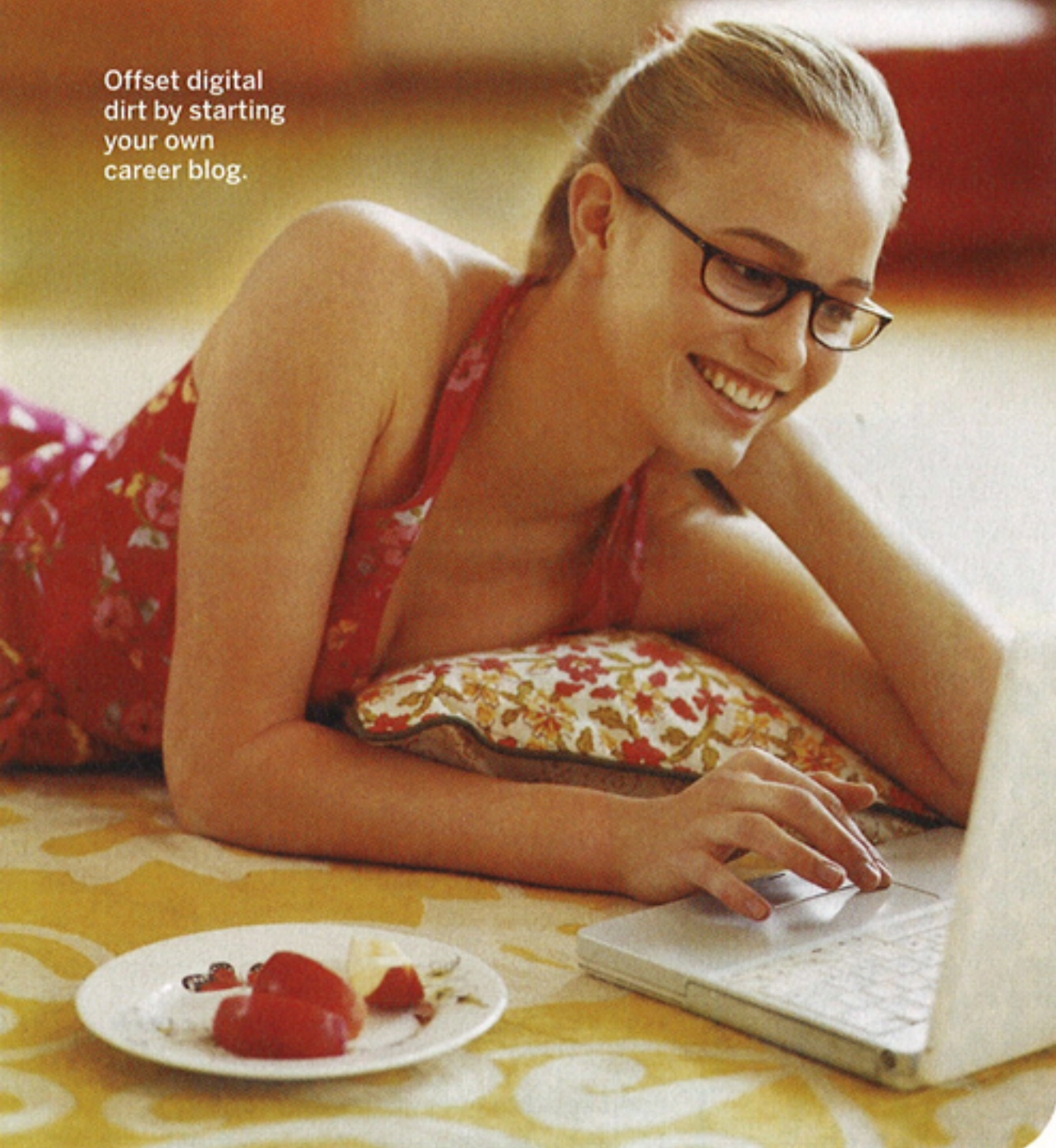


Offset digital dirt by starting your own career blog.



Rehab your Web rep

Savvy tips to improve your online image

Your blind date isn't the only one who is Googling you: According to a survey by ExecuNet, a headhunting firm in Norwalk, Connecticut, 77 percent of recruiters troll the Internet for morsels on job candidates and 35 percent have eliminated people based on what they've found. Here's how to create a first impression you can be proud of.

➤ **Keep tabs on yourself.** Type your name into several search engines on a regular basis to see what appears. I was surprised to find an article I'd written years ago titled, "Is It Bad to Be Drunk on a Wednesday?" Hardly gold-star material.

➤ **Hit delete.** If you find unflattering content, send a polite message to the site's webmaster explaining why the entry is damaging and requesting that it be taken down, suggests Michael Fertik, CEO of ReputationDefender.com. I e-mailed the site where my article was posted, and it disappeared within hours.

➤ **Create flattering content.** Start by joining professional communities online (try LinkedIn.com or ZoomInfo.com) and update your stats often. Feeling more ambitious? Upgrade your virtual presence by acting virtuously *off* line. Apply your talents to a philanthropic cause. You'll build a knock-their-socks-off Web ID *and* spread good karma. —Sara Reistad-Long

Another birthday? Yay! In a Self.com poll, 75 percent of women say they've grown more confident with age. **Their source of self-esteem? Brains, not beauty:** 40 percent are most secure in their smarts; 8 percent say it's their appearance that makes them shine.

Free ways to be a generous friend Showing you care doesn't require swiping a credit card. These women spoiled their pals without spending a cent. —Melissa Walker



I played matchmaker.

“When a friend of mine went through a bad breakup, I immediately thought of a guy I work with who was also down-and-out. Did I mention they were both shy? So I had a party. They came, they saw, they liked. The rest is history.”

AISHA FAQUIR, 25, WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA



I made her healthy.

“After my buddy and I gained weight dining out together, I started us on an exercise plan. We went from a food-focused relationship to one based on motivation. Our next fitness goal: biking to raise money for AIDS research.”

NIDHI CHANANI, 26, MENLO PARK, CALIFORNIA



I lightened her load.

“Before a friend moved, I helped her hold a garage sale. We lugged everything onto the lawn, priced it, then spent the day catching up. With that much time to kill, we shared things we normally wouldn't have had a chance to talk about.”

NICOLE NADER GABOR, 29, PHILADELPHIA



I got her a raise.

“I encouraged a pal who's a dietitian to charge more for her services. She raised her rates, and her clients didn't blink an eye. She was thrilled that I was right about the value of her offerings. I was happy that I helped her recognize her worth.”

JAN PATENAUDE, 49, MARBLE, COLORADO



I was her crisis coach.

“When a friend who lived 3,000 miles away was going through an emotional upheaval, I called her every night at 11 p.m. for weeks to check in. It's been four years, and she still thanks me for being there during that time.”

SHANNON BIRD, 29, LOS ANGELES