



## The Internet Never Forgets

There is an iconic *New Yorker* cartoon in which two dogs are sitting in front of a computer monitor. “On the Internet,” says one, “no one knows you’re a dog.” These days, that confidence is likely misplaced: Cached Web pages, logged IP addresses, and Google leave distinct electronic footprints. People who want information about you can and will track those footprints. Not only are senior scientists more tech-savvy than you might think, your peers are also adept at harvesting online information. Thus it behooves a young scientist to consider what marks he or she is leaving in the online world and to manage his or her professional identity accordingly.

**Anything that you have ever put on Facebook may reappear.**

### Google Yourself!

Make sure you Google your own name to see what a potential employer or reviewer will see. (And be assured, employers *will* Google you.) You may be unpleasantly surprised. An intemperate comment fired off years ago on a blog might reappear in an archive. An unflattering photo might be on a friend’s website. Or you may be blameless but find that someone who has the same name as you engages in unfortunate behavior.

**Remedy.** Manage your identity proactively. Set up a website or online CV that has essential career information such as your education, publications, and research interests. (Resist the impulse to add your mother’s maiden name or personal information such as an address that could be used for identity theft.) Ask your advisor to link it to the lab’s website (if your lab has one). Make sure that you do not use any copyright-protected images, but if you can use some pictures of your work, or a professional-looking picture of yourself, that helps provide interest. Make sure the CV is professional-looking and above all, be sure you keep it up-to-date.

### Social Networking Sites

A few years ago one of my undergraduates was shocked to find out that I knew what Facebook was, let alone that I had an account! I can see why he was alarmed; he had an open profile

with an unflattering photo. With no prompting from me, the photo was quickly replaced with a more sedate version. But can he be sure he hasn’t been tagged in party pictures elsewhere? Facebook has many uses, but one fact must be stressed: *It is not private*. Anything that you have ever put on Facebook may reappear.

**Remedy.** There is no perfect solution, even if your profile is private. If your Facebook profile is identifiably *you*, then you need to make sure it reflects the image you want to convey to people like *me*. If it seems unfair that you can’t post the picture of yourself wearing a lampshade at a New Year’s party, consider whether that’s the image you want a potential employer to have in mind. To reduce the chance that he would be perceived in an unflattering way, my student actually deleted his old profile upon graduation and created a new one. Another partial solution is to have a separate account with a pseudonym or “handle” for your socializing, but if this is linked to your real self by schools, friends, or interests, it will not remain incognito. Alas, your desire to join a public profession means that the public will always be looking at you.

### Email Lasts Forever

Never, ever assume that an email you have sent is erased—even when you delete it from your own mailbox.

**Remedy.** Never write anything in an email that you would regret seeing publicized, regardless of whether it is sent via a professional or personal account. Never email anyone while angry, emotional, or intoxicated. If you must write an impassioned screed for catharsis, in no case should you hit the “send” button! Copy and paste the text into a Word document and let it sit on your desktop while you simmer down.

### Blogs and Bulletin Boards

The Internet is a great democratizer, where we can publish our own thoughts and ideas for free. However, this freedom comes with risk. Consider not only the time consumed by online activities<sup>1</sup> but the possibility that

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you might be judged not on your work, but on your viewpoints. Human nature being what it is, someone may make snap decisions about your suitability for a position without really knowing you. Or a student may hesitate to join your lab if he is afraid you might be biased against his political viewpoints. There's a reason many bloggers use pseudonymous handles. A stray off-color remark can have serious consequences. (For example, student athletes have lost their scholarships for inappropriate posts.)

Additionally, consider the potential cost of writing something negative about an advisor or colleague. Would you want the subject finding out what you said?

**Remedy.** Again, remember that the Internet is public. Even if you use a pseudonym, you might be tracked down by IP address, or

otherwise lose your mask. As with email, blog posts can last forever, so always consider what you are writing and always be temperate.

We each walk a fine line between prudent self-censorship and being true to ourselves. Defining that line is a personal decision by which we balance the risks and rewards of an enriching online existence alongside our professional identity as scientists. ■

— Susan L. Forsburg, for  
*the Women in Cell Biology  
Committee*

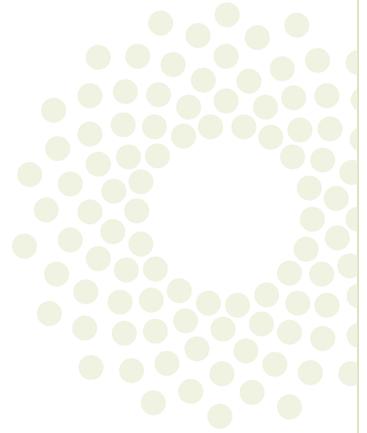
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#### Note

The author thanks Lisa Churchill for helpful suggestions.

#### Reference

<sup>1</sup>Forsburg S. (2005). Online communities. *ASCB Newsletter* 28(6), 18–19. [www.ascb.org/files/0506wicb.pdf](http://www.ascb.org/files/0506wicb.pdf).



## ASCB/JSCB/RIKEN CDB Meeting

### *Building the Body Plan: How Cell Adhesion, Signaling and Cytoskeletal Regulation Shape Morphogenesis*

Kyoto International Conference Hall, Kyoto, Japan

September 21–23, 2009

#### Meeting Organizers:

Mark Peifer, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, ASCB

Masatoshi Takeichi, RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology, Japan

Sachiko Tsukita, Osaka University, Japan, JSCB

#### Important Deadlines:

Abstract: Wednesday, July 22

Travel Award: Wednesday, July 8

Registration: Thursday, August 20

Support Opportunities Available

[www.ascb.org/JAPAN2009](http://www.ascb.org/JAPAN2009)