

Your Digital Tattoo

Learning Services has developed a range of sessions which we use to advise students at Edge Hill University on how to present themselves online. These sessions are attended by hundreds of students each year, from across the institution.

These sessions can be traced back to 2009 when academic staff from Media and Health asked us for help. Media wanted a session to help students think about how they could use the web to present themselves well to potential employers. Health students needed advice related to the challenge of protecting confidentiality amidst the growing use of social networking sites.

The two initial sessions were very different, but lots of ideas were developed and shared within the department, and they led to the 'Digital Tattoo' sessions that we've run over the last few years.

What the sessions have involved

At the start of these sessions we talk to students about why the topic is important to their employability. For some students this might involve talking about the large number of employers searching online for information about potential employees. For those on vocational courses, such as trainee teachers, we might talk about how important it is that they don't look unprofessional online.

We always say early on that the focus of the session is meant to be positive; it is meant to be about them taking some control over how they look online. However we then say that we are going to scare them, before telling the students verified stories of people like them who have got it wrong, and got into trouble.

Once the students know that this is an important topic, we ask them to search for themselves online using general search engines like Google, and some more specialised ones that are useful for finding information on individuals. There are always a small number of students who find things that they had forgotten were online, often on old social networking sites, and we ask them to make a note to remove or hide them after the session.

We then ask students to think about what they would have liked to have found, and what they would like a potential employer or anyone else searching for them to find. They are presented with some ways that they could set up a professional looking profile, such as using LinkedIn. Finally we move on to talking about how students can present themselves well on social media. For those on vocational courses we show them advice about using social media from their professional bodies. For technical courses we might talk about showing and developing your expertise by helping people and answering questions on these sites.

Where these sessions have been run

We have had many versions of the sessions for students including:

- Central Learning Services sessions that students book on individually.
- Bespoke sessions for certain modules.
- A version to be included in generic induction sessions for entire Faculty of Health and Social Care cohorts.
- Teaching Learning and Mentorship Practice 'Employability Day' sessions.
- More recently we have started running staff focussed sessions including:
- Sessions for academic staff sessions aimed at improving their own online presence, but also offering them resources so they can present the ideas to their students themselves.
- Support staff focussed sessions so they can support students and demonstrate good practice.

Other Recent Developments

We adopted the name 'Digital Tattoo: What does the web say about you?' for the sessions in 2013, based on the 'Digital Tattoo' phrase coined at the University of British Columbia, which had become a widely used term. We found this term useful when we were communicating about the sessions.

In 2013 we also started using the sessions as part of Edge Hill University's strategy to engage with local businesses. We ran modified versions of the sessions with a business focus not only to help businesses present themselves well online, but to demonstrate some of the employability work we do with students who might be their future employees. This allowed us to ask for feedback from employers on the sessions.

Outcomes

We have received positive feedback from staff who we have run sessions for and this positive reaction had led to the session requests spreading due to word of mouth recommendations. Many students have reported being encouraged to think about and act on what is online. All this means that we believe running these sessions to have been well worth the time and effort.

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