Your Digital Footprint Matters By Eric Sheninger

Your digital footprint paints a portrait of who you are as an educator, leader, school, or district. Make sure it conveys your true values and work." - Eric Sheninger

In the age where billions of people have taken both their personal and professional lives online you better be cognizant of your digital footprint. With each Facebook post, email, Instagram photo, comment on a blog, YouTube video, Skype call, etc. you are leaving a trail that can be seen, searched, or tracked. Basically all of your activity on the Internet leads to the creation of a digital identity and footprint. Check out this short video from Common Sense Media that nicely sums up the facets of a digital footprint.

In some cases you might think that you have everything under control, right? Wrong! Your digital footprint is not only formed by what you post, but also what others put online about you. As Wikipedia explains there are two main classifications for digital footprints: passive and active. A passive digital footprint is created when data is collected without the owner knowing, whereas active digital footprints are created when a user, for the purpose of sharing information about oneself by means of websites or social media, deliberately releases data. Educators who have embraced a brandED mindset understand how important their digital footprint is to him/her.

It can seem daunting to not only keep tabs on the digital footprint that you are actively crafting, but also on what other people are creating and posting at times unbeknownst to you. Here are some free tools that you can begin to use right away to track both your active and passive digital footprint.

Google Alerts

This free tool allows you to monitor the web for content that you specify. My advice is to set up alerts for your name as well as that of your school, district, or business. When I was a principal I had an alert set up for New Milford High School so that anytime content was shared specific to my school on the web I could either read or react if necessary. Now I have alerts set up for different iterations of my name including Eric Sheninger, Mr. Sheninger, and Principal Sheninger. Each day I receive an email with news of what people write about me on the web from Google. Set up your Google Alert(s) today using these simple steps or refer to this short video tutorial.

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Mention

Mention is a solid alternative to Google Alerts and in my opinion is much better. It allows users to monitor any keywords related to you, your professional brand, your schools/districts, or anything else you want to monitor. The alert settings are much more robust than that of Google Alerts. Not only can you set it up to monitor the Web (news, blogs, videos, forums, images), but you can also have it monitor mentions on Facebook, Twitter, or an array of other social media services if you want. What is even better about Mention is the variety of ways you can access and be notified of new alerts (website, Google Chrome extension, desktop application, apps for iOS and Android). Check out the Mention site or this brief tutorial to get started.

Tweetdeck and Hootsuite

These applications not only enhance your Twitter experience, but they also allow you to create different columns or categories in your respective dashboard. Each column or category in a sense becomes a search based on the keywords you identify (i.e. Twitter username, your real name, hash tags, school/district name, etc.).

The above tools will greatly assist you in tracking your digital footprint, especially in terms of what other people post about you. A brandED strategy not only employs these tools, but also some common sense tips to help you actively create a positive digital footprint. When posting content online always:

- Keep it professional and focus on your work
- Remember your role within the school and/or professional community
- Think before you post
- Be consistent
- Don't be afraid to engage

Perception is reality. With a strategy comprised of consistent content production and technology monitoring tools anyone can create a positive digital footprint. The choice is yours as to whether or not you want your reality to be on the Internet. Don't roll the dice and let others dictate this for you.

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