



SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE

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Why do you need a social media profile?

Online social media in its earliest form has been around for nearly 50 years, but it's only during the last 15 years or so that it has become ubiquitous.

The most well-known platforms include LinkedIn (established in 2003), Facebook (2004), Instagram (2010) and Twitter (2006). Aside from their use as hubs for sharing personal content and amusing cat videos, they have become increasingly valuable channels for businesses to build brand awareness and sales growth and for individuals to elevate their personal brand.

But who needs a social media profile and why? Are any industries or professions exempt?

"No," says Jessica Deery, a Digital Marketing Specialist at Family Planning Victoria. "All businesses should have some type of social media presence. Nowadays, people assume they can find you by social media and connect with you instantly. Any industry or businesses that aren't using social media are at a serious disadvantage."

Individuals who do use it can greatly benefit their career, says Arriarne Kemp-Bishop, Head of External Communications, Australia, Herbert Smith Freehills. "Do it properly and it will help in profiling you as a professional. It will connect you with relevant people, such as industry peers and colleagues, and those who are working in sectors that may be relevant to your areas of interest or practice."

There are pitfalls for the unwary though, so it's vital to ensure you are clear about your goals before you begin - how you will be engaging on the platform and what you hope to achieve from that engagement.

For professionals, the most reputable platforms include LinkedIn and Twitter. LinkedIn is used to help individuals position themselves as thought leaders in a particular area and for organisations to engage with existing and potential customers by sharing relevant content. Twitter is a good place to share short bites of news, insights and opinions, while Instagram is a visual medium and works well for businesses that can incorporate photography, video and infographics as part of their content strategy.

Once you've identified on which channel you want to focus, note that, as the old adage proclaims, if a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing well.

“It’s like a digital business card,” adds Jessica. “People can Google your name and one of your social channels will come up, so make sure it’s up-to-date and realistic.” Arriarne agrees. “A pitfall is being half-hearted about it, building a profile on LinkedIn and not including your profile photo or thinking through your reasons for accepting invitations. You’ve got to be in it properly and fully to make it work for you.”

When it comes to the invitations dilemma, Arriarne advises you take each one on its merits. “It’s OK to accept invitations from people that you don’t know as long as you think it through. There has to be a seemingly logical reason for that person to want to connect with you – be it that they’re in a relevant industry or sector or they may well be an industry peer.”

Early on in your career a well-thought out social profile can be useful if you’re considering specialising in a particular sector or industry. It shows the world that “you are a professional person with a particular expertise,” says Jessica. “Many people use LinkedIn to publish articles and share their own expertise with a wider audience online. Networking is another advantage – connecting with people that have similar interests, or it could assist you to get a job or even help create opportunities for business leads.”

For those at the other end of their career, who may be well-established, there are still many benefits to embracing the technology. In such cases, social media can be used as a recruitment tool, engaging with future or current employees. “It’s also a way to demonstrate your thought leadership,” says Jessica. And it can help to position you as a potential mentor, while reflecting the brand of the organisation you work for.

“If you have aspirations to join boards or you want to get involved as a volunteer in charity organisations, you can start to work on social media in a very simple way to position yourself accordingly,” adds Arriarne.

What to include

Arriarne advises that LinkedIn works best when you complete the profile, but not to the extent that it replicates a CV. If you want to be considered an expert in your field, include information that supports that – not just your educational qualifications or previous roles, but memberships of relevant bodies and associations. “A good way to think about it is if a potential client wants to know a little bit more about you before they engage you, what would you ideally want them to read? If they jump into LinkedIn and look up your profile, what do you want them to see?”

Everyone is human

Jessica and Arriarne both acknowledge that there may be times when you get things wrong on social media, perhaps inadvertently posting something inappropriate or even defamatory. Proving there’s no definitive response to this, their advice differs. “Don’t react immediately,” says Arriarne, while Jessica says, “The first thing is to act quickly.”

Arriarne believes the most important thing is to think it through before you act. “Don’t engage immediately, don’t engage thoughtlessly, you’ve got to be very, very careful.”

Jessica, on the other hand, says damage control should be instant. “It’s a matter of acting as quickly as possible and responding to and acknowledging the error. Apologising and moving on. Not being scared, because we all make mistakes and people understand that.”

Don’t feed the trolls

If, on the other hand, you find yourself subject to abuse and attacks in the social media space, both women agree. ‘Don’t feed the trolls’, though Jessica adds it’s important to differentiate between those who are trolling purely to get their opinion across without any valid points to make and those who may be negative, but do warrant a reply. “Someone criticising your business may actually have a good point to make and it’s important you respond, even if you don’t agree with their comment,” she says. “This can actually benefit you because your other followers will see how you responded to that.”

If you are interested in enhancing your social media presence you may want to try the following:

1. **Start connecting:** Use social media to connect with other like-minded individuals, not just as a promotional platform for yourself, but also for your business or the organisation you work for.
2. **Be active:** Log into your social media accounts every day, even if it’s just to scan what’s happening, discover the trends and learn what people are talking about.
3. **Be proactive:** Know what your competitors are doing in the social media space, because if they are ahead of you, your customers may be there too.
4. **Be bold:** Don’t be afraid of social media and don’t ignore it. Additionally, don’t be afraid to share others’ articles and posts if it’s something you have an opinion on.
5. **Start writing:** If you are focused on positioning yourself as a thought leader, remember to write your own articles on LinkedIn and share them.

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