

# Creating Your Online Brand

Creating your online brand is highly important in this day and age, especially with the growing popularity of social media. According to a recent 2012 CareerBuilder survey, 37% of companies are using social networks to research potential job candidates<sup>1</sup>. For college students and recent graduates, this idea reinforces the need to present a polished and presentable brand online – at all times. If you are looking to create a professional brand, or give your current one a makeover, here are a few important suggestions:

**Create a professional website/blog** – A professional web site is the best way to market your strengths, career goals, and personal achievements. Consider integrating pictures or videos (or starting a professional blog) to highlight all of your strong assets. Another great way to establish your brand is to secure your own personal domain name (i.e. [www.johndoe.com](http://www.johndoe.com) or [www.janedoe.com](http://www.janedoe.com)) to help employers locate your portfolio or web site more easily. If you are uncomfortable with that option or decide your name is too common for people to find you, choosing a penname (i.e. MBAWiseGuy) is a great alternative.

**Participate in LinkedIn industry groups** – LinkedIn groups are a great source of information and exist for practically every career field imaginable. While it is easy to sit back, sign up, and read the conversation feeds, you will get much more out of LinkedIn groups by actively participating. Even if you do not consider yourself an expert in a topic area, your participation alone speaks volumes, and the more you read the more you know – further increasing your knowledge and shaping your brand. If you are still shy about joining a LinkedIn group, another option is to routinely ask and answer questions on LinkedIn by using the LinkedIn Q&A feature. By doing this, you establish your credibility on specific subjects, while setting yourself apart from your peers. It is also a great way to network, as many professionals on LinkedIn are willing to give advice and feedback to students on how to be successful in the workplace.

**Volunteer to guest blog on industry sites** – Be sure to research some of the major bloggers in your industry, and see if they have a need for a guest/student blogger. This is a great way to show the world your talent and sincere interest in your field. If you do not get any bites from any mainstream blogs, look into blogging for a few new up and comers that could benefit from your help. The more your name is positively associated with industry blogs, web sites, and press releases, the better you will look and the bigger your brand will become.

**Leverage social media** – Social media networks give college students the opportunity to connect with industry professionals and learn about emerging trends in their field as well as comment on them. Twitter, for example, is a great starting place to build your professional brand. First, you should create a professional username and limit yourself to only tweeting industry-related information for that specific account. (If you wish to tweet to friends and family on Twitter, you may want to consider creating a separate personal Twitter account that is private to prevent employers from seeing your conversations). Next, you want to take the time to locate industry movers and shakers on Twitter to follow.

For instance, a communication student interested in a PR career may want to follow @PRSSA and participate in “tweet-chats” with other students and professionals. By interacting in these types of online conversations, you build your brand through engagement (exchanging and disseminating information), visibility (showing industry professionals you are “present” and interested in relevant industry happenings), and by demonstrating credibility. Perhaps you decide to share with other PR students your tips on securing an internship, or the most effective way to pitch a story online, and how to create a digital portfolio. All of these examples show how your current knowledge can be used to leverage your brand and position you as a young professional.

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<sup>1</sup> Thirty-Seven Percent of Companies Use Social Networks to Research Potential Job Candidates, According to New CareerBuilder Survey. *PRNewswire*. (2012, April 12).