



6. Online Professional Networking

Face-to-face networking is essential, but you can't afford to ignore online networking, which has exploded in the last decade. More companies are using social media to recruit. Why? Some companies have found that there are many benefits to online networking and recruiting via social media.

Most of us are familiar with social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which can be used for professional networking or, more often, to keep up with friends, people in the news, and personal interests. For professionals, however, the giant in the room is LinkedIn. It operates one of the world's largest professional networks.

LinkedIn, like all social media sites, begins with your profile. Since your profile can be seen by anyone on LinkedIn, it's a great chance to present your goals, experience, and qualifications to any of the members who may be looking. Take time to make sure it looks professional, features a good current headshot, and contains only information relevant to your professional life. (Use other sites for personal interactions - like Facebook for posting funny cat videos, or Match.com for finding a date.) Refer to LinkedIn for additional help with your profile.

After you make yourself as attractive as possible to potential companies and recruiters, do you then just sit back and wait to be discovered? No!

- **Grow your network.** People in your LinkedIn network are called "connections." Send a personalized invitation to connect to everyone you know on the site. Spend a few minutes every day trying to expand your network as you meet new people. Explore your connections' connections and see if you can get an introduction to someone who may work in a field or at a company you're interested in. Accept invitations that come your way, as long as the person's profile looks legitimate.
- **Reach out to connections** with a polite, not pushy, "in mail" request for an informational interview or just to hear their story. (You can meet in person, by phone, or via video conferencing using a free service such as Skype, Facetime).
- **Join groups** related to your profession and schools you attended, and job search groups for advice and encouragement. Keep up with the content, and demonstrate expertise by posting content and offering insight or advice when you can. Be a resource to others. That goodwill you create might open doors for you someday.
- **Follow companies** in your field to track news and job openings.
- **Keep your profile updated.**



Social Media

LinkedIn may be the big player in the online professional networking world, but other forms of social media are even more popular. Twitter allows its users, including job seekers, to send out messages (short 140-character “tweets”) to potentially large groups of people as well as follow people or companies. As a job seeker, Twitter can be used to locate job leads, to connect with current employees of a company and to build up your “brand”. You can showcase your knowledge and experiences related to a specific job related topic or program to show potential employers how you can add value to their company. Twitter can also be used as a way to research news or updates regarding companies that you might be interested in working for as many companies post updates or news related to their company on Twitter.

Facebook has a great number of users and frequency of use. Other popular sites include YouTube (video sharing), Instagram (image sharing), Pinterest (content sharing), and Tumblr (blogs). As you engage with these or other social media sites, be aware that your social media presence has potential to help or harm your job search.

Like LinkedIn, these social media sites start with a profile. Pay attention to your privacy settings. Anything that you or friends post that is “public” can be found by a company or recruiter. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow you to lock down who can see your information – limiting viewers to approved “friends” or “followers.” Pinterest, YouTube, and Tumblr accounts are more commonly public, but also offer private options.

These steps will help avoid social media pitfalls that could harm your career.

- Ask yourself, “Would I want my posts to be seen by professional colleagues?”
 - If the answer is no – and it is for most people chatting about news, politics, and dog antics on Facebook or sharing vacation pictures on Instagram – make sure your privacy settings are set to private. Look at photos or posts where a friend has “tagged” you. If their privacy settings are public, a recruiter might see that information. Ask the friend to remove tags from any posts that could raise red flags – like inappropriate photos, discriminatory comments, discussions about drug use, or bad-mouthing employers.
 - If the answer is yes – you use the social media account for professional purposes – verify that your privacy settings allow public access. Delete any posts that don’t promote the type of professional image you want to portray.
- Make sure any posts you make to public boards – whether you’re chatting about politics, redecorating or car maintenance – are polite, helpful, and factual. Remember anyone can read public posts, and form opinions about you. One workaround is to consider using a non-identifiable user name for boards unrelated to your professional life.
- Refer to the Your Online Image section below for more details.

Once you’ve eliminated the risk that your social media presence could harm your job search, take advantage of ways social media can help.



- **Follow companies and industry associations** to track trends and learn about job openings. They often have a presence on Facebook and Twitter, and may also have information about products or services on YouTube and Instagram.
- **Follow thought leaders and professionals at companies of interest**, and offer insightful comments. See if you can build a relationship. Maybe they'll follow you back or think of you when they hear of an opening!
- As noted earlier, **let your friends or followers know when you're looking for a new job** or insights into a company or industry. You never know who might be able to help, or have a friend who can help.
- If you have a public account, **post information that will attract followers in your field**, cement your "brand," and grow your network.
- **Participate in online conversations**, posting original content and links to your personal profile or blog to draw in new followers.

Networking is an important part of managing your career, and following these tips will help you master it.

Protecting Your Privacy

Online networking is vital and helpful, but be sure you don't give scammers an opportunity to steal your valuable personal information.

- **Set passwords that are hard to guess.** No names of family members or pets. No special dates like your birthday and anniversary. Nothing easy to guess like "password" or "12345." Find a word or phrase that means something to you, so it's easy for you to remember but hard for anyone to guess. Including letters, numbers, and symbols will make your password safest.
- **Protect valuable information.** Never put your social security number, mother's maiden name, birth date, or bank account information in your online resume or a social media profile.
- **Be aware of "phishing" scams**, where someone might impersonate a potential employer and reach out to you, claiming to need your social security number to conduct a background check, or your bank account information to set up direct payment. Confirm through your own research and by contacting the company to ensure the person is indeed approaching you with a real job offer.
- **Don't accept every friend or follower request.** If you get follower or friend requests from a stranger, look at their profile to assess whether they are real or simply trying to access your profile and contacts. Finding little content or few connections are red flags.

Verify questionable job ads with a simple web search, entering the company name and "scam" or "complaints" to see if you should be wary.



Your Online Image

It used to be that employers only had resumes, cover letters, and interviews to go by when making hiring decisions. That changed with increased use of the internet and social networking. **Many employers check profiles on popular online sites before making interviewing and hiring decisions.** Some posted material can leave employers wondering what type of employee you would be. This includes:

- Inappropriate photos, such as photos of you and your friends drinking or wearing inappropriate clothes.
- Inappropriate comments by your friends. Remember you can delete comments under your photos.
- Discussions about alcohol or drug use.
- Talking poorly about previous employers.
- Discriminatory comments; for instance, using slang terms for racial or ethnic minorities.
- Lying about qualifications.
- Sharing confidential information about past, current, or prospective employers.

Your online identity can help or hurt you. If an employer is considering you seriously enough to research you online, make sure that your own words or photographs don't come back to haunt you. Do an online search of your name to see what information and/or images of you come up. This will help you catch potential red flags.

Clean up your online identity. Don't list personal information or post comments, photos, or videos that you wouldn't want an employer to see. Think of everything you put online as public information. Remove any inappropriate terms, gripes about old employers, or discriminatory comments.

Create a professional online identity. Join LinkedIn and other online professional groups that are related to your career or industry. Ask someone to "recommend" you on LinkedIn. Create an online portfolio using work samples to market yourself. Blog about your professional interests.

Be choosy about who you "friend." Your profile may be squeaky clean, but make sure you don't suffer from guilt by association.

Check your grammar, spelling, and writing. Many employers reject job applicants because they show poor communication skills. Consider your online presence as part of your portfolio. Read through any of your postings to catch errors.



Build Your Brand

Your resume, your elevator speech and your online presence are all elements of your brand. Make sure each component reflects a positive image of you! Your brand should reflect your skills and accomplishments, while also reflecting the type of job you hope to get.

- **Resume:** To get help revising your resume or to have it reviewed professionally at no charge, visit your [local American Job Center](#).
- **Elevator speech:** Practice it with friends and family so it will flow smoothly when you network and talk with employers. When you describe yourself, rather than saying you are unemployed, talk about your efforts to put your skills to work.
- **Your online presence:** LinkedIn is a great place to let your network and potential employers know you are available and ready to work. Consider asking a friend or valued former colleague who is on LinkedIn to “recommend” you. Use Twitter to showcase your knowledge and experiences related to a specific job related topic or program. Check your Facebook profile and posts to ensure they are in line with the professional brand you are building. Google yourself – and clean up any negative reflections on your character.



Using the information you've studied in this section, set up an account with LinkedIn and complete your professional profile.



Confirm the applicable NH unemployment insurance requirements and be sure to follow them closely to avoid benefit disqualifications or overpayments.