The Changing Role of Social Media in the Job Search and on the Job

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Introduction

This document has two main goals that it aims to accomplish in the first two parts. First, it aims to explain to students how to use social media professionally and the ways to use it successfully in the job search. The second part explains the practical use of professional social media in the workplace and how to use it as a form of digital marketing, communication, and public relations for both for- and non-profit organizations. I have also included sections discussing analytic software and search engine optimization, sources to read for more information, and a brief glossary of terms used in this document.

This document utilizes both primary and secondary research. The information within came from websites, digital marketing books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and an interview with Brian Honigman, a digital marketing professional and University of Pittsburgh alumnus. For a specific list of sources, make sure to look over the Works Cited section.

The Importance of Establishing a Professional Identity Through Social Media

Creating Professional Social Media Networks

Maintaining a professional image online holds a high level of importance in today’s job market. One in five employers research applicants’ social media profiles before ultimately deciding to make a job offer (Honigman). According to On the Efficiency of Job Search with Social Networks, the first step in using social media involves creating professional profiles that exist separately from personal ones. Specifically, current students should create – and maintain – professional LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook accounts.

Integrating Professional Social Media into Current Communication

After creating professional social media accounts, make sure to make regular posts. You should post career-related updates such as news articles pertaining to your field, current events at your internship/job, and published works. Frequent posting will help your name to appear first on search engines that employers may use to research your digital history prior to offering you an interview and/or job. The third part of this document offers more information on search engine optimization.
Minimally, you should tweet three to four times a day and post on Facebook one to two times a day. “You should only make posts on your personal LinkedIn when you have a big announcement to make – such as being published or accepting a job offer” (Honigman).

You should include links to your professional social media accounts on business cards, your résumé, and in your email signature. This will encourage as many people as possible to view your social media pages and subsequently add you as a friend or follower to each of their networks (Honigman).
LinkedIn

Building a Profile and Establishing a Presence

With 131 million members since its launch in 2003, LinkedIn serves as the world’s largest professional social network (“Featured In Social Media”). It effectively displays work experience, recommendations, awards, education, and other key professional characteristics, effectively creating digital résumés for its users. Professionals can “connect” with one another and exchange private messages too.

Two keys to having a successful LinkedIn page:

1. Updating your page to note changes or accomplishments in your professional life. For example, you should add published works to the “Publications” section of your profile as soon as they appear online (or you can post a scanned version of the hard copy).
2. Use keywords that pertain to your professional field as much as possible. They will help your name to appear more frequently in searches that employers conduct to find candidates with specific skills. Someone looking to break into the digital marketing field may want to use words such as “advertising” and “social media,” for example. LinkedIn also allows you to add keywords under a section of your profile titled “Skills & Expertise.”

Figure 1: Sample "Skills & Expertise" section of a LinkedIn profile (linkedin.com)
Who to Connect with, What Organizations to Follow

For LinkedIn to serve as a useful communication and networking tool, users should make as many connections to other professionals as possible. By default, you can only connect with people two degrees of separation away from you (i.e. someone connected to one of your connections). LinkedIn will ask how you know the individual (see figure 2). If you have no connection to a professional, you must provide their email address and LinkedIn will send a message to them asking for their approval of the professional connection (Honigman).

![Sample connection request on LinkedIn](linkedin.com)

**Figure 2: Sample connection request on LinkedIn (linkedin.com)**

LinkedIn continually updates its smartphone apps to make them useful substitutes for the full website. The apps allow you to make new connections while away from your computer (at a networking event, for example). You can also edit your profile, post updates, and send messages directly from within the app.

Many companies create their own pages on LinkedIn. These profiles represent the entire organization as opposed to a specific individual. Following a company’s page prior to applying for a position with them can help to show your professional interest in the organization. Many employers have started to check that prospective employees follow them on LinkedIn prior to offering them an interview (Zappavigna 147).
Networking Within and Outside of the Workplace

Once you do secure a full-time job, you should continue to network on LinkedIn. You never know when a professional connection could come in handy.

You should add every co-worker at your workplace that you come into contact with as a connection. You can learn more about your co-workers from LinkedIn than what you might ascertain solely from a verbal conversation. For example, you might not know that they have experience in a certain field that you do not. Maybe that experience could help you in the future if you have a question related to it (Honigman).

External networking via LinkedIn has many benefits too. As with internal networking, you can learn detailed information about your connections through LinkedIn that you would not otherwise know. You can use this information to target potential clients that you think could benefit from a service or product produced and offered through your own company. If you work for a non-profit, you could target specific professionals that you think would have an interest in your cause and might have a desire to support it by making a donation or volunteering their time (Honigman).

What Content to Post and What Not to Post

Things to share on LinkedIn:

- Promotions (with a list of new responsibilities)
- Products and services that your company already offers
- Articles related to changes and advancements in your field
- Awards and special recognition
- Published works that you wrote

As a rule of thumb, do not post anything that your boss would not post. This includes confidential internal information, company changes that the public does not know about yet, and uncertainties (new products or services that your company might offer, for example).
Twitter

Following the “Right” Accounts For You

Twitter emphasizes fast communication achieved through short messages (140 characters or less). Over 140 million people use Twitter daily and together they write one billion tweets every three days (“History of Twitter Timeline”). With so many users you must carefully choose the accounts that you follow so that you get as much information pertinent to your professional field as possible.

You can use LinkedIn as a place to start finding professionals to follow on Twitter. Many LinkedIn users have a link to their Twitter accounts under the “Additional Information” sections of their profiles. Twitter’s own search function also works well to find good accounts to follow. Search keywords pertaining to your field (for a definition of “keyword,” see part six of this document). The most influential users will appear first since their tweets received the most favorites and retweets. For example, someone in the public relations field could search “PR” to find influential users to follow.

Following the right accounts involves choosing a good mix of end-users (i.e. other professionals like yourself tweeting on their own), companies that you could see yourself working for, and news outlets that post blogs and articles relevant to your career field.

Communicating with Potential Employers via Twitter

Twitter functions as an easy-to-use and effective platform to ask potential employers questions about their company, whether they have job openings, to let them know that you have applied for a position with them, and to thank them for interviews.

For questions or comments that you do not want to post publicly, utilize the direct message (DM) function to privately talk with either people or companies (Honigman).
Benefits of Tweeting at Industry People

Communicating with other professionals in your field via Twitter has numerous advantages in the job search including, but not limited to:

1. Employers occasionally tweet about job openings before posting them on websites such as monster.com (Zarrella 32).
2. Making a connection with a company prior to sending a résumé and cover letter allows you to ask questions about the position. You can reference the answers that you receive via Twitter in your cover letter as a way to stand out from other applicants.
3. You could send a DM to ask them their email address so that you can connect with them on LinkedIn (Honigman).

Facebook

Uses of Facebook to Communicate with Employers

Unlike Twitter, Facebook offers users the ability to write much longer private messages than 140 characters (like a standard tweet, DM’s also have the same character limit). Facebook works better in situations where you want to write longer, more detailed messages since it does not have a specific character limit.

In addition to sending a message, you can communicate with people via Facebook through either their company’s page or through their professional Facebook profile page.

A company page represents an entire organization. For example, the University of Pittsburgh has its own page that regularly posts articles, breaking news, and announcements. The voice of the company page matches the one used on their website and in printed materials (Zarrella 67).

Company pages serve as an excellent outlet to start a conversation with other people who like the page in addition to the people who work for the company itself. Pitt’s own company page quickly replies to questions, concerns, and comments that users post on its wall, for example.
A professional profile page belongs to an individual. For example, Pitt’s Chancellor Mark Nordenberg could have his own page where he makes posts. A professional profile page reflects the opinions of the person that the page belongs to, not their company as a whole. Similarly, the voice used reflects that of the individual as opposed to the company (Zarrella 68).

**Sending Facebook Messages to Employers**

Sending a message on Facebook has many similarities to sending an email to employers directly with one distinct advantage. The major benefit to sending a Facebook message as opposed to an email involves the vast information available through your Facebook page. If an employer wants to learn more about you after you have sent them a message requesting information about a job opening or general information about their company, they can simply visit your Facebook profile to determine how well you might fit in with their company.

An email contains only of the information that you have written in its body in addition to the brief details listed in your signature. A Facebook profile can provide information ranging from your professional experience to your hobbies and interests.

**Who to friend and like on Facebook**

The same people that you connect with on LinkedIn should receive friend requests from your professional Facebook page. Much like Twitter, many professionals place links to their Facebook pages (and/or company Facebook pages) on the “Additional Information” section of their LinkedIn profile (Honiman).

As a rule of thumb, you should like all companies that you intend to apply to on Facebook prior to sending a résumé and cover letter. Interacting with their pages – making comments and liking posts occasionally – can increase your chances of getting a response from companies after making an inquiry about job openings. Employers will see that you have voluntarily interacted with their company via social media and will see that as taking initiative (Zarrella 67).
A caveat: do not add friends from your personal life to your professional Facebook account unless you have some sort of professional affiliation. You do not want to have the risk of them posting inappropriate photos, links, videos, etc. on your Facebook wall (Honigman).
Part II: For-Profit and Non-Profit Social Media in the Workplace

For-profit and non-profit organizations each have unique goals when it comes to the use of social media in the workplace.

For-Profits Overview

For-profit social media initiatives have three major functions (King):

1. Public Relations. For-profits seek to maintain positive relationships with clients/customers by quickly replying to questions, comments, and concerns through social media. For example, a McDonald’s customer might post about a negative experience on the company’s Facebook page. The social media manager can reply to the post by apologizing for the poor dining experience and offer to email them a coupon for a free meal. This will soothe the disgruntled customer and provide good customer service.

2. Marketing. For-profits can provide detailed information on the products/services that they offer through social media. Many for-profits offer exclusive discounts and promotions to their social media followers.

3. Driving website traffic. For-profit social media posts generally have links to the company website where people can go to get more information. For example, Apple might tweet about their new laptop and include a link to the product’s webpage where users can go for more information.

Non-Profits Overview

Three major aims that non-profit organizations seek to accomplish through social media initiatives (Araujo):

1. Tell a story. Non-profits want to make an emotional appeal to their audience to explain the good that they do through the money that they raise.

2. Strengthen existing relationships while encouraging the establishment of new ones. Social media allows non-profit organizations to communicate with new people/organizations that they have not had conversations with in the past.
3. Social media allows non-profits to constantly update their audience on the work that they do as it gets completed as opposed to sending out periodic media releases. The American Red Cross posted the following update with an accompanying link for their followers to inform them about recent hurricane relief efforts:

![American Red Cross Twitter Update](image)

**Figure 3: American Red Cross updating their audience via Twitter (twitter.com)**

**Blog Writing in the Workplace**

Whether you work for a for-profit or non-profit organization, you must use a journalistic approach. In other words, your post should go from the most newsworthy information to the least (Hemley).

**For-Profits**

For-profits looking to market their products or services through a blog post should use the following guidelines to ensure their effectiveness (Hemley):

- Eye-catching title
- In-text links to other articles/blog posts
- Social sharing buttons (links to other social media networks)
- Images that accompany the post (of the product you describe in the body of the blog post, for example)
- Brief, detailed lists that use bullets and/or numbers
- A call to action

**Non-Profits**

While Facebook and Twitter work well for shorter posts, a “[blog post] allows you to tell deeper stories, a critical aspect of building relationships” (Araujo). Blogs offer a place to
provide detailed information about current initiatives. More than that, though, “blogging provides a platform for you to use as a home base; anything else that you post elsewhere can be brought to your base” (Araujo). This means that you can use your other social networks to post links the blog post itself (tweeting a link to a blog post, for example).

Non-profits commonly use blogs to answer frequently asked questions. Also, “[a blog] serves as a resource not only to support your projects but to reassure people about things they would not otherwise be concerned about, for example, allocation of funding – how much of what they donate goes to helping” (Araujo).

LinkedIn

For-Profit Organizations

For-profits use LinkedIn company pages to talk about their short- and long-term goals, market their products and/or services, and to find potential employees. Specifically, for-profits can use their company page for the following (http://learn.linkedin.com):

- Tell the company’s history
- Highlight and describe products and services
- Engage with followers by responding to questions, comments, and concerns left on posts
- Post employment opportunities

Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profits use LinkedIn to describe their mission, engage other organizations, and grow their workforce by finding the best possible employees. Specifically, non-profits can use their company page for the following (learn.linkedin.com):

- Increase company visibility by creating 100% complete profiles that all employees follow and link to from their personal profiles.
- Strengthen their brand by having employees and volunteers add a “Volunteers and Causes” tab to their profiles. It helps to build a community and raise awareness.
- Tell their supporters about their organization and help them to follow their latest initiatives.
Sharing on LinkedIn

The share function on LinkedIn has many similarities to the same one on Facebook. You can share personal announcements (such as promotions or a career change) or company-wide ones (new products that your company plans to sell, for example). If you share company-wide news (such as a new product release), make sure to provide links with more information to blogs or news releases on the company’s website (Zarrella 71).

Publicity

In its essence, the share function on LinkedIn serves as a public relations tool. At its core, sharing allows you to communicate with an internal audience (the people inside of your company) and an external one (all of your connections that work outside of your company) at the same time (Skerik).

LinkedIn allows you to post about upcoming events, discoveries, new services that your company will offer, and news that your external audience may find appealing. Creating posts that receive many hits helps them to appear on more professionals’ homepage feeds (Skerik).

Twitter

Establishing Two-Way Communication

Remember, you want to gain as many responses as possible to any given tweet that you write (in addition to favorites and retweets). The most successful tweets motivate many followers to post a response (Zappavigna 28-30).

Tweeting open-ended questions helps to gain as many responses from followers as possible. Figure 4 serves as an example of a good open-ended tweet since it garnered favorites, retweets, and replies; it required more than a “yes” or “no” response.
When It’s Appropriate to Retweet

Whatever you retweet from a professional account should maintain the company’s opinions, not your own (Zarrella 35).

When in doubt, only retweet links to articles and tweets posted by others that help to promote your company and/or enhance its public perception (Honigman).

Maintaining Professionalism

Above all, write conversationally and remember that you represent an entire company by managing their Twitter account. No matter the level of “professionalism” of a company, social media managers should write using proper grammar in order to create clear, easily understood messages (Zarrella 36).

Facebook and Facebook Pages

Encouraging Interaction via Likes

“As a professional, you want to make sure that every Facebook post that you write receives as many interactions (likes and/or comments) as possible” (Honigman).

Facebook’s like feature allows its users to quickly engage with posts and to express their affirmation. The importance of likes goes beyond users simply agreeing with the information shared in a Facebook post, though. The more likes that a post receives the more likely that it will show up on someone’s newsfeed (assuming that they have already liked the company’s page). While comments also help to propel a post to the top of
Facebook users’ newsfeeds, users can click the like button much faster than they can draft a comment (Partridge 45-49).

While open-ended questions help to create successful tweets, the same does not hold true for Facebook posts. Posting things that people who have liked the page would find favorable can also receive significant interaction despite not having an open-ended question since they can simply hit the like button. Figure 5 helps to demonstrate this (Partridge 47):

![Figure 5: A well-liked post by Ford Motor Company (facebook.com)](image)

**Content to post**

Facebook offers two distinct types of pages:

1. Pages that deal with the end user directly (such as restaurants, retail stores, and non-profits).
2. Pages that communicate business-to-business (such as marketing firms and parts manufacturers).
Company pages that work primarily with the end-user generally have more success with their digital marketing through Facebook than business-to-business companies and experience more interaction from the users who like their page. They tend to have more likes and user interaction because their followers already think highly of them and have gone out of their way to like the page. These users would react by liking posts about special discounts or promotions exclusive to Facebook users. Pages that cater to the end-user should post announcements, promotions, Facebook-exclusive content (such as coupons), and photos of their facilities. Non-profits can find success in posting about their latest initiatives, educating followers about their mission, posting news stories of how they have helped others, and asking for donations (Gerval).

![Figure 6: A non-profit using a patient's story to encourage followers to donate (facebook.com)](image)

Business-to-business companies should use their Facebook differently. Posts should focus on new services/products, employment opportunities, articles that have mentioned them (or their products), and accomplishments (Gerval).

**Improving Customer/Client Relations Through Feedback and Two-Way Communication**

Facebook offers an excellent way for companies to maintain stronger customer relationships by reacting quickly to complaints, concerns, and comments.
Social media managers should promptly reply to customer complaints in order to remedy issues as quickly as possible. While the social media manager might not know the answer to a question or concern, they should communicate with the person within the company who does know the answer and then reply to the disgruntled Facebook user. Management can use common complaints to fix issues. For example, a restaurant that receives complaints about a dinner special on their Facebook page can tweak the recipe in the future and then post about the fix that they have made to let their followers know that they have heard their digital “voices” (Gerval).

Similarly, “positive customer experiences should be reported to management so that they are aware of what customers are most happy with” (Honigman).
Part III: Analytic Software and Search Engine Optimization

Defining Analytics

The Web Analytics Association defines analytics as “the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of Internet data for the purposes of understanding and optimizing Web usage”. In layman’s terms, analytics measures the web traffic achieved through online posts that link back to a company’s website (online-behavior.com).

In terms of social media, most companies use analytics to track the number of people who click the links that they include in their posts. Professionals can determine the success of their social media initiatives through analytics and make changes when necessary.

Popular analytics software used by social media professionals include (Dubois):

- Google Analytics (sample dashboard below)
- Yahoo Web Analytics
- Crazy Egg
- Compete
- Google Website Optimizer
- Optimizeley

![Figure 7: A typical analytics dashboard from Google Analytics (google.com/analytics)](image-url)
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) helps companies to make sure that their content appears first when people search for similar products, services, and/or causes through popular search engines, such as Google. Marketing professionals make sure that the keywords across all digital platforms (websites, social media, online advertising, etc.) matches so that their company ranks as high as possible in search engine queries (Shoemaker).

To view an extensive list of keywords for thousands of industries, visit adwords.google.com (Honigman).

In order for SEO to have a positive effect, digital marketing professionals should constantly monitor it to note any changes (online-bahvior.com).
Part IV: Further Reading for More Information

Since social media constantly changes, I have included the following list of informational online sources that receive constant updates for more information. Page 23 contains a list of books that I also found helpful in preparing this document.

Online Sources

**Mashable** (www.mashable.com)

News source that writes about digital marketing, professional social media, and technology. Writes about digital innovation and its uses in the workplace. Posts articles with excellent advice on how to construct your professional social media profiles.

**Advertising Age** (www.adage.com)

Global news source for social media and marketing. Offers detailed white papers about analytics and SEO.

**Social Media Today** (www.socialmediatoday.com)

Hosts an assortment of blogs written by social media professionals that work for both for-and non-profit organizations. Offers marketing advice in regards to professional social media. Encourages readers to participate in the digital “conversation” by commenting on blog posts.

**Econsultancy** (www.econsultancy.com)

Writes advice on how to use social media to drive web traffic. Hosts helpful webinars for free that provide detailed tips on creating successful social media initiatives.

**Social Net Daily** (www.socialnetdaily.com)

Posts exclusively about social media marketing trends. Focuses on how to successfully use Twitter and Facebook in terms of product, service, and cause-related marketing.
Print Sources

*The Social Media Marketing Book* by Dan Zarrella

Discusses social media in a digital marketing context and offers helpful tips on implementing it in an existing marketing strategy.

*Discourse of Twitter and Social Media* by Michele Zappavigna

Focuses primarily on the art of writing effective tweets. Looks at the changing rhetorical trends on Twitter and helps to explain what makes a tweet successful.

*Social Media for Educators* by Tanya Joosten

Provides tips for teaching effective social media use to college students. Provides overviews of LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook and how students should go about creating professional profiles.

*Social Networking* by Kenneth Partridge

Provides an overview of cause-related social media use for non-profit organizations. Also offers a section that focuses on the content that students should and should not post on their professional social media accounts.
Today, students must utilize social media in order to stand out in the job search and to set them apart from their peers. Students should create – and maintain – professional social media accounts during their time in college. Social media provides students with a unique outlet to communicate with potential employers outside of emails.

Once hired, students should possess the social media skills necessary to market their product/service or raise awareness about their company’s cause. They should also know how to network professionally via social media. As the first-ever social media editor for The Pitt News, I have experienced the necessity for professional social media skills and the benefits that they can bring to a company.

For more information, I recommend visiting the websites listed in the fourth part of this document. They receive daily updates on the social media landscape, trends in for- and non-profit digital marketing, and offer helpful tips for improving your professional social media accounts.
Part VI: Glossary of Terms

At (@) mentions
Also called “tagging.” When an individual/company has received a mention in a tweet (accomplished by typing the “@” character followed by their unique username), they will receive a notification that you have done so.

Direct Message (DM)
Private message exchanged between two Twitter users. Messages have a 140-character limit.

Favoriting
When a tweet receives a favorite, it will appear under a user’s permanent list of favorites that allows them to quickly view them at any time.

Followers
The individuals/companies that subscribe to your tweets. Your tweets will subsequently show up on their newsfeed.

Following
The individuals/companies whose tweets you subscribe to. They will appear on your newsfeed.

Hashtagging
If used in a Twitter bio or tweet, the person viewing can click it and then see a list of other bios or tweets that have used the same hashtag. Denoted by “#” character.

Keyword
Specific words used frequently within a given industry. Visit adwords.google.com to view extensive lists of keywords for thousands of industries.

Like
When you like a company’s page on Facebook, their status updates will appear on your newsfeed. You can also like individual posts to express your approval/support.

Retweeting
The act of reposting another user’s tweet as your own.


