EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

THE DIGITAL FOOTPRINT AND ONLINE IDENTITY

SCENARIO

BY NC SA

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Scenario 6

Refers to Modules:

Managing traceable activity online

Protecting privacy

Behaving responsibly online

Relates to Standards:

Managing traceable online activities

Protecting privacy

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How might learners make good use of the web well and what is the value of a good digital identity and reputation?

Does it take care of itself, or is there value in having a good online reputation?

This scenario explores these questions and considers why it is important reputations created online need careful management. It includes some ideas about how it might be done.

The scenario includes exercises for users to complete in helping them consider their answers.

Particular issues relating to commercial transactions, buying and selling online are covered Scenario 8 - Buying online.

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What is a digital footprint?

The digital footprint relates to markers left behind on the web, that are visible to others.

Generally speaking, the markers left are no more than written or picture-based contributions to public areas for discussion and debate and contributions to ideas of online enterprises, like passages of study.
They are consciously made and submitted, and generally add to the pleasure, interest of knowledge of others.

However, it is possible for mistakes to be made about where contributions end up and the interpretation given to them that may not have been intentional.

Learners need to consider what these contributions are and whether they are intentional (they added them) or unintentional (someone else added them for various reasons).

TEACHING TIP

The first thing for leaners to consider is that using the web has consequences in what others do with what is shared and how they interpret it.

Secondly it is possible work is shared or passed on in a manner not considered by the original writer.

What are intentional contributions?
It includes interacting, discursive, supporting a cause, posting content to a group, collaborating, keeping a record, buying, selling, shopping and browsing.

Unintentional consequences
Private into public - others sharing content, content hacked or stolen, used without permission - this can be done innocently or intentionally.

Browsing - leaving cookies and preferences.

Posting by others - others reporting your views and opinions that may be inaccurate or without permission.

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Learning activity:

Step 1:

Illustrate the power of the web in terms of digital identity by choosing two or three celebrities who use the web as their main means of cultivating their image.

Follow this with an introductory discussion on the meaning of ‘image online’.

Step 2:

Errors in harming a digital identity can be caused by mistakes we make, and the mistakes others make.

Use the Unintended consequences file here.

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Lost in translation

Humans communicate best when face to face. We use words, body language and emotion (facial expression, inflection in words).

The problem with web-based communication is that one or more of the three modes is removed. It asks the receivers to make judgements about tone, emotion, context and cultural aspects that might be missing.

This means a message meant in one way can be translated and received in a completely unforeseen way by another, when not able to read the underlying signs. Prior to the internet, letters were generally addressed to one person at a time and the language used was formal and contained greetings and salutations to 'set the mood'.

A feature of email is that some formality remains in communications. In social media, formality is replaced with informality and a more relaxed style.

TEACHING TIP

Ask learners:

If a message is shared with a group of thousands, how many will think it contains content that is rude or offensive?

Share a paper-based copy (revised as required) of the Netiquette notes for teachers. Ask learners to have it handy for reference. There will be references to each of the 'rules' throughout the scenario.

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Learning activity:

Introduce two possible solutions to getting over the lacks in all three methods of communication.

1. Introduce Netiquette; a set of rules on how to avoid misinterpretation in communication.

2. The rise of emojis as a means of setting an emotion or context to a message in a universal language. (Twitter and messaging, for example)

Ask learners to consider the value of video calls or even voice calls to overcome these problems against the greater convenience of sending a message.

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What is meant by an identity?

Consider a learner, Sally, who is studying history.

- She may explore websites
- Take part in discussions with like-minded people
- Contribute to views on historiography

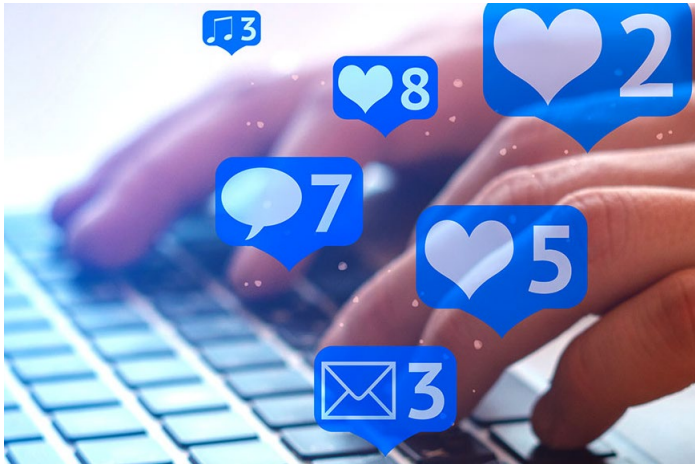
In her personal life

- Download music and videos
- Contribute to social media groups
- Interact with websites

Sally's views on history and general education means they inform her views on social media amongst friends and the idea public groups. It may affect her views and decisions about wider social groups she joins.

It will include contributions and debate with classmates and other online history groups.

Each of these activities leaves the learner's name and views available for others to read and react to, in either private or public groups.



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Learning activity:

Discuss the following issues with learner:

1. Should the fact that Sally is posting to a private group or a public group affect the way she writes and the thoughts she shares?
2. How does she know a group is genuinely private? What is the role of either personally knowing the audience or at least having trust that the others will protect mutual privacy?
3. Should Sally only post ‘safe' comments? If so, is there any value to learning?
4. Shouldn’t learners be able to challenge ideas or discuss contentious or provocative views.
5. Is the web the best place to have that discussion (lack of human contact and the need for netiquette)?

Discussion should revolve around issues of:

- Knowing who is in the audience
- Knowing the degree of trust that is shared by those in the group
- The value of netiquette

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Turning identity into reputation

Identity is the impression others take from what they find about each of us on the web. This is in the mind of the audience.

Reputation is the result of an ongoing cultivation of an identity. This is mostly in the control of the user. How reputation is managed can improve or degrade the digital identity.

It follows that users should be encouraged to manage their digital reputation.

Digital identity and managing it is important because the impressions gained by others (employers, customers, colleagues) will have a bearing on life chances in a manner far greater than many would expect.

TEACHING TIP

Play the YouTube video of the interview that goes wrong (source?…)

Learners can consider that identity needs to be guarded carefully and what steps can be taken to create and improve an online digital reputation.

Select the link to open a PDF with a digital footprint checklist.

Digital Footprint and Identity

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Learning activity:

Ask learners to start with a search of one or more celebrities and see what can be found from the sources.

Discuss findings in the class.

Ask learners to write down what is found on paper under three headings:

- Good
- Bad
- Questionable

Where a reference looks harmful ask learners to consider whether it was an intentional or unintentional contribution that led to the harm.

To help understand what footprints are on the web, each learner can also complete a Google self-search.

Like all things, there is gain and positive value and opposing difficulties or problems, be wary of its use.

The lesson is that how the web is used must be consciously managed rather than left to hope that all will be well.

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Practical application by learners

Careful decisions need to be made about:

- Poorly worded comments or briefly worded comments. Both can be easily misunderstood.
- Comments made in the heat of anger.
- Remember that many things can't be deleted.

TEACHING TIP

Use the Creating an Identity Resource as an aide to encourage engagement with one (Entry level) or more (Level 1) ways of establishing a good online identity.

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Learning activity:

Complete one or more of the following:

Work - Showing accomplishments - set up a LinkedIn account.

Social - Find, join and contributing to a club or hobby community.

Civic - Updating the electoral register, applying for a garden bin, seeing how to register for Universal Credit, contributing to an online petition.

Formal Learning - Exploring expert sites and references - Storing the results in Evernote.

Personal - Joining a family social group – WhatsApp, Explore a shopping site.

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Summary

The purpose of this scenario is to have learners understand that they must positively manage their own web presence for the benefits it can bring in terms of the interactions and fun available, as well as the benefits it brings in commercial life.

Remember that good internet management should also provide more time to enjoy other more important and pleasurable things in life. Technology is a tool.

There are hazards waiting to catch those out who are not mindful of how what they do might be interpreted.

The best defence is constant mindfulness.

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Extension activity

Good practice in contributing online

It is arguable that the availability of information has progressively opened up to the point now that we are all co-authors, adding to what we know, drawing on our special knowledge to make improvements and generally sharing in what some have called the 'democratisation' of learning as well as reminding us of the need to test all that we receive. Look for ideas in your work from others that have merit, signified by the ability to improve your understanding.

In the **Communicating and Sharing online** scenario good responses and online conversation was explored as a means of ensuring good communication and effective sharing. Doing this well affirms the value, opinions and support of others who do this well and can be just as important in establishing and improving an online reputation int the eyes of those who read, respond or follow the threads of conversation and interactions.

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Learning activity:

Share the following five approaches to contributing online positively.

The approaches are introduced as good sharing practice in the Communicating and Sharing online scenario but are considered here in a different context as a means of enhancing a good digital reputation in dealings with others.

- **Refine content** – acknowledge what is good and original in other peoples' ideas. Refine the information to develop the argument given.
- **Correct content** where there is factual error, correct the fact, not the person who wrote it. (Make sure you are sure!)
- **Add to content** to improve the arguments made – add detail to what has been said to help develop the context.
- **Offer alternative views** – find and suggest an alternative source that illustrates what has been said or develops the argument further.
- **Offer adaption** where the ideas could be applied to another situation – suggest ways and provide links to how anything posted could be adapted or applied elsewhere.

Use the activity **Improving a digital reputation through working with others**.

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Learning activity:

Discussion

Learners should see the value in:

- staying in control of it all
- managing time allocation
- enjoying non engagement time better.

Ask your learners to have a discussion on the following three points:

- For every good thing that comes from the net there is an equal and opposing danger.
- Never post anything you may later regret (this applies to you, others or all future generations) what stays on the web is there forever.
- Safety is built in to the user not the technology.

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Further resources

Government online petitions site.	https://petition.parliament.uk
Applying for Universal Credit.	https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit
LinkedIn accounts.	https://www.linkedin.com/feed/
BBC guide to online netiquette.	http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/guides/about-netiquette
Advice on how to avoid the mistakes of becoming an online troll.	https://www.wikihow.com/Avoid-Being-an-Internet-Troll
Some very useful resources for learners to help explain and develop good practice in developing a positive digital identity.	https://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/digital-footprint-identity
A useful resource to provide extension activity for learners on good the issues of digital footprint and value of online netiquette.	https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/

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Appendices

Select the links to open the PDFs for the appendices.

Appendix 1 – Unintended consequences

Appendix 2 – A netiquette strategy

Appendix 3 – Improving your digital footprint

Appendix 4 – Digital Footprint and Identity

Appendix 5 – Creating and Identity

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