

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

research brief

Social Networking for Workforce Professionals: A Primer

by Savannah Barnett, Michele Martin, and Robb C. Sewell

This brief, the first in a series, aims to introduce the topic of social networking to workforce professionals and educators. Future briefs will highlight specific strategies for social networking for business services professionals, frontline job search counselors, and higher education career services officers.

Why Social Media Matters in Job Search

As social media use explodes in the general population, businesses are increasingly turning to social media tools to aid their recruitment and talent development efforts. In a 2010 survey of employers, 92% of hiring managers indicated that they were using or planned to use social networking to find new employees.¹ At the same time, these employers indicated that they are spending less on online job boards and investing more in using tools like LinkedIn and their own company Web sites to find and recruit top talent.

Networking has always mattered in the job search. Employers have consistently found that referrals were their most reliable source of qualified applicants and have generally turned first to their networks to find external hires. Social media tools have accelerated this process and made it easier than ever for employers to tap their networks and find the right workers.

At the same time, social media tools also provide job seekers with access to information that they might otherwise not have been able to find that can aid them in their job search. Through online social networking tools, they can identify hiring managers, find “hidden” job opportunities, and discover individuals within their own networks who may be a link to a company or industry that interests them. Social media also provides job seekers with unprecedented opportunities to build an online reputation for themselves, showcasing their talents and skills in ways that are more dynamic and engaging than the traditional résumé.

Several social networking sites can be helpful to job seekers, career counselors, and educators. These sites are an increasingly important facet of a well-rounded job search. An overview of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter is presented below, as is a quick glimpse of other popular social media tools. Future briefs in this series will explore these media in more depth and provide case study examples of successful social media job search tactics.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) is the most widely known job-focused social networking platform. Of those companies that are using social networking for recruiting, 78% use LinkedIn.² LinkedIn

boasts 90 million users, including executives at large multi-national corporations. One million companies maintain “company pages,”³ which can be used to find contacts at the organization, review employee statistics (such as the most common schools employees attended), and conduct job search background research. LinkedIn also has “groups” where people with similar interests and careers can network and an “answers” section where experts can come together to ask questions and share information.

As with many social media sites, users build a “profile” on LinkedIn. This profile is in many ways similar to a traditional paper résumé and features job history, skills, and career goals. LinkedIn allows users to connect with former and current colleagues, classmates, business partners, as well as others with whom they may share a similar interest. Networking can be used to explore career leads, visualize connections to companies and industries, and research businesses for the job search. Unlike a traditional résumé, LinkedIn also allows users to endorse each other through

recommendations. These recommendations add credibility to a user’s profile and provide more information to potential employees and colleagues.

LinkedIn is built on the notion of trust and reliable recommendations to source candidates and to find job leads. Unlike some social networking sites that embrace connecting with those outside of one’s network, LinkedIn stresses connecting with people one has done business with and relies on recommendations and extensive personal networks to reach out to second- and third-degree connections. For instance, if a user wants a lead at company X, but does not directly know someone at that company, the individual can search his or her network to see if one of their connections knows someone at that company and then ask for an introduction. This ability to “visualize” network connections makes it easier for job seekers to utilize those connections in gaining access to hiring managers and getting “inside information” on companies.

Use by Employers

LinkedIn – Many companies are using LinkedIn to source candidates, to post job openings, and to keep employees and interested job seekers abreast of company news and information. Recruiters can use keyword searches in LinkedIn to find candidates and invite them to apply for jobs. Sodexo maintains a LinkedIn group, Sodexo Careers (www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=44261), where job seekers, current employees, and company alumni can network, ask questions of each other, and be alerted to current job postings.

Facebook – Many organizations are using Facebook as a customer service tool through company “fan” pages, but businesses are increasingly creating “careers” pages. For example, see Ford Motor Company Careers (<https://www.facebook.com/FordMotorCompanyCareers>) and Ernst and Young Careers (<https://www.facebook.com/ernstandyoungcareers>). Both companies release all job openings on their Facebook pages.

Twitter – Numerous companies use Twitter to announce jobs and direct people back to their company Web site to find full job descriptions and to apply. Recruiters use Twitter to talk about the company and scout Twitter users who might be good candidates for the organization. Sodexo has both a general “jobs” Twitter account (see <http://twitter.com/SodexoJobs>) that lists all jobs and a Twitter account for company recruiters (see <http://twitter.com/sodexocareers>). Governments can also make their job listings more approachable through Twitter. The National Institute of Health’s Human Resources department maintains a Twitter account to market careers at the agency (see <http://twitter.com/NIHforJobs>).

Use by Job Seekers

LinkedIn – LinkedIn allows job seekers to create a professional online résumé with keyword optimization potential and readily available recommendations. Job seekers can use LinkedIn to research companies they are interested in and see how their education compares with current employees, how often employees at the organization switch job titles (indicating potential for growth), and if anyone in their network works at the organization or knows someone who does.

Facebook – Job seekers benefit from keeping their Facebook profiles professional and projecting a positive online image during the job search. Job seekers can let their Facebook network know they are looking for employment and feature work products and links to other online portfolios in their profile.

Twitter – Users can brand themselves as experts in their fields by sharing timely and useful information on Twitter related to their career interests. Job seekers can also optimize their Twitter bio to increase the likelihood of being contacted by recruiters or showing up positively in Internet search results when being evaluated by potential employers.

Facebook

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/>), like LinkedIn, allows users to create a profile that can be viewed publicly or only by one's contacts. While LinkedIn is primarily a professional network, Facebook is more focused on personal/social connections, although it can be used professionally.

Privacy is a bigger concern on Facebook than LinkedIn, as users typically visit the site to keep in touch with personal connections and less often use the platform for dedicated job search or business purposes. Unlike LinkedIn, Facebook has a number of extra features, including photo and video sharing and applications for games. Facebook has traditionally been considered in connection to job search for its potential negative impact (i.e., through sharing inappropriate photos or comments). This does not need to be the case, however. A professional, networking-oriented Facebook profile can be built and maintained and can be especially useful for entrepreneurs and freelancers who can feature their businesses on a Facebook company page.

Applications for job search also exist within Facebook, like BranchOut (<http://www.branchout.com/>). BranchOut is similar to LinkedIn in that users build a profile centered on career skills and job experience. BranchOut gathers relevant career information from a user's Facebook account (though it notably leaves out personal information) and can even harvest information from already established LinkedIn accounts. The benefit of BranchOut over LinkedIn is that users connect with people who are already in their "friend" base, which could make them more reliable networking contacts. Facebook also has a much larger user base, making online networking through BranchOut likely to result in more contacts than LinkedIn. Additionally, Facebook users tend to check their profile more frequently than users of LinkedIn, resulting in quicker introductions between second- and third-degree contacts.⁴

Twitter

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com/>), a form of microblogging, allows users to update their status in 140 characters or less. These status updates are called "tweets" and can include links to other Web sites, photos, events, news, etc. As with other social networking sites, Twitter users connect to other users, in

this instance by “following” others who share useful information or are personal contacts. Twitter differs from Facebook and LinkedIn in that users’ profiles are extremely limited (only 160 characters of information are allowed for a “bio”), which puts less emphasis on a static profile and more emphasis on use and interaction. Twitter can be helpful in the job search as more companies are announcing job postings on their own Web sites and using Twitter to link to those openings. Many search engines exist simply to comb through job openings announced on Twitter (i.e., JobDeck and TwitJobSearch) and many Twitter user accounts serve as a clearinghouse to spread the news about job openings (i.e., @jobangels, @jobshouts, @tweetajob, @tweetmyjobs.)⁵

Twitter is a unique social media platform and has several features that can be helpful in the job search. One feature is the option to create “lists” where users can group together similar people who tweet about things that interest them. This allows segmentation of tweets, which can be helpful if users are following a large number of people and tend to be overwhelmed with information. Job seekers can follow lists of experts in their industry to keep up-to-date about the field or can follow lists of job search experts for job openings, résumé writing advice, and tips on job search. Another helpful feature that Twitter offers is the ability to search for certain terms and to use “hashtags” for search. Hashtags are terms that begin with the hash symbol (#) and allow for grouping and easier searching of terms. Following certain hashtags or search terms on Twitter (i.e., job search, job opening, #careers, #jobs, #jobsearch) can allow for easier access to more targeted information.

Other Social Networks/ Online Media for Job Search

The number of social networking sites is large, growing, and constantly changing. Many other social networking sites can be used for the job search that are not mentioned here. Blogs, while not technically social networking sites, can be used to build an online portfolio of work and show expertise. This is especially helpful when they are tied in with other platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook. Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>), which allow users to create automated Google searches, can provide job seekers with relevant industry information, job leads, and company information directly in their email inboxes. Job seekers can also set up alerts for their name to manage their online reputation during the job search. Slideshare (<http://www.slideshare.net/>) is another helpful tool where users can upload presentations they have given or even build a PowerPoint-based résumé, showing creativity and increasing positive search results for the job seeker’s name. Video and photo sharing sites, such as Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>) and YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/>), can be used in a similar fashion to showcase skills and talents visually.

Social media extends beyond the World Wide Web to mobile applications (apps) available for use on Smart Phones and PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants). For example, mobile versions of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are available. Additionally, a wide array of mobile applications are available for résumé writing and job search, either for free or for a modest fee. For instance, many companies and job boards have branched out beyond the Internet and have begun posting their job opportunities via mobile apps. Web sites such as LinkedIn, Craigslist (<http://www.craigslist.org>), and CareerBuilder.com (<http://www.careerbuilder.com>) all have mobile

apps. Mobile apps have also been developed that aggregate jobs in a given area (such as Job Compass, Now Hiring, Job Finder, and iJobs) and are available for purchase.

Resources

CareerOneStop – Social Media in the Job Search features helpful information and links: <http://www.careeronestop.org/jobseekertools/jobseekerchallenge.aspx?category=5&subcategory=&keyword=&searchtab=&recommended=y&recommendedcategory=&recommendedsubcategory=>

CareeRealism features résumé tips, job hunting guides, webinars, and other resources on social networking and the job search. <http://www.careerealism.com/>

Mashable.com features news, guidebooks, and how-to's on all things social networking. <http://mashable.com/>

Pew Internet and American Life Project features survey data and topical news stories on Internet and social media usage. <http://www.pewinternet.org/>

Using Free Internet Technologies to Support Customer Job Search – a presentation to the Garden State Employment and Training Administration along with other presentations and social media resources. <http://gsetaconference10.wikispaces.com/Social+Media+for+Job+Search>

An array of books about navigating LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter are available for purchase, including *The Power Formula for LinkedIn Success: Kick-start Your Business, Brand, and Job Search* (Greenleaf Book Group, 2011); *Facebook for Dummies (For Dummies, 2010)*; and *All a Twitter: A Personal and Professional Guide to Social Networking with Twitter* (Que, 2009).

Endnotes

1. Jobvite 2010 Social Recruiting Survey. Retrieved March 9, 2011 from <http://recruiting.jobvite.com/resources/social-recruiting-survey.php>.
2. Ibid.
3. Retrieved March 9, 2011 from <http://mashable.com/follow/topics/linkedin/>. Also, retrieved March 11, 2011 from <http://press.linkedin.com/about/>.
4. Retrieved March 14, 2011 from <http://mashable.com/2010/09/16/branchout/>.
5. URLs for the above-mentioned search sites and Twitter accounts: JobDeck - <http://www.tweetdeck.com/jobdeck/>; Twit Job Search - <http://www.twitjobsearch.com/>; Job Angels - <http://twitter.com/#!/jobangels>; Job Shouts - <http://twitter.com/#!/jobshouts>; Tweet a Job - <http://twitter.com/#!/tweetajob>; and Tweet My Jobs - <http://twitter.com/#!/tweetmyjobs>.
6. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from <http://mashable.com/2009/03/26/iphone-job-search-apps/>.

About the Authors

Savannah Barnett is a Research Coordinator at the Heldrich Center. Savannah has a strong interest in integrating social media into workforce and job search efforts and has presented about social media and the job search at several national conferences. She also conducts research and provides technical assistance on projects related to disability and employment. She is currently providing research support to the NTAR Leadership Center as well as providing technical assistance and support to the State of New Jersey's DiscoverAbility (Medicaid Infrastructure Grant) initiative.

Michele Martin is a learning and workforce development consultant with over 15 years experience in workforce development. She has been using online tools since 1999, when she was co-host of an Internet radio show, *CareerTalk*, and was using listservs and forums to facilitate Career Development Facilitator certification training. Michele blogs at The Bamboo Project on using social media for learning; maintains blogs for the Garden State Employment and Training Association and DiscoverAbility NJ; and has developed and facilitated a number of learning, workforce, and community-building activities using social media tools. She has also presented at numerous conferences and conducted multiple training sessions on using social media for job search and career development.

Robb C. Sewell is the Senior Writer/Editor at the Heldrich Center. For over 15 years, he has developed and managed print and electronic communication initiatives at both Rutgers University and the University of Pennsylvania. Additionally, he is an award-winning fiction writer and journalist. Robb has presented at conferences on social media and storytelling.

About the Heldrich Center

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is a dynamic research and policy center devoted to strengthening the nation's workforce. It is one of the nation's leading university-based centers devoted to helping America's workers and employers respond to a rapidly changing 21st Century economy.

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