



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Branding – Social Media Style

By Margaret Resce Milkint

LinkedIn is adding a new member each second¹, one in every nine people are registered on Facebook, Twitter is handling 1.6 billion queries per day and Google+ reached 10 million users in just 16 days² – it is safe to say that the social networking scene is more than just a phase. It has become an essential component of networking. Does your social media presence – or lack thereof – accurately represent your personal brand?

Yes, your personal brand – what you are known for and what sets you apart from the crowd – is just as important online as it is off. In fact, 63 percent of recruiters are checking social media sites to find out more about potential employees³. And, LinkedIn is delivering on its brand promise, with its top three activities reported as industry networking (61 percent), keeping in touch (61 percent), and co-worker networking (55⁴ percent)⁵. The reality is that social media is having an increasing impact on the way professionals hire, advance and network; and if you are not intentionally active in the space, it is time to make the leap.

GETTING STARTED

The number of social networking sites available today can be overwhelming. Be realistic. It is not possible to be everywhere all the time. Determine your objective, decide which sites will help you achieve your desired results and participate at your own comfort level.

If you are searching for a new career or hoping to expand your professional network, look at social media sites, like LinkedIn, that have a distinctly professional aim. If you are looking to stay current on industry news, brands you like or even celebrity gossip, consider joining Twitter. If you are interested in keeping in touch with friends and family, Facebook may be the best venue. Depending on your objective(s) you may want to maintain a presence on multiple social media outlets or use the same site to further more than one objective. Social networking sites continue to evolve and are offering more control to members who want to use the same site

for multiple purposes, allowing you to share photos from your infamous Halloween shindig with friends and not with your boss or co-workers.

MAKING A MEMORABLE FIRST IMPRESSION

First impressions are almost impossible to reverse, making those first encounters extremely important. Your profile on social media sites is the equivalent of your resume; your appearance or your elevator pitch and should be crafted with care. Highlight your skills and talents to further your brand and demonstrate your value to fellow networkers, recruiters and potential employers.

Some sites, like LinkedIn, allow users to search the user database using keywords. Think about what keywords you want to be found for and incorporate them into your profile to increase the likelihood that you are “found” in relevant searches. And most importantly, proofread, proofread, proofread! One of the easiest ways to look unprofessional and sloppy is to display a profile (or even posts for that matter) with grammatical and spelling errors.

Furthermore, select a profile photo that illustrates your brand and furthers your objectives on that particular site. Although your favorite shot of your toddler is adorable, a headshot may be more appropriate if you are using the site for professional networking.

BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

Expand your network by searching out and connecting with relevant contacts. Most venues offer to check your various address books for contacts who are also members of the same site. Adding the appropriate icon to your email signature is a great way to promote your social media profiles and makes it easy for contacts to connect with, friend or follow you.

Don't lose sight of the importance of face-to-face communication, though. It will always be in style, so utilize social networking as an extension of, rather



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than a replacement for, in-person networking. When you return from an event or reach out to someone by phone, go one step further by looking the person up on LinkedIn, or the other networks you are a part of, and extending an invitation to connect.

Be familiar with the privacy settings of the sites you are using. Know who can see your profile and to what extent. More often than not, the default settings are very lax. If you are using a site for dual purposes, consider creating different lists on Facebook or circles on Google+ for personal versus professional contacts. In some cases, it might be best to keep your lists of friends separate from those of your co-workers and others in your professional network.

FURTHERING YOUR BRAND

Merely joining a social network is equivalent to hiding in the corner at a networking event. Though you can't control what is being said, you can demonstrate a willingness to act on what you have heard – good and bad – just by participating in the conversation! Establishing yourself as an authority or leader in your field can create positive visibility and open you up to professional opportunity. Showcase your credibility by sharing relevant content and commenting on others' posts. Join relevant groups; follow industry experts on Google+, Twitter and Facebook, and participate in the "LinkedIn Answers" feature.

Remember that everything you post is permanent and should further your brand proposition. It may be best to stay away from controversial topics. Think twice before publically recommending someone and employ the one-hour rule before responding to something that really gets you fired up.

MONITORING YOUR BRAND

When was the last time you "Googled" yourself? "Googling" yourself is the best way to monitor your online reputation. Search your name periodically and see what you find. You can also set up Google Alerts to send a message directly to your inbox whenever your name pops up online. If the results

are less than enticing, take the opportunity to ramp up your social media efforts.

There is no question that social networking is redefining the way the world is communicating. Networking is no longer confined to a board room or luncheon, but rather has adapted into a 24/7 venture. The impact it has on social and professional endeavors is far-reaching and continues to evolve. You are in control of your digital footprint. Use social media to grow your network, spread your knowledge and absorb information. Now is the time to embrace the power of social networking and further your personal brand. ●

END NOTES

- ¹ Van Grove, J. (November 17, 2010) *LinkedIn Adding a New Member Per Second*. LinkedIn. Retrieved November 16, 2011, from <http://www.linkedin.com>
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- ³ White, C. (November 2, 2011) *Protecting Your Online Reputation: 4 Things You Need to Know [INFOGRAPHIC]*. Mashable. Retrieved November 16, 2011, from <http://mashable.com>
- ⁴ Gunelius, S. (August 9, 2011) *Study Reveals How Professionals Use LinkedIn*. Forbes. Retrieved November 16, 2011, from <http://www.forbes.com>