Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives. What some first considered a trend has now become a mainstay. Social networking sites, blogs, wikis and other platforms have substantially changed the way individuals, communities and organizations communicate. These mediums have not only significantly influenced our personal relationships, but also have become a more powerful presence in our professional interactions. Specifically, social networking sites dramatically impact how we connect with colleagues, navigate job searches and market our brands.

The Big Three
If you’ve already been leveraging social networks to bolster your career, you’re on the right path. If not, now is the time to start! There are multiple options to choose from. The three most prominent social networking powerhouses today are LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. In less than a decade, they have all grown exponentially, boasting users from all demographics. Although their services differ slightly, each network provides vital tools for anyone who is serious about managing and advancing their careers.

By far, the most well-known and well-used social network is Facebook, which currently has 800 million users and is estimated to reach 1 billion in the near future. Although primarily geared for personal use, Facebook has features that can benefit your career. LinkedIn is presently the number one professional networking site with over 100 million users, and growing. Members have the opportunity to tout credentials, exchange ideas and information, post recommendations and connect with professionals in similar industries. Twitter has over 300 million registered accounts with 100 million active users and is increasing daily. A free microblogging site, Twitter offers the opportunity to interact in real time with text-based messages or “tweets,” enabling participants to network and establish contacts.

If you are just getting acquainted with social media, your best bet is to first choose one social network and master that before expanding to other platforms. If you are already using a network, you’ll want to be sure you are maximizing your social media experience to pump up your professional network and enhance your employability.

How Can Social Networks Catalyze Your Career?
Networking opportunities: It is no secret that networking is still the most effective way to find a job. Sites like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook are the conduit for expanding and enhancing your network. By tapping your connections, you can maximize your efforts and minimize time spent on securing job leads. Even if you are not presently seeking employment, building your network is essential. Similar to insurance, it is best to have it in place before you need it in the event you unexpectedly lose your job, your company downsizes, or you just decide it’s time...
for a career change. Reach out and invite your contacts to be your advocates! Remember, too, that you also need to share information and resources. Networking is a reciprocal process. Be willing to take the time to assist your connections when they are in need, and the favor will likely be returned.

**Practical and plentiful job search resources:** LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook all offer advantageous job-related resources. For example, LinkedIn provides a job search engine that allows you to search by title, keyword or company name, and provides an advanced search function that will create job search agents to continuously inform you of current openings in your field. The LinkedIn Group directory is another beneficial feature that helps identify niche professional groups in your industry that you can join and use to network. Or, you can also create a group of your own and invite others to join. Twitter, too, has several job hunting and networking resources. TwitJobsearch.com is a job search engine that scour Twitter for any new job opportunities that are tweeted and posts them to your account.

TweetMyJobs is another Web site that conducts job searches based upon the parameters you input, and then sends notifications of suitable matches to your email, mobile phone or Twitter account. A basic Twitter account allows you to search by keyword for job-related tweets and career information. You can also choose to follow an organization’s news and events to stay in touch with current trends in the field.

Facebook’s professional network, known as Branchout, offers job search capabilities that not only search by keyword and location, but also immediately reveal any Facebook contacts you may already have at the organizations you are targeting, so you can immediately leverage your network. Users can also view company Facebook pages to research organizations and glean pertinent intel prior to an interview. Many of the big job search boards, such as CareerBuilder and Indeed, also have Facebook pages where current resources and leads for job hunters are posted. (See Related Resources for more information on each social networking site.)

**Engaged employers:** Employers have become savvy connoisseurs of social media. Most companies and organizations have established Twitter accounts and Facebook pages as a marketing and communication tool. Moreover, according to Cachinko.com, more than 80 percent of employers are currently using social networks, especially LinkedIn, as a popular resource for investigating and identifying potential candidates. Many employers like the idea of recruiting new hires from a trusted source. Using social networks to locate candidates with the right fit can also eliminate potential turnovers, saving the company money and time. Without a vibrant online presence, you may be missing many viable opportunities to showcase your talents and convey your experience to employers who are trolling the networks for talent. Position yourself accordingly and reap the benefits.

**Use Social Media Wisely; Adopt Best Practices**

**USE TUTORIALS**

Each network provides some form of text-based or video tutorials, FAQ and/or help sections that can instruct you on available features. Once you set up an account, take the time to explore the services offered and become acclimated to all the functions in order to optimize your social networking experience. (See Related Resources.)

**MANAGE AND MONITOR YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE**

Be careful what you post on any social network. Employers are not only using social networks to search for top talent, but also to conduct background checks and screen potential candidates. The content and photos you post on social networking sites can tell employers a lot about you. A negative profile picture on Facebook could be your demise. Take control of your online profile. Use the privacy settings on your Facebook account. Also, be aware of what you tweet as these will show up in a Google search for anyone to view. Is your digital reputation distinct or disappointing? Google your name to view your online presence. If damage control is needed, it’s better you find this information before employers do. Always maintain a professional online presence. (See Related Resources.)

**QUALITY OVER QUANTITY**

Although it is important to grow your professional network, choose contacts thoughtfully. Make sure they are mutually meaningful and supportive. Before you connect with someone, consider how that person can help you and visa versa.

**BE ACTIVE**

It is not enough to create a network account and walk away. You need to actively participate to make it useful. Share helpful information on your Facebook wall. Tweet about current events in your field. Demonstrate your skills and promote others on LinkedIn.

**Jump In!**

Social networks can prove to be a great addition to your career toolbox. As a job hunter, be sure to remember to use them in conjunction with other traditional job search tools to create a well-rounded approach. Wherever you are on your career path, adding a social networking strategy will ensure that you are well equipped for continued success in your career.

**Related Resources**

- **Twitter Basics**
  - http://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics

- **Tweet My jobs**
  - www.tweetmyjobs.com

- **TwitJobSearch**
  - www.twitjobsearch.com

- **Facebook Basics**
  - www.facebook.com/help/basics

- **Facebook Professional Network: BranchOut**
  - http://branchout.com

- **LinkedIn Webinar Trainings**
  - http://learn.linkedin.com/training

- **LinkedIn Job Seeking Webinars**
  - http://learn.linkedin.com/jobseeker

- **Vizibility Online Identity Calculator**
  - www.onlineidcalculator.com

- **Social Networking Safety Tips, StaySafeOnline.org**
  - www.staysafeonline.org/resource-document/social-networking-tips

**Access this article and many additional career-related links at the Excelsior College Career Center at [www.excelsior.edu/career](http://www.excelsior.edu/career).**

**Questions or comments about this article?**

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