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Using the Social Web to Find Work


chrisBROGAN

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Introduction

2009 is destined to be an unprecedented time in history, both in the US and abroad. At the same time we're coming to realize this, there is hope. With social networks and lightweight communications platforms, there are ways one can connect to like-minded people and perhaps find the job they need to keep themselves afloat in the coming months and year.

What follows includes information repurposed from [chrisbrogan.com] , and some new material as well. The goal of this ebook is to be helpful to people who might be looking for a new job, new business, or just the opportunity to expand their business network for the coming year. I hope that it's helpful, and I encourage you to share it liberally with others.

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Write Your LinkedIn Profile for Your Future

I was speaking to one of the best upcoming tech bloggers the other day about [LinkedIn](#), and how I view it. To me, LinkedIn isn't a place to dump a snapshot of where you've been. It's an opportunity to stay connected to people, and to demonstrate where you are now, and where you plan to go next. To that end, I've got a little advice for you to consider applying to your own profile.

First Impressions

First, your headline matters. It's what people see when they accept your invite, and it's probably the fastest first impression one receives. If you work for a company, put that name in the headline. When I don't see a company name, I wonder if you're solo.

Your Summary

Here's where I think the most work can be done. When I look at my profile, I think it's a bit long, but otherwise, I've done the following:

- * Lead with what I do most.
- * Lead with the type of business I want to do.
- * Move into the reasons why you'd do business with me.
- * Move from there into all the nuances of what I do.

In every case within the summary, your plan should be to write from the mindset of the prospective employer (or client), such that when they read it, they think, "I need to hire this person."

Tip: refresh your summary every two weeks.

Your Work Experience

Here, I do something you might not expect. I make sure my past experience still supports my current and future aspirations. I write the past work experience summary to highlight those functions I performed that will still be useful to the current and future goals. Why? Because if you're still reading that far down my summary, you want to kick the tires a little on my experience.

Tip: Refresh your past work experience sections every four weeks or so.

Power Moves: Recommendations

Ask people for recommendations. Be smart about it, though. Ask people who can vouch for your abilities.

I receive a few requests for recommendations a week from people I know from Twitter. I'm sorry, but I can't really vouch for you. And this, to me, the reputation engine part of LinkedIn, is the most important part of the product. I will only recommend people that I would hire for myself, or that I would work for. At the time of this writing (August 2008), I've written 146 recommendations.

In both cases, I feel that recommendations are powerful.

What's Next?

A list of next steps:

1. Review your LinkedIn profile. Look at it as if you're a prospective new boss, or a client. Would you hire YOU to do something? If not, rewrite it. Keep it tight. Do as much editing as you can.
2. Enter your blog's RSS feed on the profile page. People want more color.
3. Add a photo. Not one of those weird grown up versions of a school class picture. Find a good candid. If you don't have one, go to a social media meetup. Someone will snap you a good one. Worried about discrimination? Guess what: they'll figure it out eventually. Get it out of the way up front.
4. Start writing quality recommendations for people you can vouch for. If they can do the same for you, ask for one back. If not, hold off. No sense making someone feel awkward.
5. Grow your network. LinkedIn and I don't agree on this. I say connect to whoever. It helps you build a network. (I only recommend people I can vouch for, and to me, that's where who you know or don't know really matters).
6. Keep looking at your profile as it applies to your future.

Make Your LinkedIn Profile Work for You

LinkedIn is a professional network built around one's employment capabilities. It is often referred to (I believe somewhat incorrectly) as an online version of your CV or resume. People who use LinkedIn expertly, like Christopher S. Penn, will be the first to say that this service is sorely underrated as a place to develop business, grow your capabilities, and promote your projects and opportunities. Here are some thoughts on amping up your LinkedIn presence.

Write to be Read

The first horror show I see when reading other people's LinkedIn profiles is that they're written completely dry, as if robots are the only thing that will read them. Though one should write with robots in mind, this is still a human network, so write as if you want someone to actually read your profile. Here's the first paragraph of my summary:

I show businesses how to use social media technologies for external community building and outreach, and for internal collaboration. I have over 10 years experience with social media and 16 years experience in enterprise computing environments. I blend emerging tech knowledge with enterprise culture understanding.

You can tell what I do, have a sense of what I'm hoping you want from me, and get a hint at my unique value proposition to businesses on this regard. It's not the best paragraph ever written, but it's definitely clear in explaining my core interests.

Make your summary explain, succinctly, why someone would want to tap your shoulder for business. If you're not sure why, that's another matter altogether. Read it aloud a few times to see how it sounds.

Make Your Job Descriptions Work Two Ways

I want people who read my profile to see that I'm happily employed, that I work for a "real" company, and that my company has capabilities in certain areas. If you work for yourself, be clear about that, too. There's no shame in being a

solo operator. Just be clear that you've chosen to build a profile to signal your professional capabilities, and write it in such a way that people understand where you sit.

Further, make sure that when people read your job description, they are thinking about how to put you to work on their issues. I state my company's primary functions in the first sentence of my current role, so that people can see what I'm bringing to the table alongside my own personal skills. Thus, my job description states what I'm doing, but also what I can do.

Recommendations are Your Friends

I ask for recommendations all the time. I'm not shy about it. (*Author's note: I've contradicted myself in this advice. Pick which one works best for you.*) Why? Because I want other people's words to guide you to choosing me for your business needs. I want you not to have to take my word for it, but instead, to know what others have to say. Don't be shy about this, but also be very realistic about asking for recommendations.

I will not recommend people whose professional work I'm not familiar with enough to suggest to a close, personal friend. I'm willing to "friend" anyone, but I only recommend people I can vouch for professionally.

Connection Strategies

LinkedIn has an official opinion on connecting up with others. They recommend that you only connect with people you know well personally. You're welcome to take their opinion on that.

I've chosen to accept with anyone who connects with me, and I've only had to drop one person ever for abusing that connection. Why? Because in my view, expanding my network means that you will find the person you need by searching through my network, and that I, at least in theory, can help you get to the person you need for your business efforts.

Your mileage may vary. I will do it my way, as most folks who connect with me eventually come calling to reach someone else that I've added, and I feel good every time I can be helpful.

Some Last Thoughts

- * Check your contact settings. Be explicit about who you want connecting with you.
- * Consider putting up a photo.
- * Use the groups features and find groups where you might want to contribute.
- * Participate in the Q&A function to share your expertise (it's like free advertising, when done tastefully).
- * Update at least every three months. Your role has changed. Make sure your profile reflects that.

Template for Building a Small Powerful Network

This post is somewhat inspired by a thought [Jeff Pulver](#) tossed out as an aside at his Social Media Jungle prototype in Long Island a few weeks ago. Hat tip to you, Jeff.

Jeff Pulver said this: “We’re making our own dial tone.” In such a typical Jeff Pulver way, he tossed out a little idea that had been bouncing around his head, but that he hasn’t rolled into any particular context yet, so I’m going to run with it. I’ve got an idea that came to me tonight about Twitter (amongst other social networks), and I’m going to share it with you: take that dial tone idea and build your own network. We’re sitting on something because we’re still in the “gee whiz” mode. Let me explain.

Where We Falter - Solo Efforts Versus Scale

I asked Twitter tonight about what people were working on for goals. Several people had remarkably similar goals, including, sadly, the fact that several of them were looking for work. 2008 is the easy year compared to what 2009 is going to be. I saw the same thing passing through everyone’s stream, and I saw connectivity that would be missed. And that’s when it stuck me. I tweeted this:

Do you realize there are thousands of great minds all plugged into the same conversation who could help each other with your goals? Activate

The trick is this- don’t make me or anyone the hub. Lead. Find your groups. Reach out. Set group goals. Execute. Move to a new group. Fluid.

You see, you’re all out there. You’ve got goals, you’ve got needs, you’ve got sources of information, and you have the tools to connect it all. You’ve got every piece of a network except for the directors.

So, what if you had the templates to building a small but powerful network? Here’s my starting ideas on this. I’ll talk in somewhat technical terms, but I promise this has everything to do with the human elements. I hope it sparks something in you. More so, I hope you run with it.

Build a Small Powerful Network

1. First, think about your goals in 2009. Build the network with two purposes on mind: how you can achieve your goals, and how you can help others achieve theirs.
2. You need authentication in a network. Start with a blog as a home base. Make it such that your about page tells people lots about you.
3. It doesn't hurt to have a picture of YOU on the blog, as this will deal with building a trusted network.
4. Start a Google Doc spreadsheet with the following fields: name, twitter ID, cell, capabilities, notes. Think of this as your routing table, your database of records of where resources reside.
5. Ask some probing questions on Twitter. If no one responds, ask again. See if there's interest out there. What you're doing at this point is sending out a signal that you're looking for resources. (Like a computer, only you're human.)
6. Use Twitter Search to find some like-minded people. Work at this. Try all different kinds of queries until you find the right response.
7. Send @ messages to these types of people. Ask them if they want to talk about collaborating.
8. Invite them to your document, if you want. Let them share the resources. Get them into the mix
9. From here, collaborate. Figure out how you can help. Understand each other's needs, and share the resources. Try to build your goals and businesses together.

It's not exactly simple. But to me, it's all there. You build the mechanisms (very simple ones), and you go after the goals together. You can feed it. You can encourage the edge points of the network (the other people) to be their own hub. You can build out more capabilities.

Scribbles from The Sidebar

What if you thought of these small networks in terms of games? Games have goals. They have a point. What if you set goals and points to these networks? What if you went at this network-building and empowerment as something very active, instead of using tools like Twitter as another place to chat?

In 2009, you need your networks. It is not a solo act. I need mine, too. And I plan to do exactly what I've laid out here.

Social Media for Your Career

Today's career environment is different, at least for the information workers. What's different is that there are more ways to influence getting a job than in the past. You probably already know that the old saying is true: "it's not what you know; it's who you know." Well, the people you know has expanded a bit, thanks to social networks, and what people know about you has grown, too, thanks in part to the various tools you can employ in social media.

What follows are some ideas on building your online presence with your career in mind.

Your Blog Is A Resume

If you've not considered this yet, let me explain that my blog has been responsible for HUNDREDS of inquiries over the years. Why? Because people who might want to know about using video, or blogging, or making podcasts, or tying this all together into a strategy see examples, almost daily, of what I think, what I know, and how I've accomplished some of this in my own life and career.

Blogging about this stuff is like writing out my experience for a resume line by line. (Only less boring).

Use These Tools for You

The story of our work lives, and the story of what we do after work when we're expressing our passion can now be captured in ways we didn't have available to us before. With free tools, free or inexpensive distribution, you can share your accomplishments with the world, and with Google, which most prospective employees use as a matter of course these days in their hiring diligence.

Elements to Consider

Once you start thinking that way, about your blog as a way for people to know more about you, what you stand for, who you are, you might consider doing a few things.

- * Consider adding a picture of you on the main page. I admit that I take this to the extreme, but whatever. You won't ever NOT recognize me at a conference or a social event, and that's my goal.
- * Make your ABOUT page robust. I write a lot about who I am, where to find me, what I am passionate about, and other things on my about page. In my case, I even have a speaking page, so that people know what I speak about at events (or some of what I speak about).
- * Make it easy to contact you. My email is right there on the blog, as well as my phone number. People use them both all the time, and these bring me interesting opportunities that don't always land in the comments section.
- * Consider WHAT you talk about in your blog. Even if you don't consider your blog your resume, Google will help your prospective employers figure out your web presence.

The Social Media Resume

Listing your previous jobs and titles is not nearly a full picture of who you are, what you know, what you're capable of, and who you know. There are other ways to do this. You might want to give more thought to posting more information about you online. There are ways to do this that don't seem as threatening to current employers, by the way.

If you haven't considered using LinkedIn, that's a baseline. But LinkedIn is still a resume of sorts, only with a few (really useful) features added in. LinkedIn can be explained to wary employers as a way to network with fellow professionals in your field and to find people who share interests. But don't stop there.

A few people have talked about a social media resume. My first exposure to it was Bryan Person's post about it, with a link to his own social media resume. I've not employed this specifically, because I feel my profile on LinkedIn covers all that ground, but I could see someone choosing to split out their professional credentials from their social media experience, and then this would be the right tool.

Social Networks for Networking

First, I have to say that I have a problem with the notion of traditional networking, in the social sense. I perceive networking to mean those cocktail gatherings where you stand around and ask each other what you can do for each other. Though I understand it's usually genuine in intent, I've rarely found the right kind of relationship by doing the cursory dance at these events. Too shallow for my tastes.

Online social networks are different, insofar as we have the opportunity to know more about someone through repeated interactions. If you and I are friends on Twitter, I get to see what you deem interesting enough to post into a box. If we're friends on Facebook, I might learn a LOT about your interests and the like from what you put on your profile, which groups you belong to, your other posted media.

One more thing about Facebook: the repeat question of whether or not it's for business is only coming from people who aren't in there messing around with it. It's not the best thing in the world for businesses, and I can tell you lots of things I hate about it, but it's a way to find a more enriched profile of someone than what you get on LinkedIn, and that's the value statement there.

I think social networks, blogs, and all these various places like Seesmic, Utterli, Flickr , are great touchpoints to understanding someone's personal interests, tastes, and learn about their professional proclivities as well.

The Bonus Round

You might consider putting up a video about yourself. There's something different and more intimate about making video, and people can see even more about who you are, how you act, in a video.

One friend, [Ben Yoskovitz](#), made a startup out of the idea of video in recruiting. It's brilliant, really, because it adds that piece that's missing.

And making video isn't especially hard these days. You can use a Flip video camera and pop a video onto YouTube without a lot of effort.

Now, making a GOOD video is another matter altogether, but then you might consider getting some help from a local expert. I've got friends in video all over the place, so if you want a little help with that, let me know.

A Note About WHERE to Find Jobs

This has changed a great deal over the last few years. Popular blogs and websites now have their own job boards (37 Signals, TechCrunch, and tons of other places, for instance). It's not just the world of Monster or HotJobs. Now, people and individuals are becoming hubs for jobs. Oh, and don't forget Craigslist.

At any one time, I have someone ping me for either a social media position that's open, or a software engineer, or someone with an Internet skillset that isn't easy to find by sifting through resumes. So, be attentive to that as well. Sometimes, jobs aren't circulating in the traditional places, so the folks who might want to find you, are the same ones spending time online.

Starting Points for Online Presence

Getting started in social media might feel daunting. In considering what would constitute a “passport” for a would-be “web native,” I found myself adding more and more services to the list of things one might consider adding to their collection of applications and services to use.

Start at your own pace, and go as slowly as you need to for you to feel comfortable getting to understand all these services, but here is a list of applications and networks that I think you might consider joining and developing into your online reputation and presence platform:

The Basics

- * Take a reasonably decent photo of yourself for an avatar pic. Size it to 100×100 pixels if you can. (most services want this as a default). If you’re shy off the bat, put something more fun than your corporate logo.
- * Twitter - Be sure to add your nifty new photo. Then, if you don’t already have friends on Twitter, check the public timeline to see who’s doing something interesting, or check out Twitter Packs for some starting people to follow.
- * WordPress.com Account - Even if you eventually choose another blogging platform, building a WordPress.com presence means that you get an OpenID account, a place to build a profile for lots of the popular blogging platforms (I recommend getting a Blogger/Google account for that reason, too), and also a potential “scratch blog” for putting up ideas that might not fit your larger presence.
- * Facebook profile - There are millions of people using Facebook (and even more on MySpace). It’s a good place to build an account that tells people more about yourself, and as an outpost for your blog (add your RSS feed to Facebook through one of many 3rd party apps that will re-post it there), which all goes towards establishing your reputation online.
- * YouTube account - YouTube serves millions of videos a month. It’s a great place to comment, to submit your own stuff to a larger audience, and/or to find points of interest. If you want more serious, better considered video hosting, try Blip.TV.

* Gmail account - which will give you access to Gmail.com, but also Google Reader, Google Calendar, Google Talk, and plenty other useful services. I use Google Reader as my preferred news reader, and I use Google Calendar for ease of use of scheduling.

* Google Reader for listening.

Bonus Round

If you're feeling like you want to participate even more, you'll need these:

* FriendFeed is a way to aggregate your presence and that of your friends online.

* Digg and StumbleUpon and del.icio.us accounts - Use social bookmarking communities to share things you like, to find things you're interested in, and to grow a social view of news and information.

* Upcoming.org for events to attend in this space.

* Flickr account - (which is technically now a Yahoo! account, as is del.icio.us.) This is for photo sharing, and gives you an easy place to put your pictures on the web.

* Skitch account - for screen captures, should you want to post a picture off your computer screen simply. (Mac product)

* PayPal account - for easy financial transactions used by many websites.

* Plaxo or Batchbook - for online contact management (always keep a backup).

Threading the Social Needle

One thing I try to do often is connect with people across all my various social networks. If you're following me on Twitter, I invite you to add me at LinkedIn. Likewise, if you're a reader and contributor to this blog's community, I invite you to join me at those other two places. If you're reading the blog, but not yet getting the newsletter, which is totally different, I invite you to get that. If we're not Facebook friends, add me there. It's all part of a concerted effort. The goal? Threading the social needle.

Networks Loose and Taut

Imagine you're looking for a job. Where do you start? What do you need to know? I'll give you a hint: the first letter is "p" and the last few letters are "eople." I have spent time and effort building a robust social network across LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, this blog, and beyond, because it's my goal to be helpful in as many ways possible. It's how you were able to help me send a woman to college in under 2 hours. It's how I help friends find work, get projects, or just connect with like-minded souls.

That doesn't happen on the fly. Jeremiah covers this very well. Networks are the lifeblood of this new human computer we're building. You want the network connections to be there ahead of when you need them. And here's where we get a little more human still.

Be Human About It

Connect with people from the mindset of wanting to be helpful to THEM. Learn what you can do to be useful FAR before you ask them for anything. And do this because you care, not because it's a strategy, not for some long flung business project. Do it because being a good human matters to you. If you do this, and I mean it, no faking, it will become a very powerful thing. People remember your efforts to be helpful. They remember all the ways in which you do good things for them. And it never has to matter a lick, except sometimes it does.

How this SHOULD Work

In the future, this will be a lot more dynamic. When I show up at a social network, it will ping my profile server, will ask me which personae of mine to expose, and then see which connections I have from other networks that have similar credentials, and offer connections without me thinking much about it. I'll be able to write metadata above every one of these contacts, very visual stuff, that will allow me on the fly to draw little lines between one person and another few people, showing VISUALLY the networks of people that I've met, and how they might relate.

With this information, I'll be able to pluck threads quickly, and know that someone who has a PHP need is connected through me to someone who's a PHP expert. I'll be able to see my network by proximity, by home base, by corporation, without much fuss. I will be able to apply endless filters so that I can squint into the tapestry and find the exact right two people to work with me on a project.

But until then, while it doesn't work that way, I'm building my own variations on the theme and threading the needle by hand.

In Closing

Nothing is guaranteed. Your mileage may vary. You might find different results in different places than I've mentioned. But overall, the premise sticks - these tools permit for human contact, and that's what drives new business opportunities. Instead of hunting for jobs, get started now by building networks ahead of time so that you're helping others long before you need help yourself.

Remember that YOU are every bit as capable of finding and building networks as anyone. Don't wait for others. Build your own and nurture them. It's a winning strategy no matter what your current circumstances.

As always, thanks for your time and attention. -- Chris Brogan...