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Helping Students Understand the Nuances of Video Interviewing

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Now that video technology is not cost prohibitive and is easily accessible, Matt Berndt, director of communication career services at the University of Texas, Austin, identifies video interviewing as the new frontier of communication for students and employers. The technology is no longer location specific, newer laptops come with built-in webcams, and services, such as Skype and ooVoo, offer free options.

"This technology has been around for years, but now it's coming from the business side into the home," Berndt says. "Meanwhile, free services like Skype and affordable technology, such as webcams, are building from the grassroots level up. At some point in time, these two worlds are going to intersect and new social dynamics will be defined."

For now, he notes, the use of video interviewing for interviewing college students for full-time jobs is in its infancy, but it will continue to progress to be a more common and accepted practice.

Berndt recommends that career centers build video interviewing preparation into the programming they offer their students and alumni.

"Most students aren't going to think about all of the elements of how to properly prepare for and take part in a video interview," Berndt says. "We need to help them understand all of the nuances involved. In addition, we need to have our rooms as equipped as possible, with Internet connections, computers with webcams, and accounts in place."

Following are some of Berndt's recommendations for students to follow in preparation for video interviews. Students should:

1. **Know the technology and be comfortable with it—**Students shouldn't sign up for a video interview until they're comfortable with the process. They should know what they can and can't do with the audio and video controls, what their image looks like, and where to look once the interview begins. Being adept with the technology gives students credibility as online professionals.
2. **Consider image and the interview environment—**Students should dress professionally as a video interview *is* an interview. Is the background of the interview area consistent with the image the student wants to portray to recruiters? The student should remove or silence all distractions, such as cell phone ringers, e-mail alerts on the computer, music, pets, roommates, and more.
3. **Test all settings and connections beforehand—**Students should make sure the settings are optimized and all connections are working prior to the interview to avoid any issues during the interview.
4. **Be prepared for a system hiccup—**Students should have a Plan B ready in case the technology fails during a video interview. For example, a student participating in a video interview should have his or her cell phone ready to use in case the connection is unacceptable or drops. Being prepared in such a manner and making a smooth transition to another method in light of unexpected problems can impress an employer.

Sometimes, however, the background environment is a key selling point. Such was the case last year, when Berndt was interviewing a student by Skype for an internship scholarship. The student was attempting to secure the scholarship for an internship in the music industry and, the day of the interview, was working in the production trailer at a music festival in California.

"He explained that he would be wearing a headset so he wouldn't be distracted by the noise in the background," Berndt says. "Being able to see him in that environment and the way he handled potential distractions brought greater credibility to his abilities. In this situation, setting the context was a critical element."

The visibility offered through video interviewing can also offer college students another advantage over phone interviews.

"Students can see the reaction to their response by the recruiter," Berndt says. "If something resonates with the interviewer, the student can see this and provide additional information."

Of course, the ability to see someone and their environment can do as much bad as it can good.

"As video interviewing is becoming a more popular interviewing method, this is something we need to teach our students," Berndt says.