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12 Ways to Make Your Online Profile Work for You

Proactively managing your online persona is a must if you're serious about your career.

By Christina DesMarais, PCWorld   Mar 1, 2012 9:16 pm

Like it or not, your digital identity is what defines you to potential employers and recruiters seeking you out online. And if you're interested in pushing your career forward, experts suggest that you take your digital identity seriously. The right words, photos, and social media banter online can impress a prospective employer or recruiter, while the wrong ones may turn them off.

Experts we spoke with say you must proactively manage your online persona if you're serious about your career. If someone you wanted to impress--a potential employer or recruiter, for example--were to research you online, what would he or she find?

Would a Google query turn up a wealth of information that points to your business acumen, valuable technology skills, and impressive history of achievements? Would it uncover a veritable vacuum that indicates you haven't given your public profile a moment's thought? Worse, will posts to that CNN.com article you made two years ago raise questions about your character? The answers may be make-or-break factors in landing your next job.

Here are 12 strategies to pump up your online profile with the savvy needed to win in a competitive marketplace (plus a little bonus tip at the end).

1. Choose the right title. Don't try to impress people with lofty titles. "If you're a CTO of a very small company, maybe a better title for you would be director or manager or senior software developer. You want to make sure that the title that you currently have is the title of the type of position you're looking for. Typically people do not want to hire a director that currently has a CTO or C-level position," says Michael Dsupin, CEO of IT staffing firm Talener. That's because employers think that workers who settle for a lower position won't stick around.

2. Use the best email address. The email domain you use matters. Dsupin says Yahoo email can get marked as spam by firms that use Linux servers. And "AOL is a little bit old. I wouldn't say that would be a reason why I wouldn't call someone, but I might get a little leery of somebody if they use an AOL account," he says. "Hotmail might be looked at as a bit outdated, and Gmail is definitely the best."

3. List your phone number in your professional online profile. This increases the likelihood that a recruiter, headhunter, or potential employer will contact you. That's because a phone call is sometimes the fastest and most reliable method they can use to determine if you're a good fit for their client or company.

"Phone numbers are big with us," says Dsupin. "Until you get somebody on the phone and actually speak with them, it's really tough to know whether or not they're a serious candidate."

If you are uncomfortable listing a personal phone number, sign up for Google Voice--or a similar service--that allows you to have a free phone number and voicemail box for people to leave messages on. You can set up your Google Voice account so that any phone calls to your Google phone number will trigger an alert to an email address about new messages.

4. Use social media aggressively. The more connections you have on services such as LinkedIn, the better. "Someone who is more connected, especially in the digital world, is probably more in tune with the latest and greatest strategies," Dsupin says.

And don't listen to the nay-sayers who dismiss Google+. Dsupin points out that if someone searches for your name, there's a good chance they'll use Google's search engine to do it. "Google just reworked its search algorithm [with Search Plus Your World]. You become more relevant to Google if you have a Google+ account. You're doing yourself a disservice if you're actively looking for a new job and you don't have [such an account]."

5. Don't fall for the Facebook fallacy. Notice that Dsupin doesn't mention Facebook. That's because nobody uses Facebook to find talent. The only way Facebook comes into play is if your public profile picture or public posts are incriminating in some way and reflect poorly upon you (a point emphasized in this job search video on YouTube).

6. Be image-conscious. Every photo that's recoverable online should show you in a professional light. That's right, every single one. "A serious job searcher is not going to have a picture of his kids or a fishing photo up on his website," Dsupin says. Instead, you should be dressed professionally, or at least in business-casual attire. And don't use caricatures and avatars for your online profiles. They make it appear as if you're hiding something (because you are).

7. Create a professional profile. Headhunter [Adam Hoffarber](#), who works as IT practice director for the recruiting firm [McKinley Group](#), routinely contacts people on LinkedIn to find out what future opportunities they might be interested in. What draws him to those prospects are completed profiles with keywords that point to valuable skills and achievements.

"The bottom line is the average time at a company right now is around three to four years, so you're not going to be at the same company cradle-to-grave like our parents were. You could be in the best job in the world, but what you don't know is there may be a company with an even better opportunity that's closer to home, pays better, or has more upward mobility," he says.

8. Get your own domain. Hoffarber says that the first thing employers or recruiters do is use a search engine to look up your name, and if you have your own website, it will usually rank high in their results. "Getting your own domain is relatively inexpensive and it shows that you're tech savvy," he says. Your own website can serve as a visual resume where you can convey your personality and strengths as well as display a photo of yourself--something you shouldn't ever include on a resume.

What if your name is John Smith and someone has already grabbed it? You need to get creative, Hoffarber says. You could hyphenate your name ("adam-hoffarber.com," say) or add a specialty to it (as in "adamhoffarberheadhunting.com"). Many Web hosting and domain registration providers will give you your own domain for just a few dollars. Try [GoDaddy](#), [GreenGeeks](#), [BlueHost](#), [HostGator](#), [FatCow](#), and [iPage](#).

9. Delete red flags. These include inappropriate posts or photos on social media sites. You should check how your Facebook profile displays to the world; with the [recent introduction of Timeline](#), many profiles now publicly display information that their owners think is private.

"Completely empty spots in LinkedIn job histories are major red flags as well," Hoffarber says. "If there's a one- or two-year gap, be able to explain it. If you're unemployed and you just sit around and don't expand your skill set or research what's going on in your field, employers will pass you over." Did you go back to school, get certified in a new skill, or stay at home to raise children? Even travel can account for time you spent out of the workforce.

10. Post intelligent commentary. According to Joel Garfinkle, job coach and author of [Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#), when you contribute thoughtful comments online, it's an opportunity to make a positive impression as well as to leave a link to your blog or website. "The high-traffic websites targeted should be directly related to your industry and area of expertise," he says. How much time should you spend doing this? He says one to two hours a week should suffice.

Case in point: Max Woolf has garnered quite a reputation as a tech pundit even though he's still in college studying business administration at Carnegie Mellon University. While he hasn't mapped out his future after graduation, he's got 1100 subscribers on Facebook thanks to prolific comments he has made on TechCrunch and other technology blogs.

"Entrepreneurs have contacted me with their prospective startup ideas and I have consulted with them [about] product strategy and how to best structure their business, due to my comments [that demonstrate] how much I know and care about startups and technology. I've had similar requests to meet with local Pittsburgh entrepreneurs in person with their startup ideas," Woolf says.

11. Blog, blog, blog. A blog is a great way to share your knowledge and expertise, but don't try it if writing isn't your forte. Anyone interested in you will certainly be turned off if you publish grammatical errors or awkward prose. But if words come easily to you, go for it.

"Write useful and well-thought-out content, and do it as much as you can because the search engines will pick up your posts and bring traffic to your blog," says Garfinkle, who also suggests guest blogging on other people's sites. Popular blogging platforms include Wordpress, Blogger (a Google service), and Tumblr, and there's an abundance of information available online about how to drive traffic to your blog. At the very least, you should share posts on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and LinkedIn.

12. Use LinkedIn to its fullest. With 150 million users worldwide, LinkedIn is commonly used by employers and recruiters to research prospective employees, so if you're serious about your career, there's absolutely no excuse for not using it.

LinkedIn spokeswoman Erin O'Harra says it's important to include specific, significant results when you create your profile. "If you closed a million-dollar deal or you recruited five key executives for your company, those are definitely the things you want to call out to distinguish yourself from others," she says.

She also says business-savvy users drill down and take advantage of the platform's deeper features. For instance, if you haven't already done so, make sure to claim your vanity profile URL, which you can post on other sites or networks to bring people back to

your LinkedIn profile. To get one, on LinkedIn, go to *Profile, Edit Profile,* and then scroll down to *Public Profile*.

LinkedIn also has more than 1 million different Groups you can join. Using them is an excellent way to expand your network and can be good places where you can contribute thoughtful commentary and demonstrate your expertise in your given field.

LinkedIn Skills is another underused feature that you can use to associate valuable keywords with your profile. If you're a programmer who codes in Objective-C, for example, you can add that skill to your profile so that anyone searching for Objective-C programmers can find you.

Finally, LinkedIn has a slew of handy apps you can use. For instance, SlideShare Presentations lets you upload slideshows, PowerPoint presentations, PDFs, and videos to your profile with just a few clicks. Other good ones are the Polls app, which lets you collect data from your connections, and Creative Portfolio Display, which lets you showcase creative visual work.
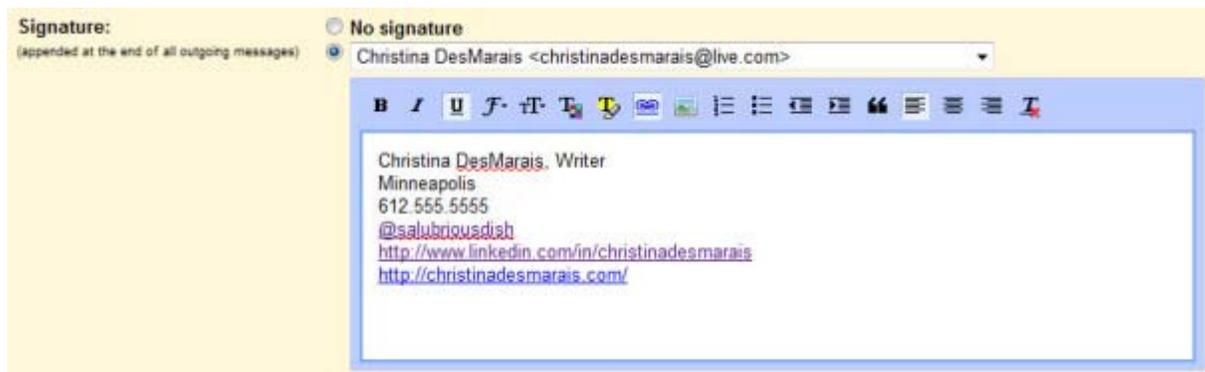
Your email signature should include links to your social media accounts, website, or blog.Bonus tip: Add links. Make sure to include in your email signature links to your social media accounts, website, or blog so that every message you're sending points recipients back to your spiffed-up online profile. To establish your email signature in Gmail, for example, go to the *Options* wheel cog at the top right of the window, then click *Mail Settings, General, Signature*.