

**Use social networking to establish, maintain and manage your professional 'brand.'**

# Everybody's Business

**“W**hat's happening?” Whether you're an active contributor to your social networking image or not, you have an online reputation. Know it. Manage it. How's that for less than 140 characters? Click the “like” button.

The truth is that social networking can work against you just as easily as it can work for you. With Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Flickr spreading information at the click of a button, job seekers and companies alike must protect their brands. While these online media can help build a network or provide an avenue to learn who is hiring or job searching, they can just as easily derail your chances of making a valuable connection.

Have you Googled yourself lately? The results may surprise you. More than three-quarters of hiring managers use the Internet to screen candidates, according to an ExecuNet survey. And since most social media users believe companies should have an online presence, it's time to embrace the revolution and take ownership of your online reputation (or build one if you seemingly don't exist).

The key is to know why you are joining a site and then to ensure your activities on it further that objective. If you wish to expand your professional network, find a job or recruit candidates, then take care to portray your professional brand. Create your profile just as carefully as you would your resume, incorporating keywords and communicating professionally, even if you only have 140 characters to do so.

Likewise, if you wouldn't want a potential employer to see your posts, adjust your privacy and permissions settings and be conscious of who has access to your profile or who can tag you in photos. Remember—the Internet is permanent.

Merely joining a social network is equivalent to hiding in the corner at a networking event. With your original goal in mind, participate! Search for and link

to, friend or follow people who can add value. Join relevant groups; monitor or post jobs; and share interesting links and insightful remarks. 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.

Professional social networking follows the same etiquette rules as in-person networking. It is also based on the same overarching principle: reciprocity. Writing a sincere recommendation for someone else's work often yields a similar return. However, before you start recommending, be familiar with your company's social media policy; many organizations take the same stance on recommendations as they do on references. If you do ask for recommendations, personalize your request and only ask people who know your work well.

Though social networking sites are a more comfortable way to network, don't hide behind your computer. This phenomenon shouldn't replace in-person networking; rather, it should serve as a supplement. Given their very nature, these venues provide the follow-up opportunities necessary to maintain regular contact.

As social networking continues to grow, so does the impact it can have on your image and reach. Don't let your online reputation manage you. Take control, and see and be seen on various sites as it aligns with your goals. “Like?” “Comment?”

—Margaret Resce Milkint



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