

LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA

for Networking and Career Advancement

By Alaina G. Levine

Networking is a necessity for career advancement in science. And social media networking is no different. Your online presence, via websites, your blog, and personal profiles on channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter all serve as a way for interested parties to get to know you and your brand, or promise of value. And it is becoming more and more critical for you to maintain a presence on social media in order to amplify your reputation and reach decision-makers in your field. When you apply for a job or fellowship, or send a cold email to someone, one of the first actions that the other party takes is to google you. And the second action they take is increasingly becoming the norm – they will check your LinkedIn profile. If you don't have one, the perception might be that you are not a contributing member of your community.

Developing a social media networking strategy involves planning and preparation, execution and monitoring and maintenance. You can't simply send one tweet and expect to reap the rewards. You have to consistently engage and interact with others, and you have to develop a plan that optimizes your time while seeking to achieve your career goals.

Social networking involves four principal pillars:

1. Be professional, at all times, in every way and on all channels: Social networking is not about posting pictures of cats wearing glasses. It has a specific purpose and part of that is to increase your connectedness to other professionals. A professional is simply someone who is serious about their craft and this is demonstrated in every action they take and in every correspondence they make. It is vitally critical that you are perceived as a professional, so make sure all of your activities – your postings, comments, pictures and videos – all reflect your professionalism and dedication to science. This means using appropriate language and not posting things that reflect poorly on your reputation and brand such as offensive or divisive comments, or inappropriate or silly pictures of you and cats.
2. Be dynamic: Seek to engage the members of your community with content that is relevant to them, by being both *proactive* and *reactive* with your activities. Be *proactive* by posting new content to your social media groups, starting new discussions and contacting people within the community whom you find interesting. Be *reactive* by commenting on what others post or contacting people who post things of interest to you to continue the conversation via an informational interview.
3. Be Valuable: Everything you post, whether it is reactive or proactive, should be construed as a value-addition to the community. By adding value and not wasting people's time with information you accomplish two tasks: you elevate your brand and reputation in the minds of those around you and you are perceived as a credible leader and expert. And therefore more people will be interested to hear what you have to say. Furthermore, once you are established as a thought leader, others will seek you out to establish potential partnerships. It is all about delivering a Return on Investment (ROI) for those who take the time to read your contributions: make sure that every time someone sees that you have posted something, they know it will be incredibly worth their while to read what you have offered.



4. Be Seen: The more you engage other with professional, dynamic, and valuable content, the more you will be seen as being professional, dynamic and valuable. Every action on social media contributes to the public's perception of your brand, attitude and reputation, so post often. Build a buzz around your reputation so much so that those around you can't help but think of you for that next great (often hidden) career opportunity.



More and more, LinkedIn is becoming the standard for professional social media networking. So if you don't have a profile on this channel, seek to establish one ASAP. Add a summary of your accomplishments, skills, and expertise, list your jobs and the schools you have attended, and start joining groups that are relevant to you. AGU has a group on LinkedIn, as does almost every university and university alumni association. And there are other groups that relate to subfields, particular segments of society, such as the National Postdoctoral Association and the YES Network (for early career geoscientists), and even regions. You can join up to 50+ groups. Add connections with people after you have a meaningful interaction; don't invite others to connect whom you don't know. And once you start adding connections, you can also ask for recommendations on LinkedIn, a terrific way to promote yourself and your credentials to the community.



But for everything you put online, remember it will be there forever, and there is always a chance that your current boss or PI and your future bosses and colleagues will view it too. So think strategically and for every comment you make, ask yourself "how will this post contribute to my advancement and to my community?"

Alaina G. Levine is a science writer and science careers consultant and coach. She is President of Quantum Success Solutions, a science career and professional development consulting enterprise. She can be contacted through www.alainalevine.com.



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