

## Make Your Mark

Leverage social media to promote your personal brand

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You've developed a compelling branding statement that's spot-on. It communicates who you are, what you do, and how you do it better than anyone else.

That's great--but what's the next step?

Creating a concise and powerful branding statement is an accomplishment in and of itself--but it's only half the battle. Unfortunately, the best personal branding in the world is virtually useless unless you promote it. Once you've crafted your message, you have to get the word out.

Social media provide an ideal platform for your promotion efforts. Used properly, online networking activity can reinforce your branding by making you more visible, credible and involved. So take the next step by reading this brief article. It provides several useful tactics for leveraging social media to enhance your branding efforts.

### Choose Your Weapons

If you are new to the world of social media, here is a quick overview of three of the most popular sites:

**LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network. With over 37 million members, this professional networking site helps you exchange knowledge, ideas and opportunities with your trusted contacts. Powerful search, project status, recommendation and networking features make LinkedIn an ideal choice for promoting your personal brand.

**Facebook:** Facebook is a social network which allows users to create their own profile pages, post status updates and communicate with other network friends. While it was originally designed as a social networking site, Facebook's groups, status updates, networking capabilities and app development features make it another strong choice for gaining visibility and credibility in your chosen field. (Note: if you choose to use Facebook for both personal and professional networking, make sure to carefully manage your Privacy Settings.)

**Twitter:** Twitter is a real-time social messaging and micro-blogging utility. After establishing a user profile, you can send and receive short, text-based "tweets" that are displayed on your profile page, and sent to others who have subscribed to your page (known as followers). In a nutshell, Twitter provides an easy way to reinforce your branding by letting others know what you're doing.

### Establish Credibility and Visibility

A strong brand is of little value if nobody knows about you. It's worth even less if you don't back your claims up. To put your branding to work for you, you must become both

visible and credible. So don't just "talk the talk." "Walk the walk" by trying these ideas:

- **Get out there:** If you don't have a strong online presence, create one. Develop profiles on networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter; create directory listings on Naymz, Plaxo and ZoomInfo; vote for your site in social bookmarks like Delicious and Digg to improve your position in Google results.
- **Publish articles:** Put yourself in the spotlight by writing and publishing articles relevant to your area of proficiency. Then link these resources to your profiles. The more you show what you know, the more credibility you lend to your brand.
- **Create a professional blog:** Prove that you understand and care about relevant professional topics by contributing your two cents. Start your own blog to demonstrate your willingness and ability to give back to your niche.
- **Post to other professional blogs:** Find out who the other hot bloggers are in your field. Reach out by posting to their blogs with responses that provide unique insight or support your branding (Tip: it's perfectly okay to spend a few minutes on paper planning your response before posting).
- **Post content, links and news:** Reinforce your credibility as an expert by showing that you keep current with developments in your industry. When appropriate, post articles, news or other links to timely and relevant information which others may find valuable.
- **Answer questions on Q & A communities:** Few things will reinforce your branding more than providing the solution to a problem within your niche. Actively search out questions in places like LinkedIn and Yahoo! Answers, and provide well thought-out responses that demonstrate your knowledge and expertise.
- **Garner recommendations:** LinkedIn's Recommendations lend credibility by providing 3rd party perspective on you and your work. Take advantage of this opportunity. Ask your boss, peers and/or satisfied clients to write recommendations for you--and make sure they are familiar with your branding statement. Review their comments to confirm they align with your branding efforts before posting them to your profile.
- **Hone your profiles:** Both Facebook and LinkedIn provide prominent places to display your personal branding statement--take advantage of the free advertising! In addition, the LinkedIn Summary section is connected to its powerful search engine--so make sure you place essential branding keywords in the Specialties section within your Summary.

Get and Stay Involved

**Be selective.** When it comes to managing your personal brand, more is not always better. So start slowly and resist the urge to join every network available. Remember, the more

profiles you create, the more you will have to sustain.

Do your homework upfront to determine which sites, forums, etc. are likely to be the most beneficial for promoting your brand--then limit your activity to these networks. When evaluating their appropriateness, bear in mind the components of your branding statement.

Select media best suited to:

- your specialty (who you are)
- your service (what you do, and how you do it better or differently)
- your audience (whom you do it for)
- your leading attribute (the single most important skill you possess)

**Interconnect your social media.** Strengthen your branding "web" by interconnecting the social media you regularly use. Link your Twitter profile to your blog and LinkedIn profile. If you have a website to promote your brand, make sure you create links to your email address, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, etc. Make it easy to access all the social media you use to maximize the power of your personal brand.

**Commit to regular activity.** While you may get some minimal value from passive participation, you have to be at least moderately involved on a site to reap the benefits of your branding efforts. So once you establish a presence on a site, stay active on it. Grow your networks. Post. Blog. Refer. Recommend. The more effort you put into your online branding efforts, the greater the results you'll see.

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