surprising amount of control over what appears about themselves on Google, and taking charge of your online persona is a lot easier than you think. Just follow these 15 quick and low-cost Google identity management tips, and you can put your best face—and foot—forward when the online world searches for information on you.



- 1 Google your own name on Google.com to audit your Google identity.** What information, if any, is available on you? Is it accurate, up to date and flattering? Perhaps you have no Google identity per se, and no information is available on you. Maybe someone has an identical or similar name as yours and the Google results on them could be mistaken for you.
- 2 Use other Google search tools** — particularly Google Blog Search, Google Book Search, Google Groups, Google Images, Google News, Google Scholar, Google Video and YouTube—to search for information on yourself. These tools may reveal totally different information and results for your name than those generated on Google.com alone.
- 3 When searching for information on yourself, use different variations and word order combinations of your name.** In my case, I searched for "Garrett Wasny", garrettwasny, gwasny, g wasny, "Wasny Garrett", wasnyg, and wasny g. I discovered that each variation of my name produced different results. Snippets of information were available on me, but not in one place—the content was scattered all over the web from a conference listing in Oslo to a web video at the University of Michigan.
- 4 Deliberately search for variations of your name that may have been accidentally or deliberately misspelled.** In my case, I searched for "Garet Wazny", "Garret Wazny", "Garrett Wasney" and other incorrect spellings of my name. These should not be discounted. You never know what might turn up, especially if someone misspells your name in the first place when they search for you on Google.
- 5 If you spot information on yourself online that is inaccurate, out of date, or unflattering, contact the website owners.** Respectfully request that the information be immediately updated or removed. In my experience, most website owners will cooperate. If they don't and the information in question is egregiously erroneous or disparaging, contact your lawyer and explore other

options to get the information changed or deleted.

6 Create your own blog. If you do nothing else, do this: go to Blogger at www.blogger.com and create your own blog at no charge. Here you can post your resume, list your key accomplishments and get an online presence if you don't have one already. Even if you're already online and have your own website, getting a Blogger blog is still a good idea. Blogger is run by Google, and blogs created in Blogger get preferred treatment in Google's search rankings. Case in point: I created a blog on Blogger on November 16, 2006. When I Googled my own name on December 10, 2006, less than four weeks later, the new blog was listed in the top three search results, and eclipsed other websites that had listed information about me for years. No special coding was added to the site nor were any search engine optimization techniques applied. I simply opened an account, created a blog, posted the information, and let Blogger take care of the rest.

7 When you create your blog, put your name in the blog title. In my case, I named the blog after myself, Garrett Wasny, and the URL for the blog is <http://garrettwasny.blogspot.com>. You should do the same and name the blog after yourself and ensure your name is in the blog title and URL. This is not being vain. In Google's indexing system, titles are all important, and when you put your name in the title, you are dramatically increasing the chances of that blog receiving a high Google ranking whenever somebody searches for your name on Google. If you were to call the blog by another name, say, the Vancouver Small Business Blog, Google would have more difficulty connecting that blog with your name when someone Googles you.

8 Post a professionally-shot picture or pictures of yourself on your blog, and use your own name as the file name. In my case, I name the image file of myself, say, [garrett_wasny.jpg](#). This is key. When Google searches for images of something, it doesn't actually "look" at the pictures because Google can't see per se. Instead, Google scans the file name of the picture and assumes what the file is called is actually what is shown in the picture (which may not always be the case). For this exercise, the important thing to remember is to name all picture files of yourself with some variation of your own name. Other pictures of myself, for example, are called "[garrett_wasny_01.jpg](#)" and "[garrett_wasny_02.jpg](#)" and so on. This makes it easier for Google to match my name with my correct picture and properly index the image in the search results.

9 Reserve a domain name in your name. In addition to creating a blog, you may wish to take an extra step and create a domain and website in your own name, say, [johnsmith.com](#) or [marygalinchuk.ca](#) or [whatever-your-first-and-last-name-is.com](#). This can be done for a modest investment, about \$5 or so a month as part of website package at sites like Network Solutions at www.networksolutions.com. This displays professionalism in your online presence, and your commitment to building an online brand. Perhaps more importantly, it protects your name from being used by others who may or may not have the best online intentions or standards. One nightmare scenario, for example, would be if someone—maybe even an unscrupulous competitor—reserved a domain named after you, and then posted adult or other questionable content on that domain for the sole purpose of discrediting you. Lesson: take control as much as possible of your online identity including domain names that others might instinctively type into Google when searching for information on you. If your specific name is not available, be creative and explore other naming options such as [garrettwasnybio.com](#) or [garrettwasnyonline.com](#), or [garrettwasnyresume.com](#) to build and protect your web identity.

10 Track your name on Google Alerts. Add your own name as an alert on Google Alerts at www.google.com/alerts. The service will scan new blogs, discussion groups, new stories and websites around the clock for any mention of your name. In the event your name does appear in the top search results, the application will send you a notification e-mail immediately. This is an easy and zero-cost way to monitor your online presence and identify any communication issues at an early stage

11 Use free profile services. Create your own web summary using services such as LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com, Ziggs at www.ziggs.com, and ZoomInfo at www.zoominfo.com. These resources will profile your professional experience and expertise, and connect you with businesspeople and companies with complementary interests. Hiring managers and executive recruiters are using these services to learn about prospective employees.

12 Participate in professional communities. Search Google Groups at <http://groups.google.com> and Google Blog Search at <http://blogsearch.google.com/> for the leading forums and blogs in your area of expertise. Monitor discussions and share your opinions and knowledge where appropriate. Google has a knack for finding and indexing your name every time it appears online—even in a brief post in what you think is an obscure online community. Over time and with enough contributions, you can boost your visibility and reputation in that online community and Google overall.

13 Be consistent in how you write your name. Every time you post information about yourself online in a website, blog, or discussion group, ensure that your name is included and that you write your name in the same format. For example, don't

write your name as Howard Hoosli in website A, H.P. Hoosli in blog B, and then Howie Hoosli in discussion group C. For Google to properly index and track your online activities, you need to write your name the same way every time. If you don't, Google will treat the different versions of your name like different people, and your online messaging will be diluted and scattered. Consistent naming promotes more and better Google results and rankings for you.

14 Determine the best labels and keywords that describe you. Just as you use keywords and labels to find relevant information online, you need to think hard about which keywords and labels best summarize your experience and expertise. Ask yourself—what words and phrases would you want people to use on Google to find you? Do you want your keyword(s) to be your university education (say, an MBA) a professional designation (Chartered Accountant), a job title (comptroller), industry focus (electrical equipment), functional expertise (marketing specialist), hobbies (cyclist), charity work (environmental activist), some combination thereof or another label entirely? Everyone is different and there's no right or wrong answer. Just recognize that today's marketplace, online and off, is highly competitive and crowded and you need a unique label or hook to stand out from the pack and fully develop the brand of you.

15 Do not post incriminating evidence about yourself online. This may seem to be stunningly obvious and just plain common sense, but this is surprisingly not the case. Increasingly, many web users are posting the most intimate and raunchy details of their personal lives on social networking websites such as Myspace or Facebook, online dating sites such as Lavalife and Plentyoffish, or on blogs, or even regular websites without realizing the potential consequences of their actions. Incredibly, many users will post videos, photos and/or written accounts (true or fabricated) of their excessive drinking, drug use, sexual activity and other leisure pursuits. This information could be seen by potential employers, current colleagues, and your present and future family (not to mention law enforcement authorities) and put you in "Google Prison" in perpetuity.

Long Beach Magazine - phone: 562.286.9191 - info@longbeachmagazine.com

Copyright 2006 Long Beach Magazine • All Rights Reserved • Logo by wowlogo.com • Website by High Speed Media