

## Getting Started with Social Media: The Importance of the Profile

*What you say about yourself is the fuel that drives the conversation.*

By Rick Grant

Social media is red hot right now because it finally allows the Internet to be the personal connector that the World Wide Web promised from the beginning. It was never enough to create a web of information. People wanted to connect. We saw that on CompuServe and AOL back in the very beginning. It's still true today.

We now have LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogs, online video and many other tools that allow us to connect with one another. These tools are very useful for allowing friends from the real world to stay in touch, but what about people who don't know each other? That's the most common case among people who are using Social Media as a source of new business. What's the online equivalent of a handshake? Or even a step before that, what's the online equivalent of a first impression?

In the real world, we take in much of what we'll later remember about a person over a very short period of time, which usually occurs the first time we see the person. Our brains factor in the person's general look (features, height, clothing, posture, etc.) as well as attitude, the tenor of voice, strength of handshake and many other attributes when forming a first impression. That impression is later very difficult for a person to overcome.

The very same thing is true in the online world, but instead of the person's physical self that gets that first glance, it's the person's profile.

### Where you can put profile information

Just about every social media site provides the user with some place to put a personal profile. Many people ignore this, to their detriment. The profile provides an opportunity to tell people how you would like them to see you. A well written profile will bring you to the attention of people who see the value you bring, and that will lead to new business.

Your opportunity in this area differs by the social media outlet, so we'll take a number of popular social media platforms and share some information specific to each that can help you make a great first impression online.

### LinkedIn.com

Arguably the No. 1 site on the web for professional business executives, LinkedIn boasts over 45 million users worldwide. It offers a wide range of opportunities for the profile writer and rivals the resume for its power to attract new opportunities.

The first section of the LinkedIn profile allows users to create a headline that describes themselves. This is the place to attract attention quickly. Users are given space to write a summary that describes themselves and even gives them a place to list their specialties.

What follows that is similar in most respects to a resume, where users can enter any information about their past work experience they choose. But perhaps the best part of LinkedIn is the ability to solicit recommendations quickly and easily from those you have worked with in the past. With a single click, you can send a request to anyone who worked at the same company during the same period who is also a registered LinkedIn user.

LinkedIn allows outbound links to your current company website and any blogs you have. It also makes certain application interfaces available that will allow you to share information from a WordPress blog, send updates from Triplt and more. To update your profile, click on "Edit My Profile" in the left sidebar.

### Facebook.com

Facebook may have started out as a way for college students to stay connected, but it has quickly moved into the business world. The ability to add pages and attract fans to a Facebook site and the new functionality that extends the site's social media components to other websites has done a great deal to increase its popularity.

The Facebook profile offers the user four basic sections of information: basic information, personal information, contact information and education & work. Together, these sections offer a user a great deal of space to tell the world who they are. Some of the questions are quite personal in nature, which springs from the site's collegiate beginnings. You can tell the world that you're interested in hooking up with others, but it's not recommended if you hope to use the site for business purposes.

To edit your profile on Facebook, click on the "Edit my profile" button on the left underneath your profile picture.

### Twitter.com

Micro-blogging platforms like Twitter are becoming more popular, partly because celebrities have found them useful ways to stay in touch with an audience. It can be very difficult to know if it's actually the celebrity posting to the services, so it's easier for these professionals to outsource the function. Visitors to a user's Twitter page generally end up on the user's profile, which is the most recent "tweets" and some basic information about the user. To update the profile, click on "Settings" at the top of the page.

Users are only allowed 160 characters to describe themselves in their Twitter bio, but they can point to a website that contains more information. They can also specify where in the world they are located and what language they speak. For most folks on Twitter, it's the profile picture that makes the first impression. Photos should be square and not larger than 700k. The service will automatically reduce the picture to fit on the profile. Visitors who click on the picture will be taken to a page that includes the full sized version.

### Google

Even Google has a place for users to enter profile information. While not the most social of the social media sites, you never know who might check you out there. Sign into your Google account and then click on the "My Account" button at the top of the page. If you haven't created a public profile yet, Google will alert you to this fact and provide a link.

By following the link, you can add a bunch of personal information and even choose a unique URL that others can use to find out more about you. There is room to put information about where you grew up, what schools you attended and where you work now. There's even a place to put information about your personality, complete with formatting tools.

It's not clear how often people are reading Google profiles, but the company clearly hopes people will adopt them and use them as central locations for information about themselves.

### The basics of a good profile

When preparing information to upload to any social media site, be sure to consider your goals. You should try, as best you can without providing inaccurate or misleading information, to provide the information that people looking for someone like you will hope to find. Don't waste space talking about aspects of your personality that would not be interesting to the people you want to attract.

Keep the information short and concise and make sure that at least one other person you trust reads the material before you post it. Make sure you tell them what kinds of contacts you're hoping to make online and see if they agree that this information will get that job done. As you make new contacts, be sure to analyze them and make sure that your profile is attracting the kinds of people you want to meet. If it's not, adjust it.

Finally, don't forget to update your profile when things in your life change to keep it fresh and accurate.

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Rick Grant is the president of [Rick Grant and Associates](#), a multimedia, internet-based new media firm that creates information products that help clients sell their products, their people and their brands.

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