



"The richest people in the world look for and build networks; everyone else looks for work."
-Robert Kiyosaki

MODULE 2 | Professional Networking





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Introduction | Professional Networking



The professional credentials of everyone associated with a brand or cause is an important part of social media credibility and reach. Many employees are hired at a company already having their own social media professional network. If they then choose to link or list the new brand, the performance and reputation of that individual is now linked to the brand. For this reason it's important to have a plan for professional social media expectations.

The Human Resources Department of an organization is key to setting the legal and cultural expectations of online professional networking between staff and the brand page. An organizational social media policy can outline each employee's participation in professional social media, or their right to opt out. The policy manual can also communicate guidelines to using social media in a way that culturally fits with the brand. However, any attempt to reprimand or control the social media of an employee should be done solely by the Human Resources professional because of the extensive employment legalities to consider. An employer may not discriminate based on numerous factors, but if an employee's personal social media account is professing political, ideological, or imagery in opposition to a brand, this may be a "red flag" issue to alert the Human Resources department.

Effective professional social media networking can utilize employees, customers, suppliers, professional associations, and common interest groups to share the brand message to an even wider audience. Original content about the brand created by each one of those professionals has the most credibility and also the highest risk for being inaccurate, wrong, or exposing secrets. There is no legal ability to control what is said by these professionals, so the best strategy is to create such compelling and inspiring brand content that they re-share those posts because it improves their own professional image.

LinkedIn is the most popular of professional social networking websites and should be part of any social media strategy. An individual on LinkedIn can set up a company page that has its own profile, contact information, and posts updates and even job postings. User's and company's can post content in newsfeeds or in groups. Individuals can also connect through "projects," where several individuals or company profiles can be attached to a project that has images and a description. It's a shared portfolio of work.

There are many other professional social media networks within various industries and causes. Some are very...



Introduction (*continued*)

...specialized to an industry and have tremendous importance in B2B marketing. The sophistication of these social media networks varies based on the industry. Don't underestimate the B2B marketing value of a professional social media source based on the look of the website. The "networking" of a very primitive social website may have years of strong relationship building and deep trust amongst the users, so that it is a critical decision making place within the brand's target demographic. Many "old school" bulletin boards or chat rooms are incredibly trusted among circles of influential people. The online social rules can be very distinct. They may wait for a new user to "prove" their value to the community by intelligent, appropriate cultural participation in the discussions before really engaging that professional. They can be VERY skeptical of "marketing" sounding posts or links. Content may have to be crafted very differently for these forums, and it may have to have a much higher level of expertise than other social media outlets.

When evaluating any social media network, it's important to thoroughly review and understand the typical way people first enter the network, the ways people successfully interact, and the ways people fail and are sidelined.

Professional networking in social media has legal and ethical and boundaries to understand. The personal gain factor of enhancing individual profiles can be a gain for the company/cause, or it can result in losing a key person to another company. If owners, executives, and key team members have no professional network profile or if they have a poor one, the social media marketer should consider addressing the issue by carefully providing profile upgrade suggestions and/or content for them to post. In other cases, the best solution might be to recommend removal of a poor or unmaintained profile.

Once again, it's critical that social media professional networking strategies be worked out with the human resources department and be part of the overall employee manual.