You.com: Top 10 Online Branding Tips for Students

Make no mistake about it: your professional networking contacts are Googling you. Your online image is incredibly important, and your web-based networking activities can make or break your job search. Are you happy with what they will discover when they Google your name? Just as you work hard to build a strong resume and in-person presence, you have to put equal time and effort into developing a professional online presence. Promoting yourself virtually is no longer optional.

Here are 10 tips for professionalizing your virtual presence:

1. **Google yourself.** Google your own name and make sure the results reflect the image you want to project. If you don’t show up in search results or you don’t like what appears, create one or two professional social networking profiles and post bylined content in your school newspaper or a club or association website.

2. **Email impeccably.** Email is a very important component of your online image. Since this is likely the primary way you’ll interact with networking contacts and potential employers, make sure you always communicate in writing like the professional you want to become. Answer all emails within 24 hours and use proper grammar, spelling, capitalization and professional etiquette at all times, even if you’re responding from your BlackBerry or iPhone.

3. **Make sure your social networking profiles are rated PG.** According to a 2009 CareerBuilder survey, 45% of employers admit to using social network scouting for applicants as part of the employment process. Would you be comfortable with a recruiter or other professional looking at any of the content you’ve posted online? If not, change it.

4. **Become an active user of LinkedIn.** LinkedIn is the largest professional social network, so you need to be part of it. Set up a complete profile including keywords a recruiter might use to find someone like you. Then connect with everyone you know by uploading your email contacts to see who’s active on LinkedIn. Next, join groups (starting with your college alumni group) to build your connections and visibility.

5. **Tweet.** While Twitter, the micro-blogging site (in which each 140-character message is called a “tweet”), seems frivolous to some, to others it has led to job offers and much more. Twitter is a great resource for following industry leaders, career experts and recruiters tweeting out real job opportunities. Follow people you admire, and then jump into the conversation on topics related to your professional interests or personal passions.

6. **Bring offline relationships online.** Spend 30 minutes a week sending a few “hello” emails to people you haven’t spoken to in a while—former classmates, internship colleagues, family friends, etc. Ask your connections if there is anything you can do to help them, and update them on your news or career goals.

7. **Share your professional status.** A great way to stay on other people’s radar screens and further build your personal brand is to update your status on Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter at least once a week with some career-related news. Tell people about events you’re attending, major projects you’ve completed, professional books you’re reading, successes you’re celebrating or any other news that you would tell someone at a networking reception or on a quick catch-up phone call.

8. **Get some online bylines.** Review books on Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com or comment on news articles and blogs related to your industry or interests. Sharing your point of view (as long as it’s appropriate!) is a terrific form of networking and brand building. Note that for maximum exposure you should register to post any articles, comments or reviews with your real name and not a username.

9. **Add links to your email signature.** Once you’ve built up a professional online presence, make sure you don’t get lost in cyberspace; you have to direct people to find you. Include a link to your favorite pieces of online content or the URL of your LinkedIn, Google or Twitter profile in the signature line at the bottom of your email messages.

10. **Stay diligent about your online presence.** Just like the web itself, your online image is a never-ending work in progress. While you don’t have to monitor your online identity minute-to-minute, you should check in on your virtual self regularly. Set up a Google alert on your own name (including any misspellings or nicknames). This is particularly important before you venture out on an informational interview or formal job interview, when others are more likely to be checking you out online.
How to Build a Professional Student LinkedIn Profile

LinkedIn is the world’s largest professional online network. It is the place to build a professional online profile and to network with the site’s 60 million+ members. Think of your LinkedIn profile as an interactive business card. It’s a summary of your professional experience, interests, and capabilities that is designed to attract the attention of important people who are searching for you online — recruiters, networking contacts, and grad school admissions officers. A strong profile is a key differentiator in the job market. So let’s get started...

1. Building a 100% complete profile = 100% more likely to get noticed
You can’t build connections if people don’t know you exist or what you have to offer. Your LinkedIn profile is your online business card and resume — introducing you to new people and showing friends and family your professional side. Include all of your experience. One of the most valuable aspects of LinkedIn is the way it connects you with former classmates and colleagues. You’re alerted when someone joins LinkedIn from your school or a former employer.

2. Craft an informative profile headline
Your profile headline gives people a short, memorable way to understand who you are in a professional context. Think of the headline as the slogan for your professional brand, such as “Recent honors grad seeking marketing position.” Check out the profiles of students and recent alums you admire for ideas and inspiration.

3. Display an appropriate photo
Remember that LinkedIn is not Facebook or MySpace. If you choose to post a photograph — and we recommend that you do — select a professional, high-quality headshot of you alone. Party photos, cartoon avatars, and cute pics of your puppy don’t fit in the professional environment of LinkedIn.

4. Develop a professional summary statement
Your summary statement should resemble the first few paragraphs of your best-written cover letter — concise and confident about your goals and qualifications. Remember to include relevant internships, volunteer work, and extra curriculars. Present your summary statement in short blocks of text for easy reading. Bullet points are great, too.

5. Fill your “Specialties” section with keywords
“Specialties” is the place to include key words and phrases that a recruiter or hiring manager might type into a search engine to find a person like you. The best place to find relevant keywords is in the job listings that appeal to you and the LinkedIn profiles of people who currently hold the kinds of positions you want.

6. Show your connectedness with LinkedIn Group badges
Joining Groups and displaying the group badges on your profile are the perfect ways to fill out the professionalism of your profile and show your desire to connect to people with whom you have something in common. Join groups you’re connected to in the “real world” or with which you already have an affiliation. This might include your university, volunteer organization or professional association. Once you’re a group member, you can comment on discussions, find exclusive job listings and seek advice from people around the world. Ask and answer questions on topics too.

7. Collect diverse recommendations
Nothing builds credibility like third-party endorsements. The most impressive LinkedIn profiles have at least one recommendation associated with each position a person has held. Think about soliciting recommendations from professors, internship coordinators and colleagues, employers, and professional mentors.

8. Claim your unique LinkedIn URL
To increase the professional results that appear when people type your name into a search engine, set your LinkedIn profile to “public” and claim a unique URL for your profile (for example: www.linkedin.com/in/yourname). This also makes it easier to include your LinkedIn URL in your email signature, which is a great way to demonstrate your professionalism.

9. Do your homework
Research people before meeting. Before an informational interview, a job interview or a networking get-together, use LinkedIn to learn about the background and interests of the people you’re scheduled to meet. This will make you feel more prepared and confident about the get-together and give you some good conversation starters.

10. Share your work
A final way to enhance your LinkedIn profile is to add examples of your writing, design work, or other accomplishments by displaying URLs or adding LinkedIn Applications. By including URLs, you can direct people to your website, blog, or Twitter feed. Through Applications, you can share a PowerPoint or store a downloadable version of your resume.