



Patrick O'Brien explains how online social networking tools can play an important part in boosting your employability

Promoting your own brand



In the deepest recesses of our minds, each and every single one of us has a craving. We all have something in common - we all have a need to be social.

Humans are by nature social animals. It pleases you greatly when you socialise; it pains you deeply when you don't.

People do what it takes to constantly nurture this need, as evidenced by the rise in "social networking" technologies in recent years, such as email, MSN, short message service, Facebook and more recently Twitter.

The accelerating growth has been so explosive that it is easy to see why some people think that social networking is just a tech-savvy, generational thing. But, it is not. The reality is that Web 2.0 technologies are being grasped by the masses as they provide beneficial tools, allowing people to fulfil their social connectivity needs in an easy to use way.

So when it comes to managing your career, how can you tap into your own need for social connectivity, use social networking to promote "Brand You", and get into the game - that is, place yourself as the "hunted", in the places where "hunters" go.

"Brand You"

Social networking is an extension to, not an exclusion of, all those other "real world" activities you have already been doing, such as creating a good CV and arranging face-to-face meetings. A CV reflects your "brand" - who you are, what career path you are pursuing and how you wish those elements to be represented.

You can build positively on that "real world" stuff, by embracing social networking for the powers it can afford you.

Social networking:

- > enables your personal need to socialise
- > extends your reach to a wider audience; and over a 24/7 timeframe
- > puts you into a target zone of head-hunters, constantly searching for candidates; and
- > allows you to control with consistency, that first impression you make on others.

Social networking is exceptionally empowering too. It allows you to align your social network and career management, independent of your current organisation and your boss. This can be a very liberating experience, especially for those considering, or in the process of a career transition.

Personalising your brand

Facebook is a good tool as it focuses on the fun and friendly side of personal relationships. For those who currently use it, there is no need to stop. That said, with reference to your career, it lacks a bit of bite in terms of value-add.

In contrast, LinkedIn is engineered for business, structured around careers and focuses professionally on helping you build up and connect to your business network. Moreover, it is a well known space where "hunters" go to seek the "hunted".

The real challenge begins in discovering how to use that chosen tool to position yourself to your best advantage. Going online is a little like placing yourself in a large department store window. When people pass by and look inside, it is only your avatar they see, isn't it? Therefore, what do you want them to see, how do you want to make them feel, and importantly, what do you want them to say and do afterwards?

You only ever get one chance to make that first impression, so a little forethought now will provide you a bigger paycheck later.

As you start to build your online presence, keep these eight points in mind. They

will help you project "Brand You" online in a much more captivating way.

1. **Permanence.**
Whatever one says online, stays online. There is no eraser, so think before you publish.

2. **Be truthful.**
Ensure that what is published is correct. Never publish anything that you may have to explain afterwards.

3. **Be consistent.**
Ensure that anything you say aligns to everything you have previously said about your career. Search engines are powerful, fast and flag inconsistencies quickly.

4. **Be realistic.**
Just because words are your embodiment online, it does not mean that you can indulge in fantasy. You may desire a career with future possibilities, but your suitability for it is grounded in present realities.

5. **Think of the future.**
When people employ you, they don't look for a better yesterday, but a different and brighter tomorrow. Make sure to position your past to exemplify areas where you can help them in the future.

6. **Be positive.**
When networking online, choose to take a positive treatment of your past work experiences, framed by optimism for the future. People hire the optimists, not the pessimists.

7. **Show your personality.**
People hire people they feel they can work with. So ensure that your avatar encapsulates your own personality. Unlike a CV, the web gives you an opportunity to add a little character.

8. **The essence of you.**
Capture the full essence of who you are, what you can do for others and the manner in which you go about things.

Remember, charisma is the colour of your character, and social networking tools give you a certain freedom of expression. Try it, and see how going online can work for you, and help in managing your career.

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