

Steps To A Professional Online Presence

BY PAM LONTOS

Creating a professional online presence is a must for businesses these days. Many business professionals are wondering how they can be online without sacrificing personal privacy or appearing less than business or Internet savvy.

The following strategies can help you feel more comfortable and make sure you build your online presence in a professional manner that will help get you clients, customers and business.

1 Use a professional photo of yourself and use it consistently on all of your online profiles. Using the same photo helps potential clients and the media recognize you. Using cropped or unprofessional photos can really hurt your image. If it was taken on your cell phone, it shouldn't be your profile picture. Also, use a picture of you, and not your logo on the accounts with your name on them. A photo of you makes you more approachable. If you have a company page or account, logos are fine, but make sure they are correctly sized and clear.

2 Use established social media sites. These include MerchantCircle, Facebook, Plaxo and LinkedIn. The idea behind using social media is for you to be reachable and visible on the sites where your clients and customers *already are*. You might personally find an up and coming social media site to be great, but the majority of your potential customers are on the major social media sites and may not want to join you on a lesser known site. Don't forget the Yahoo! and Google local business directories which can help you show up to local searchers. Beware of the business directories that so-



licit your business wanting you to pay for your listing and promotion on their unknown site.

3 Sharpen up your resume and experience, and be consistent. If someone is looking for you on the Internet and gets three or four different versions of what you have been up to these past few years, they are not likely to call you or visit your establishment. Be honest and straightforward about your experience, awards, and purpose.

4 Tweet professionally. You may have a personal Twitter or

other microblogging service where you keep up with friends and family. That's fine, but make sure your personal tweets like the fact you had a miserable time at the company picnic to yourself. Keep a separate account for your professional updates and share information that is helpful to your readers, not just memes about how great you are. Share tips and advice that makes your readers' day better and they will return to you when they need your professional service.

5 Use privacy controls. You might already have personal ac-

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counts on social media sites, but these should not be synonymous with your business persona. Use privacy controls to make sure your personal conversations and activities are not getting in the way of your business. You can “like” a political party candidate or post those pictures that show what a great time you had out on the town last night on your own account but make sure you limit who can see that information.

6 Put your best foot forward by having a short summary of who you are and what you offer. Many professional sites have space for a summary, which allow you to highlight your strengths. This is a great spot to point out how you are unique and how your experience and skills work to your customer's advantage. Be creative and catchy in your self-description, but don't sound like a braggart or unprofessional. This is your career, not a dating ad. “Licensed Financial Advisor and Youth Volunteer” is far more likely to get you a call than “Perky Fun Video-gaming Gemini.”


7 Consider a video interview or demo. Many sites like VisualCV, MerchantCircle and Facebook have the ability to host short videos. These can help highlight your abilities to your clients. For a retail location, shoot a short video showing your establishment and describing your services. For a service-based business, include a

description of what you do, and how you do it. Trainers, coaches, salespersons and anyone who delivers presentations as part of their job can use a short video to show their effectiveness, humor, clarity, and style. Showing your comfort working with various groups, and your ability to deliver a message effectively over video is important to many career paths and for clients who want to see who they will be working with.

8 Remember to offer information you would want to receive as a customer. When building and reviewing your online profiles, remember to think like your potential client or customer. Is your contact information readily accessible? Did you include a link to your website or address of your location? Do you clearly state the purpose and offerings you and your business have to offer? Ease of finding information on your social media profiles is what starts the client or customer's experience working with you and your company. If your profiles are only half completed or don't offer

helpful information, your potential clients and customers will assume the same is true about you and your business.

Before you start building your online presence, make sure you have the tools to do the above steps at hand. Gather them all in one place so you can reference them quickly. It is also better to have a few well-done social media and online profiles than to have a multitude of incomplete profiles. If you work in a niche market, search online to see where your competition or similar organizations or professionals have online profiles and view their pages. That way you can make note of what you do or don't like about their profiles, and what seems to be working for them as they interact with their customers.

Most important, if you need help, find someone to help you. It may be hard to admit that you need help with all this technology, but biting the bullet and asking for assistance is much better than the potential of ruining your professional or business' online reputation. 



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