Following the trail: Building your digital footprint

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The title on your business card, years of experience and length of your CV will always demonstrate some degree of professional credibility, but social media experts have warned that the times have changed. Having a strong online presence is integral to establishing yourself as an expert in your field and in managing your personal brand. Perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates a fluency in all things digital. “Status is much more democratic now. Expertise can be noticed more easily,” says Soumitra Dutta, a social media academic.

In order to best use social media to advance your career, you need to dedicate yourself to using it for professional purposes, set goals and ensure your so-called ‘digital footprint’ projects the image you want. “The opportunity to reach people directly is powerful, and still underexploited,” says Dorie Clark, author of What’s Next?: The Art of Reinventing Your Personal Brand.

Blogging or tweeting about a topic shows you’re ‘in the game’. Even contributing a small amount of content can go a long way toward establishing you as an expert. “If you are passionate about a topic and argue your perspective in a compelling manner, you can begin to generate a following. Even if you aren’t trying to be labeled as an expert, contribute to discussions you find interesting or you simply want to be part of,” Dutta adds.

What you should be considering:

Assume everything you have online is visible to all parties, namely potential employers and current colleagues

- Build your personal brand and establish yourself as an expert. When people peruse your social media activity, they get a sense of what you’re about. The more you comment on or write about a certain area, the more likely you’ll be affiliated with it
- If you’re over 50, companies may be inclined to think you may not be competent in using social media and other digital tools. That’s why it’s integral you demonstrate your proficiency by actively participating in the digital space

Your digital footprint doesn’t stop with blogs or forums, of course. LinkedIn’s annual list of ‘most overused’ terms in profiles (see box) indicates that it’s vital to stay vigilant with purposely set up professional profiles as well. Those guilty of using some (or all) of the terms in the top 10 may unwittingly be turning away potential interest in your skills.
"We have the unique ability to uncover interesting workplace trends in our data given the high volume of people with profiles on LinkedIn," says DJ Patil, LinkedIn's chief data scientist. "In this case, we wanted to reveal insights that help professionals make better choices about how to position themselves online whether they are reaching out to new clients or networking with peers."

Lindsey Pollak, a career and workplace expert, adds that phrases like 'extensive experience' and 'proven track record' can appear empty to a potential employer and may do more harm than good when included on a profile or resume. "If you're using any of these 10 terms, wipe them out. Instead, note that you have eight to 10 years of experience or that you increased sales by 300 percent. Include meaningful phrases that apply specifically to highlights you've achieved in your career."

Here are three tips professionals can act on to increase the number of people viewing their LinkedIn profile:

**Tip 1: Accentuate your profile**

Make sure your LinkedIn profile is complete and includes all the roles you have had. You are 12 times more likely to be viewed for potential opportunities if you have more than one position listed on your profile. Also, add a profile photo – people never forget a face.

**Tip 2: Grow your network**

Connect to at least 50 trusted contacts. Simply import your contacts to start finding first, second or even third degree connections working at companies you want as clients or would like to get in touch with.

**Tip 3: Lift your profile in Google search results**

Have you done a Google search for your name? If you haven't, you should. People are Googling you before meetings and interviews. Get your LinkedIn profile to come up higher in search results by customising your profile URL.

**Death by overuse**

According to LinkedIn, the top 10 most overused terms used in profiles by professionals based in Australia are:

1. Extensive experience
2. Innovative
3. Motivated
4. Dynamic
5. Proven track record
6. Team player
7. Proactive
8. Skill set
9. Highly skilled
10. Entrepreneurial