



You've heard the idea that everyone is connected to everyone else by just six degrees of separation? Well, make that just two degrees of separation, thanks to social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Because of this, your online presence—and the relationships you build through social networking—is vital to building your career.

The majority of people still find jobs and get hired through personal connections. Social media is your route to making more personal connections—and to making them more, well, personal. As we mentioned last chapter, the old saw “it's not what you know, it's who you know” has morphed into “it's not just who you know, it's who knows you.” Which leads us to a critical question: What do people know about you? If they know you're skilled, trustworthy, and hardworking, they will be happy to help you connect with others. Having a strong network not only gets you the job—it also gives you the opportunity to exchange ideas and knowledge with other professionals.

Now is the time to create a professional online presence and start building valuable connections. In this chapter we'll discuss the major social media sites and how you can use them to grow professionally.

### **Grandpa, what's Facebook?**

For as long as there's been social media, there have been people predicting its death. As of the printing of this book, however, it's still very much around. Facebook, as of this moment, has 750 million active users. Because of those numbers, we'll assume you're already familiar with Facebook. LinkedIn, a professional networking site you might not be using yet, has over 120 million users. On LinkedIn, users post their profiles, including job experience and education, resumes, and interests. LinkedIn individual members use the site to make professional connections and exchange ideas. Companies use LinkedIn to find new hires. If Facebook is casual Friday—or very, very casual Saturday night—LinkedIn is business-attire Monday. Facebook lends itself to informal, personal exchanges; LinkedIn is your best reflection of your professional self. Another popular means of staying connected is Twitter, which people use to post short updates or to track their friends, favorite celebrities, and organizations. There are countless other social media outlets, which ebb and flow in importance and numbers of users.

### **Establishing and maintaining an online presence**

When you're ready to use social media for professional purposes, you've got to take a look at your current online presence. Google yourself and see what

others can easily find out about you. If you have blog posts, pictures, or other things online that could potentially sabotage your chances of finding and keeping a job—or that could inhibit your ability to connect with others in your profession—consider deleting them, if possible. Employers, potential employers, colleagues, and others *will* search for you online and you need to be comfortable with what they might find.

After you've taken stock of your current online profile, take steps to build a professional online presence:

- 1. A good first career move is to join the organizations relevant to your profession—or the profession you'd like to have.** Sign up for relevant Facebook groups, Listservs, or other email groups and check them regularly. Make sure you consider all groups that might benefit you professionally: National, regional, and local professional organizations; alumni groups; and specialty interests that relate to your current or future professional goals.
- 2. Create a profile on a professional networking site, such as LinkedIn.** Upload your resume and request recommendations from professors or previous employers. Approach online requests for favors such as recommendations just as you would in the real world: Show that you value the person's time and assistance, be specific about your request, and follow up with a thank you email or note.
- 3. Make Facebook a positive or neutral force in your professional life.** Decide who you want to view your Facebook profile. Clean up your profile, posts, and page if possible. Check your privacy settings. Facebook is notorious for changing privacy settings regularly and not providing very clear directions about dealing with those changes. Luckily, if you Google “Facebook” and “privacy settings” you'll find plenty of tips on how to tighten your privacy settings. Privacy online, however, is always best considered an oxymoron.

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### Who are you online?

Your online personality may be a factor in whether or not you're hired, fired, or promoted. Consider these two examples: One applicant for a marketing assistant job had all the qualifications, but made a bad first impression before she even set foot in the interview room. Her interviewer Googled her and discovered, among other things, a blog post filled with profanity. She did not get the job. Unfair? Possibly. But it's certainly not an isolated case. Another example is a chef who ranted about his employer on his blog, and made sarcastic comments online that damaged the restaurant's reputation. He was fired immediately. Everything you post online—and even those things posted about you—can potentially help or sabotage your career.

## Making connections

Both Facebook and LinkedIn are excellent for networking and provide a window that up until a few years ago wasn't available. Remember that the rules of engaging professionally online are the same as they are in the real world: Introduce yourself and demonstrate your respect for the person's time by keeping your messages short and by not flooding the person with requests or information. Be gracious, too. For example, some people limit their LinkedIn connections to a small circle of very well known, highly trusted individuals, and will not accept your invitation to link up until they get to know you better. Also, consider your situation carefully before friending a boss or colleague on Facebook. Do you want that extra level of connection with them? What are potential drawbacks and benefits of being Facebook friends with people at your particular workplace?

## Finding a job

Social media can be an essential means not just to finding a job, but to finding the right job. From a simple Facebook status update or tweet: "Anyone know of any accounting positions open in Austin?" to a more targeted LinkedIn search for a position in a particular department in the organization of your dreams, you have a powerful job search tool literally at your fingertips.

If you find yourself needing a job, first get the word out. Post what you're looking for and follow up any tips you get from people with an update or thank you. If you find yourself wanting another job—but not ready to tell your colleagues or supervisor that you want to move on—you might have to be more targeted about getting the word out. You don't want your boss to find out and have, at best, an awkward conversation and, at worst, a burned bridge.

Next, search for companies and organizations that interest you and determine if you have any personal connections to someone working there. For example, you might see that one of your contacts on LinkedIn is connected with someone who works in the field you want to get into. You might contact that person—a so-called "second-degree contact," akin to a "friend of a friend"—and request information or let him or her know of your interest. Note: Common practice is to limit such messages to second-degree contacts. In other words, reach out to a contact of a contact, but not a contact's contact's contact. Even if you don't have connections to an organization, you can get a lot of information about it and potential job openings by searching its website and following it on Twitter and Facebook.

If you build a strong online presence you might find that you won't have to do a job search: people will seek you out and make you an offer. They might hear about you through tweets, retweets, a LinkedIn connection, or something you've published online. Or, your blog or Facebook posts might draw just the right kind of attention.

Remember to update and thank people who help you out in the process of finding a job. They'll appreciate the follow up.

## **Social networking and the workplace**

You might have a job that requires you to be plugged into Facebook and Twitter all day, but if it's not part of the job description you should probably avoid social media activity while you're on the clock. We know one person who was fired after he called in sick the same day he posted on Facebook pictures of himself enjoying the sun at the beach. Another acquaintance was such an active Facebook status updater that it was hard to imagine she was able to get any work done in between the updates. (A colleague, tired of having his email requests to her ignored, once sent a Facebook notice from his cubicle next door: "When you're done with Facebook, would you mind going over the document I sent you yesterday?")

Social networking is certainly not dead. It's a powerful force in the social and professional lives of countless millions of people. It can backfire—being tagged in those pictures from Cabo, for instance—but follow common sense and social networking can be an incredibly enriching and positive force in your professional life.