

# Using Social Networking Sites When Hiring Informatics Job Candidates: A Preliminary Study

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## Abstract

*Employers and job seekers are using the Internet to find job candidates and opportunities, respectively. However, little is known about the use and attitudes towards social networking websites that supposedly support personnel selection. A preliminary study asked employers about their attitudes towards the use of online social networking sites. Surprisingly only a slight majority of respondents reported value in using online profiles in addition to traditional resumes and vitas when searching for a job candidate. Additional study and analysis is required to better understand how social networking sites can enhance personnel selection. Efficient and effective personnel selection is important given the worldwide lack of a sufficient informatics workforce.*

## Keywords:

Personnel selection, Job application, Computer communication networks

## Introduction

Developing a strong informatics workforce remains a priority for many nations as well as the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) and its affiliates, including the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA). Despite efforts to develop the informatics workforce, connecting employers to pools of informatics talent (qualified candidates) remains a challenge. Employers have anecdotally expressed frustration with the process for finding and recruiting informatics graduates within IMIA and AMIA working groups.

Roughly half of U.S. employers are using the Internet to locate and evaluate job applicants.<sup>1</sup> Online social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, may therefore be tools that informatics employers and job candidates alike can utilize in the personnel selection process.

## Methods

A preliminary study was conducted to better understand the potential of social networking sites in connecting informatics job candidates with employers. The author used an online survey to examine informatics employers' perceptions of social networking sites as they relate to personnel selection. Respondents were drawn from a convenience sample of informati-

cians and human resource managers in several countries. Respondents were invited to participate via personal email, IMIA and AMIA email listserv notices, and notices posted on online social networking sites. The questions were designed to elicit respondents' perceptions of social networking sites in general as well as their attitudes towards using online profiles as valuable information sources when evaluating a job applicant.

## Results

73 respondents completed the survey. All but one of the respondents were familiar with social networking sites. 83.5 percent (N=61) of respondents had created online profiles for their personal use. 11 percent (N=8) of respondents were from outside the United States. Half of the respondents (N=36) routinely interview candidates, and 37 percent (N=27) of respondents are responsible for making final hiring decisions.

Attitudes towards the use of online profiles in the hiring process were mixed. 41.1 percent (N=30) of respondents felt that employers should look at online profiles, and 19.2 percent (N=14) of respondents felt that employers should request information that would help employers locate a candidate's online profile. 54.7 percent (N=40) of respondents felt that online profiles add value beyond traditional resumes and vitas.

## Conclusion

The survey suggests that social networking sites have the potential to be an effective way to enhance the personnel selection processes. Given that many respondents were unsure about their attitudes, more work is necessary to understand why informatics professionals have reservations about online profiles and how job candidates can best leverage online profiles when seeking health informatics roles.

## References

- [1] Sprague R. Googling job applicants: incorporating personal information into hiring decisions. *The Labor Lawyer*. 2007 Summer; 23(1):19-41.