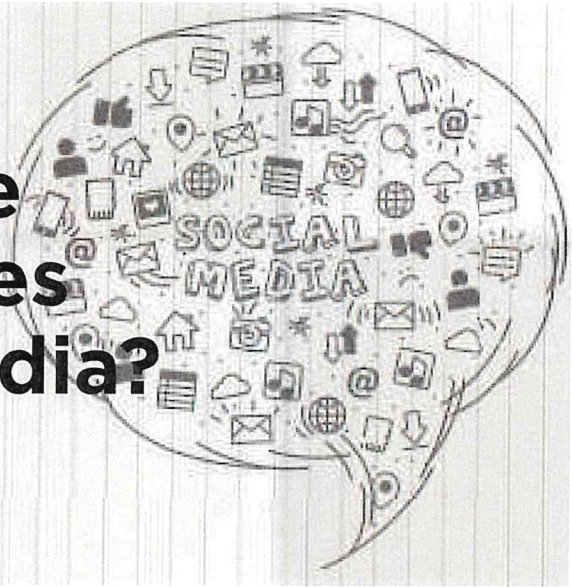


# How are college admission offices using Social Media?



By Dr. Brittany Maschal

When was the last time you “Googled” something or even someone? We’ve all done it, and admissions officers are doing it, too.

According to a 2015 Kaplan Test Prep survey, 40% of college admissions officers browse social media profiles to learn more about applicants. Your digital footprint—everything from your own Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook accounts to posts you are tagged in on other people’s accounts—is discoverable online if public. With the goal of remaining anonymous online, many high school students do not use their full names on their social media profiles, opting instead for their first and middle name or a nickname. Others make sure their profiles are completely private, but this does not always make posts you are tagged in by others, private. It is not uncommon for high school students to take precautions online, especially as they approach the college search and application process. Caution is understandable, but instead of spending time hiding online for fear of what others may find, I suggest students use social media to their benefit by creating a positive online presence that schools can learn about the student from.

For some students this will not be desirable; many want their personal life to remain private, and I have even worked with parents who want it to be this way, too. Conversely, there are many students who want to take advantage of every opportunity possible to connect and engage with college admissions officers, and for those students, upping their social media game is a win-win.

## Students should consider:

- ▶ Liking and following schools on Facebook, reposting posts or interacting with relevant posts by liking them
- ▶ Following schools on Twitter, interacting with relevant posts, retweeting posts, or tweeting to schools directly
- ▶ Following schools on Instagram, liking posts, or tagging them in posts
- ▶ Following schools on Snapchat

Prior to beginning the process of making their profile (whichever ones the student is going to focus on, or all of them) public, and proceeding to engage with schools via social media, here are a few tips and things to keep in mind:

- ▶ Provide parents information on the use of social media in college admissions. You can point them to the Kaplan study, and have them look for themselves how active colleges and universities are online. They almost all have Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat accounts, Facebook pages, LinkedIn pages, and some even have Google+ pages. Students follow these accounts, “like” them, tag them, and tweet to them. To the college and universities that track it, this is all a form of demonstrated interests. Depending on the school, demonstrated interest is a factor in the admissions process, so showing heightened interest can help an applicant.
- ▶ Provide students this same information!
- ▶ Students should conduct a social media audit.



They can start by Googling themselves, and click through every link that shows up on the first two or three pages of the search results. If they come across something that they would not want to share with a grandparent or teacher (like a Facebook post, tweet, Instagram photo), have them delete it or ask the person who posted it to delete it. They should also review all their social media accounts even if for some reason they do not come up on the first three pages of the search.

► It can't hurt for their counselor to search for them, too. What a student may think is acceptable may realistically not be acceptable to an adult, so take five minutes to peek at what comes up in a basic search via Google.

Students today have active online presences, and they are not alone—colleges and universities do too! Students should feel comfortable knowing that they can connect with schools online in meaningful ways. We know how widespread the use of social media is and how much time teens spend on it, so let's encourage them to use it to their advantage in the college admissions process.

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