

# Establishing Your Online Profile



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**Abstract** Creating an online profile is one strategy to improve your professionalism. Through the use of social media platforms, English language teaching experts will be able to connect virtually and physically to share information, network and address opportunities to outreach with broader audiences. The chapter provides a practical perspective on how to successfully build the online profile. To do so, you need to engage cautiously as well as ingeniously and resourcefully. Conscious use of the popular communication tools with such engagement will stimulate creative out-of-the-box planning that will materialize impression management building. In short, you must engage strategically to portray your professionalism.

**Keywords** Online profile · Strategy building · Impression management · Social media platforms · Communication tools

## 1 Introduction

An online professional profile enables you to reach a broader audience that reflects you as an expert in the field. Recruiters, educators, students, professionals in related fields, alumni, friends, family, and educational institution leaders would be the intended audience. Build yourself online through social media platforms to connect virtually and/or physically with others. The purpose of this chapter is to give a practical perspective on how to build your online profile using social media.

## 2 The Importance of Social Media Networks

By using social media networks, the outreach globally shares your information and enables you to network and receive and/or address opportunities that would have

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remained unidentified. Placing a professional online profile on social media networks considered suitable for your profession may be a significant way to improve your growth and development in the field, your ranking as well as make you visible in most education sites or search engine results when persons look for you by name or by profession. As far back as 2007, Boyd and Ellison defined these network platforms as a means to allow professional to construct a “public or semi-public profile within a bounded system”; moreover, the platforms also offer connection possibilities with similar professionals or services (p. 1). Social networks date back as far as 1997 with SixDegrees and MySpace in 2003; Facebook appeared around 2004 (Wall & Hardin, 2009). Many professionals feel that the presence of the internet infringes on their rights to privacy; however, they know their presence online has become a requirement to function as a citizen of the world. Your online presence becomes an open book to who you are, what you do and what you say. Thus, you are expected to be aware of this, and you should act accordingly. Since the online world is approachable to all, should educators be expected to lead lives above reproach? Care in what is uploaded on the social media sites is expected to maintain the image you want to portray. I, as an avid user of social media, follow my rule of thumb: What I select to upload on any social media platform is what I do not mind being seen or read by internet surfers. I am conscious of what I say or do when I post or comment on the sites. It takes discipline to do this. I am confident in who I am and the image I portray, and, thus, I take full responsibility for my demeanor. You, however, may not be so particular and may choose to separate your professional world from your day to day “fun” you. Just be aware that the tech-users of today are sharks when it comes to internet know-how: some may be on a mission to search for helpful information, but many may be looking for undesirable and/or damaging information about a person. Given that negative information is damaging, especially if long-term, removing it must become a priority (Wall & Hardin, 2009). That is why I believe that defining your professionalism and portraying it means your standards and behaviors are maintained to achieve the image of an educator with high-level standards. Create the online profile with this in mind: Create to portray quality.

In the same light as you would put an educator’s e-portfolio together, create the online profile. Be very particular about what you tell and show the audience—sharing who you are becomes pivotal to others who are making decisions about you. It is they who decide whether or not to involve you in their future endeavors.

Your online profile will be evaluated differently depending on the quest of the seeker. Their purpose will determine if the profile meets the search requirements: For example, selling your profile for an employment prospect—say for a teaching, administrative or research position—then the profile will be benchmarked against a screening process with other professionals similar to you. However, selling your profile to recruit others to work with or for you—as a teacher, administrator, or researcher—will be looked at to portray the type of colleague or employer you would be. The value of a positive online profile makes you ready for whatever opportunity (Ely, 2014). It needs to be attractive and placed strategically.

### 3 The Importance of Deciding on a Social Media Platform

Therefore, deciding on the social media platform(s) to place your online profile is of key importance. According to Turner (2016), this was mostly done on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn although she pointed out that, in 2016, the 20 sites that professionals in business considered to network and collaborate with other similar professionals were AngelList, Beyond, Black Business Women Online, Data.com Connect, E.Factor, Gadball, Gust, Meetup, Networking for Professionals, Opportunity, PartnerUp, PerfectBusiness, Plaxo, Quibb, Ryze, StartupNation, Upspring, Viadeo, Xing, and LinkedIn, being the leader for the professional social networking scene. Likewise, Hueber (2019) pointed out that there are only five primary professional networking sites: LinkedIn, Quora, Plaxo, Viadeo, XING; she, too, agrees that LinkedIn is, using Forbes as her reference, “far and away, the most advantageous social networking tool available to business professionals today... it is the largest and has over 238 million users in over 200 countries and territories around the world...and professionals are signing up to join LinkedIn at a rate that is faster than two new members per second.” Each social media site has its unique characteristics based on its outreach aims, and professionals need to consider that when selecting the networks they want. In the early 2000s, educators used MySpace and Ning as their social media platforms to create and connect with other professionals in the field. Ning remains the largest online social platform that allows you to build your own online community (Ning, 2019). However, most educators may not be inclined to start from scratch to create the connectivity; they tend to resort to using social media that is user-friendly to profile building and outreach.

Your audience needs to be approachable virtually as well as physically. The social media platforms you consider must warrant this addition to your credibility. To quote Ely (2014): “more than a billion people use social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ without always considering how these can affect professional opportunities”—this is wrong. We have set purposive objectives to how we envision our professionalism. Act accordingly. I believe the roots of your profile should be based on the skeleton you would create of yourself in a paper-resume. The online components bring alive your stance to show the details related to the skeleton. The selected social media channels share this growth.

The networking influence has made social media one of the most popular communication tools in teaching/learning spaces (McCarrol & Curran, 2013). It is used by many tech-savvy teachers to help students find their voice; Daniels (2016) said that “the use of social media with students [was] teaching them to communicate openly, honestly, and, above all, kindly with their peers.” Why should educators not use social media platform for their voice?

Indeed, the ground is fertile for educators to use the technology to showcase the lessons they plan for the students or the attributes and positive outcomes through their online skeletons. This suggests that online profiles can reveal very interesting silhouettes. Many educators developed e-portfolios using Microsoft Word with attachments and saved them on compact disks or created digital portfolios or online e-portfolios

to showcase their professional endeavors or growth. I have also had students do this activity as a means to map their learning growth within a course (Sabieh & Akhras, 2018). Using diverse mediums to create such tasks need not be the case when educators create online profiles using social media platforms—be it through the internet itself or through apps.

## 4 The Creation of Your Online Profile

Profile creation should be a fun task. Brainstorm ways to portray creative professionalism: Be resourceful and think of witty ways to illustrate your originality. I often use an imaginative exercise to break the ice with my students in a class of communication: I ask them to perceive themselves as a product/brand on a supermarket shelf waiting to be bought. They are to think of themselves as a product/brand and why they have value to be purchased. This is a challenging task similar to my request to you above. How original are you in selling your expertise? The profile you are to create is a ‘commodity’ that you will place online to be ‘sold’ on social media platforms. What is your ‘purchase’ value? Think of your worth or importance as a professional in your field. Why would anyone take a course with you; hire you to run a program or department, or work with you on a research project? To self-reflect or self-monitor requires self-confidence and a willingness to evaluate your pros and cons (Bandura, 2000; Knowles, 1980). To attract online observers to follow you, you need to ‘show and tell’ innovatively and resourcefully.

Fitzpatrick (2017) noted that individuals present themselves in different ways to show the image they want others to perceive. You decide on how you want to be presented to the online community. This pre-occupation with self-representation has become known as impression management. You, as like the other individuals, are creating the profile you to be portrayed as online. What this implies is that profilers are trying to control how others perceive their ‘professional value’ and act towards them synchronously or asynchronously (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Goffman, 1959). According to Patel (2016), you are created as a trustworthy profile “commodity” given your connection to the people you know. For example, taking data from Pew Research Center (2017), Fitzpatrick (2017) shared that 50% of 5 in 10 American social media users log onto their social media sites daily to maintain a bond of connectivity. That suggests that they “[found] the right group on social media, [kept] their image consistent, [engaged] regularly, [diversified] content, [studied] influencers, [gave] as much as [they could], [asked] questions, [jumped] into discussions, and [monitored their] name” as Patel (2016) shared as the nine ways to ensure connectedness.

## 5 The Management of Your Online Profile

You want to manage the impression your profile is to generate. Envision the profile and communicate professionalism verbally and non-verbally, adhering to online etiquette. You want to show the value of your expertise through the skills you possess—this may be done with supporting documents, audio and/or video coverage. I recommend that you include the following in your online profile: first and foremost, contact information—including your address, email address, telephone number; second, education and professional development, skills, language proficiency, research experience, awards, publications, and professional membership affiliation(s); third, work experience and community service; fourth, extracurricular activities and hobbies, and, finally, references and testimonies. I believe personal information related to marital status, religion, sex or gender, and age are not necessary to divulge your usefulness in the field. Through evidence and by basing your know-how with audio, pictures, infographics, images, and/or videos, you are showcasing your capabilities and significance.

Plan your profile content to relate your professional context to your intended purpose; this implies the use of key terms, language, and mechanics to describe the needed competence to fascinate the audience to explore more than just an outline of who you are. Build up your personality in the profile you craft. Convey your abilities; bring them to life—use pictures, recorded footage or You Tube uploads, but be mindful of source citing, political or cultural innuendo, as well as privacy and permission prerequisites if you are using sharing images of people or places, since the social media platforms are accessible to all.

Also, when possible, resort to using the free technology tools available, such as font, color, annotation, photo-editing, design or drawing tools, to create a strikingly smart profile. Know what your audience is looking for—the type of work, goal or mission, culture expectation, context, and appropriateness—and use the tools in an original way to help deepen the impression. Just keep in mind that the profile you develop must not sound suffocating: Be bold enough in your personality to paint a spirited professional. Your audience needs to know that you love what it is that you do; help them feel your passion and dedication.

## 6 Tips to Create an Impressive Online Profile

### 6.1 *Leave an Impact*

Belosic's (2019) advice is to establish a dependable online presence. You need to be a product that is noticed and credible to buy. Reach out and join the online audience. Let the professionals and education spaces know of your presence—bond with them: Be forward; do not wait for others to connect to you. Be aggressive. Be constructive. Be proactive. Be convincing.

## **6.2 *You Teach***

Create a learner-centered tech-supported lesson plan. Show a flipped classroom in action and demonstrate your teaching style. Design activities and use alternative assessment tools to measure learning. Upload end-products to measure learning outcomes.

## **6.3 *You Administer***

Provide a curriculum page you designed with all the supporting resources to have an effective teaching/learning space. Plan a meeting agenda to introduce reform into the education setting, enlisting cooperation from the department or school stakeholders. Show teams and shared ownership spirit within your workplace hierarchy and your communication skills usage.

## **6.4 *You Research***

Advocate a problem and advance an action-based solution. Display the timeline in a research proposal you are working on. Share a recent paper you published. Take a picture of a book you wrote. Provide a link to a keynote presentation you gave at an international conference. Show a data collection phase in an experiment you are conducting.

The evidence you provide to accompany your profile creation allows the audience to evaluate how well-suited you are to be an integral part of their professional world. Patel (2016) calls this validating “culture fit”. The audience must “clearly see that you fit with the company’s culture and make sure that the things you post wouldn’t be harmful to the organization in any way” (Belosic, 2019).

## **6.5 *Know Your Audience***

Study their online presence and deliver the profile evidence as proof to show transformation, reform and newness.

## 7 Four Suggestions to Help Impact Your Profile Evidence

First, impact with #Hashtags: You need to add hash tags to your online profile to increase exposure and connectivity. By adding a # to keywords or phrases, you create hash-tags to illustrate topics of interest. The #Hashtags added to your profile provides the link to social networks using the same hash-tags. Observe the ripple effect when tagging keywords that describe who you are, what you do, what you want to work as, or which audience you want to work with. For example, one hash-tag could be #teachingexcellence, while others may be #flip and #elementarystudents. *Teach Thought* (2019) has identified the 20 most used hashtags in education: to list a few, #edtech, #edchat, #edapp, #edreform, #teaching, #classroom, #globaled, #elearning, #engchat (See also Best-Hashtags.com (2017) for other indexed hashtags). Be innovative and create hashtags customized to what or who you intend to reach out or appeal to; the hashtags enable you to become associated to other resources and chats and couple you with other users that may lead to interesting results.

Second, impact with links: You need to use web or site links intentionally to find the “right group” to nurture your profile (Patel, 2016). Add these links to your online profile. Accordingly, use keywords related to the content of your profile or your expertise, search the internet for resources, associations, or for professional databases. Select the website addresses that would provide fertile soil for you to grow your profile and explore them, keeping focus on your purpose. Connecting online with other professionals in the field, joining chat groups or asking questions, enrolling in courses or having your students enroll in courses or in communications with others or showcasing your skills and activities on similar sites are ways to promote your online presence and find audiences interested in you through your profile.

Third, impact with your Web 2.0 creations: If you have created your own personal website or page or blog on other sites, you should also include the personal spaces on your profile as links. What you create freely using Web 2.0 tools is also a way to show your audience another side of your profile—a side that reflected your free spirit and creativity through what design and content you choose to use. Belosic (2019) recommends not only adding these links to your online profile on the social networks, but also adding your social media network links to your email signature line. I find Belosic’s recommendation very powerful. I believe you should add all the social links to more than just your email messages; add them to the bottom of all your tech-based correspondence as a way to encourage more profile movement.

Fourth, impact with taglines to your network links: You need to provide creative taglines to your links. You will not effectively call attention to your profile if you just present the network links in list form for the readers to see. Add taglines to the links; that may make the readers think about the network link you provided. Have the tagline relay a message: Be imaginative in how you write the taglines in your signature line space. For example, you could add taglines such as, Be hooked: (add Facebook link); Follow us: (add twitter link); Join me: (add LinkedIn link). By having

creative taglines, the audience will be attracted to your online profile or social media links.

## 8 Conclusion

In conclusion, your online profile may be as simple or as detailed as you choose to make it. It defines who you are and how you want to be perceived. Creative out-of-the-box planning is what will make the professional communities become engaged. Social media network platforms provide opportunities for you to construct a profile. When developing your online profile to upload onto LinkedIn or the many other platforms in existence, take into consideration my suggestions but also see Career Sherpa's (2018) list of 20 steps to create "an awesome profile." Remember that you provide the content in the selected context to portray how professional you are in the twenty-first century workplace. Impression management is crucial. Engage ingeniously and resourcefully.

## 9 Discussion Questions

1. Explore the social media networks mentioned in this chapter: AngelList, Beyond, Black Business Women Online, Data.com Connect, E. Factor, Gadbball, Gust, Meetup, Networking for Professionals, Opportunity, PartnerUp, PerfectBusiness, Plaxo, Quibb, Ryze, StartupNation, Upspring, Viadeo, Xing, and LinkedIn. Which social media platform would you say is *most beneficial* for you to promote your online profile and leave the impression you want? Why? Reflect and support with examples.
2. Use the information suggested in the chapter to create your online profile. Do you feel the profile you created would have *equal growth opportunity* for you if you kept the profile the same and placed it on all the social media sites? Why? Reflect and support with examples.
3. The profile you portray should be a real impression of who you are as a professional educator. Two issues come to mind:
  - a. Do you feel the issue of privacy should be an issue of concern? Why? Why not?
  - b. Do you think there is a need to separate the personal from the professional portrayal of an educator? Why? Why not? Reflect and support with examples.



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