

Online Professionalism & Employability

A guide on how to use social media to become more employable



By Gabi Lipan &
Dr Emily Nordmann,
School of Psychology

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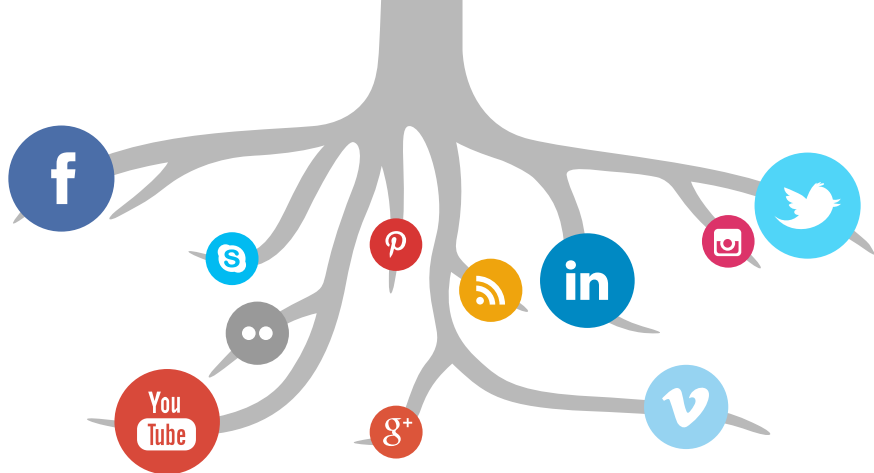
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All the data presented in this guide has been collected through a survey conducted as part of the project in 2016. More information can be found on Page 14.



What?

This guide has been created to help you manage your online footprint and become more employable.

We know that the vast majority of students use the Internet as a social tool. *Facebook* is the most popular site with 1.7 billion active users (Statista, 2016).

Social networks are used to communicate with other people, to see what they are doing, what they have shared and liked. They are also used to find interesting content and news, but, most importantly, **social networks are used to share information from every aspect of life.**

This is why it is important to learn about the possible consequences of your online presence on your employability and learn how to

manage and improve your online footprint.

In this guide you'll find tips and tricks on how to use social media to improve your chances of standing out in the job market as well as information on:

- How employers use social media in the recruitment process.
- The difference between what students think and what employers say.
- How different kinds of posts can impact your employability.
- The steps you should take to maximise the potential of your online presence.
- Methods you can use to remove or hide potentially damaging posts or embarrassing content you posted in the past.

Why?

Social networks are used to share information from every aspect of life.

In the past few years, more and more employers have started to realise how helpful this information can be in the process of recruitment and selection of candidates.

A few years back, the only things that would speak about a candidate were their CV, cover letter, recommendations and the interview. However, with the arrival of social media, most candidates have established an online presence sharing a wealth of information for the world to see. By looking at social media profiles, employers can gain insight into a

candidate's experience and qualifications, come across work samples, see who is in their network, and have a look at their personality, interests and hobbies. This information can be very useful when deciding who to hire and your online presence can improve your chances of getting a job.

However, your online presence can also negatively impact your job application.

This guide aims to help inform you on how social media can impact your employability and present you with ways of improving and developing a healthy online presence.



52%

of employers use search engines to research candidates or job applicants



How?



Reading through this guide will give you a good understanding of how social media can influence your employability. You will also learn how employers use social media in the process of recruitment and selection and what they think are the DOs and DON'Ts of social media.

What this guide can help you with:

- Understanding what your online footprint is.
- Learning how your social media can impact your job application.
- Learning which kind of posts can help and which can hinder your application.
- Understanding how employers use social media in the recruitment and selection process.
- Finding out how to improve your social media and online presence.
- Tips and advice from employers.

Know your social media platforms

It's important to know what different platforms are for and use them accordingly presenting yourself in a slightly different way on each.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
|  |  |  |
| <p>Facebook is meant to be personal. You can use it to showcase your enthusiasm, personality, creativity, written communication skills and other personal attributes that are important when deciding who to hire.</p> | <p>LinkedIn is a professional network. Having a LinkedIn account will enable you to provide employers with an easy to access professional profile where you can let your skills, education, experience and recommendations show employers that you would be a great addition to the team.</p> | <p>Twitter combines elements of Facebook and LinkedIn. You can show your soft skills, let your personality shine and you can also connect with professionals and express your interest in a certain field by engaging in discussions about niche topics.</p> |

Create a good first impression

Make use of the LinkedIn Summary, the Twitter short bio and the Facebook 'Intro' section on your profiles. These are the first things employers will read. Keep it short and sweet. If you are looking for a job or internship in a specific area, make sure you mention it in one of these sections.

Make sure that all your profile pictures are of yourself, that they are recent and you look professional (This is not necessary for Facebook, but your profile picture should still be appropriate). Use a photo when you are smiling and looking at the camera.

For posts that are publicly available, always use good grammar and check your spelling (not withstanding the use of abbreviations etc. for brevity on Twitter & other platforms that may have a strict character limit).

What is your online footprint?

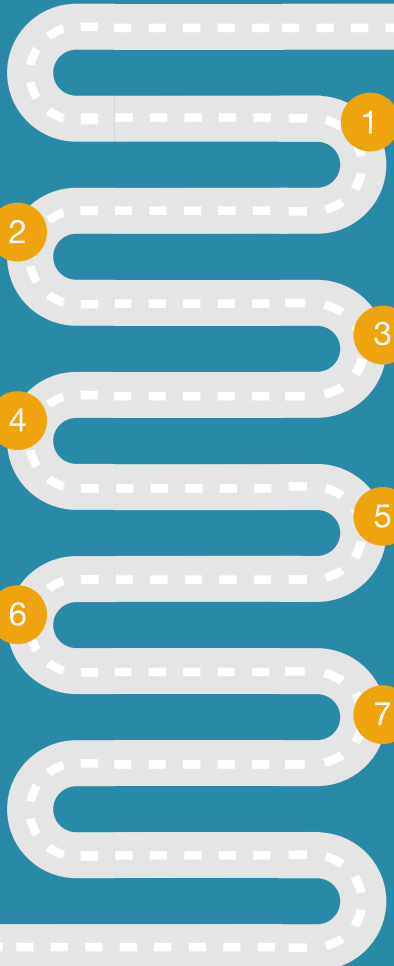


In short, your online footprint is a record of your online activity and includes the following:

What other people or institutions posted about you.

Pages and posts you like, people you follow.

Personal information (e.g. job history on LinkedIn, address or phone number from local authority records)



1

What you posted or shared on social media/forums/blogs etc.

2

What other people or institutions posted about you.

3

Your location history.

4

Pages and posts you like, people you follow.

5

Your browsing history (not public but some sites keep track of pages you visit, your IP* and what you click on).

6

Personal information (e.g. job history on LinkedIn, address or phone number from local authority records)

7

Any information you or others make available online about you.

* Like a street address, a unique IP address is assigned to any computer on a network.

How can your online footprint affect you and what you can do about it

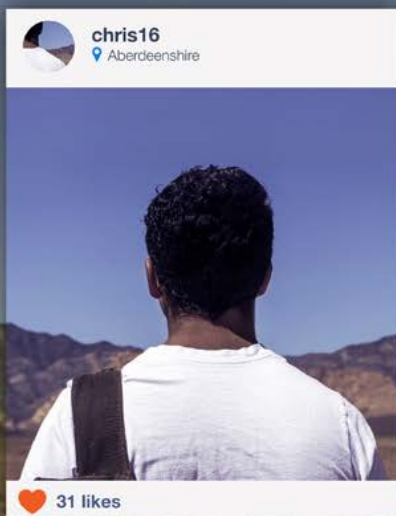
If used well, social media can be a great means of promoting yourself and showcasing your skills, experience and personality, helping employers paint a clearer picture of who you are and potentially helping you in your job application.

However, if you don't manage your social media effectively and post

inappropriate content or are sloppy in your use of language for example, the effect on your job application could be negative.

Through social media you have the opportunity to maintain your professional identity, and make yourself known and visible for the right reasons.

Stand out from the crowd by keeping a professional image, sharing articles related to the field you want to pursue in your future career and showcasing your skills (e.g. if you are good at photography, make sure to have an online portfolio, or if your strength lies in writing good stories, start a blog).



Manage your online footprint

When it comes to looking professional online, there is one simple golden rule for what not to post: if you wouldn't want employers to see it, then you shouldn't post it. Here are some things to consider when using social media:



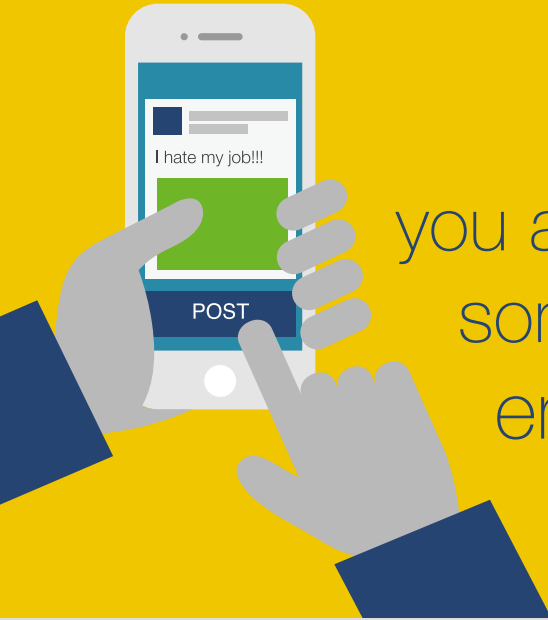
- ✓ Choose who can see your posts according to what you post.
- ✓ Make sure personal posts are only shared with the right friends (you can sort your Facebook friends into different lists). Only make professional posts public.
- ✓ What you like and comment on other people's posts/pages is not covered by your privacy settings, so keep this in mind.
- ✓ Don't share important personal details.



- ✓ Use your real name for a professional account and keep it professional if you have a separate personal account.
- ✓ Tweets are not editable and they can spread quickly so be careful what you write. You can, however delete tweets and tweet an edited version if a mistake was made.
- ✓ If you want to approve the people who will see your tweets, you can always choose to 'protect your tweets' in the settings.
- ✓ Don't share important personal details.



- ✓ Make sure you use appropriate language and post about relevant topics. Unlike other platforms, LinkedIn is made for professionals.
- ✓ Take time to create a complete and accurate profile.
- ✓ Your LinkedIn can also be made private from the settings. However, only do so if you have good reasons since it's recommended to leave it public so that employers can easily find you.



What if you already posted something that is embarrassing?

You would not be the first person to look back at your posts from a few years ago and feel embarrassed or to regret posting something online. There is no need to worry, however. There are solutions!

Google yourself and make notes of content you're associated with or have posted that you no longer want to be online. Try other search engines as well as results may vary.

If this is content you've posted yourself, chances are you will be able to remove it yourself. Most social media platforms offer you the chance to edit or delete your content. Use this if you need it.

If you haven't posted the content yourself, you may be able to contact the administrators of the website or their support team to have it removed. Just look for details in their Contact Us section.

Check your social media thoroughly and remove inappropriate/damaging posts. If that sounds like too much work, there are websites such as Rep'nUp (repnup.com) who can look for such posts and point them out to you.

How to keep your online image professional?

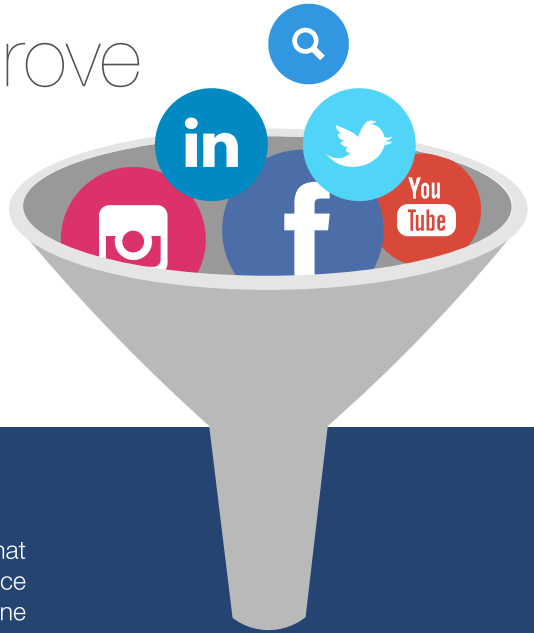
Now that you've done all the hard work of cleaning up your online footprint, you should try and keep it tidy to avoid doing the same work in the future.

Update your profiles as needed and avoid having old information about jobs, experience etc. on your profiles. If you are no longer using a social media platform or don't have time to update it, it's better to delete your account or disable it until you can update it. Try using online apps such as Hootsuite (hootsuite.com) to schedule posts. This will reduce the time you spend posting on your social media and it's free for up to three different social media accounts.

Make sure your new posts are appropriate and thoughtful. Think about how they make you look to others and post things that help showcase your interest in your field and make you stand out in the eyes of potential employers. Don't know how to do that? There are some tips in the following pages.

That being said, feel free to post pictures with your friends, from parties and from your travels, comment, like, follow and share. Just be mindful and keep it appropriate!

How to improve your online profile



Being a student you might think that you don't have sufficient experience or skills to build a professional online presence or even to fill a satisfactory LinkedIn profile, but most of the time, that isn't true.

During your time at university you develop a range of skills and accumulate experience not only by doing coursework and participating in class but also by getting involved in student activities or having a part-time job.

A position in a society committee can help you develop time-management skills, leadership and communication skills and give you experience in event organisation, for example.

Show employers you have these skills and this experience, create a personal brand by being active and consistent and engage with them on social media.



71%

of employers look for previous employment on LinkedIn.

59%

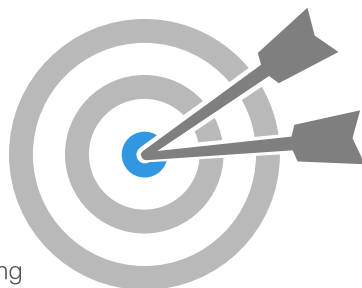
of employers look for industry-related posts on social media.

Have consistent, accurate and complete profiles

Try and keep consistency between social media platforms. Make sure you fill in every section that you can on your LinkedIn profile and keep it accurate.

If you list your job/education or volunteering positions on any other social media, make sure they are also up to date and consistent.

Always check your CV against your LinkedIn before sending it to ensure consistency.



Research companies you'd like to work for and interact with them

Companies have profiles on social media too, and there is plenty of information to be found about them on the internet. Do your research and learn as much as you can about working in the sector/field of your choice.

Follow or like company pages on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. Find out what they are working on and what they are interested in, research it, and make yourself noticed by engaging in discussions in the comments sections.

Look up people working for those companies, follow them, search for them on LinkedIn and see if you have any connections that you can use to be introduced.

Use social media to keep informed and up to date

Follow important news providers and publications relevant to your field of interest to keep up to date with current issues and recent discoveries. Use this information to make posts on your profiles and to engage in discussions with companies or personalities from your field. This will demonstrate your interest and help you build a stronger, more noticeable profile.

Use social media to learn about working in your field

Join sector-specific groups and participate in debates/discussions on LinkedIn. Ask professionals in your field about their experiences and opinions on Twitter. Take advantage of the possibilities that communication on social media offers.

Join Alumni groups and find recent graduates from your University working in your field of interest on LinkedIn. You are likely to have connections in common who can put you in touch. Ask them about what they have done to get a job in that specific sector, what kinds of skills they needed to get there and about their experiences.

Use social media to promote yourself

If you are good at something, use social media to promote your work. If you write a blog, share it on your social media. Are you a good photographer? Let the world see your work! There are different social media sites to showcase different skills or talents (e.g. YouTube for music or filmmaking, WordPress for writers, Flickr for photographers).

Use these sites if you have something to show and make sure you share it on your other social media profiles. Keep in mind that LinkedIn might not be appropriate for sharing your new acoustic cover. Being mindful of what is appropriate on what platform is key!





Privacy Settings

Some tips:

- If you are not sure how your Facebook or LinkedIn looks to other people, you can always use the 'View as' feature.
- You can also log out of all of your accounts and then visit your profiles to make sure that there is no unwanted public information about you there.
- Use the 'Who can see my posts' feature on Facebook and sort out which posts are suitable for which audience.
- If you allow other people to post on your timeline, make sure their posts are not seen by the public by default.

Familiarise yourself with the privacy setting for your different social media accounts and make use of them. Never settle for the default settings. The tricky part here is that they differ from platform to platform and are changed reasonably often as privacy policies are updated and new features are released.

Here are the official pages that can help you understand how to use the privacy settings:

LinkedIn

www.linkedin.com/psettings/

Facebook

www.facebook.com/about/basics/

Twitter

support.twitter.com/articles/20169886

Don't get carried away and hide everything - most employers prefer finding an online presence rather than not.

Some stats...

To understand student awareness of social media in the recruitment and selection process, we conducted a survey. This enabled us to compare students' perceptions with the actual behaviour of employers.

To ensure that the results are relevant for you, as students at the University of Aberdeen, we sampled students from across the University and surveyed employers that the University is working closely with. These employers come from a variety of different sectors and are active in the local area.

how employers use social media and how that contrasts with what students at Aberdeen think.

From the responses we have collected a number of DOs and DON'Ts as well as a few pieces of advice directly from employers.

Sample size: 49 employers and 66 students from the University of Aberdeen completed the questionnaires.

The results presented in the next few pages should help you understand



Students believe employers are googling job candidates more than they actually do.

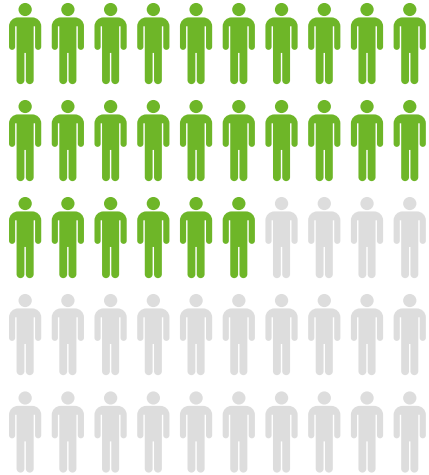
98%

of students believe organisations use search engines to research candidates or job applicants.



52%

of employers reported using search engines to research candidates or job applicants.



Students believe employers use social media platforms 'often' in recruitment and selection, however, they tend to overestimate how often and for what reason.

Most employers tend to use social media more during the recruitment process and less during the selection process than students think.

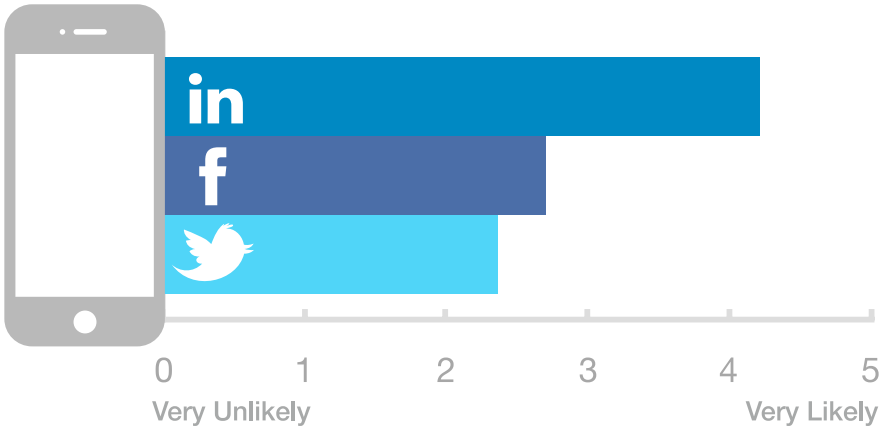
This is why it is important to stand out on social media. You may be contacted by graduate recruiters if your profiles are well maintained.

| <i>When do employers use social media?</i> | Employers (%) | Students (%) |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| When searching for candidates | 69 | 41 |
| During the application review | 47 | 74 |
| Before interview | 41 | 67 |
| After interview | 20 | 71 |

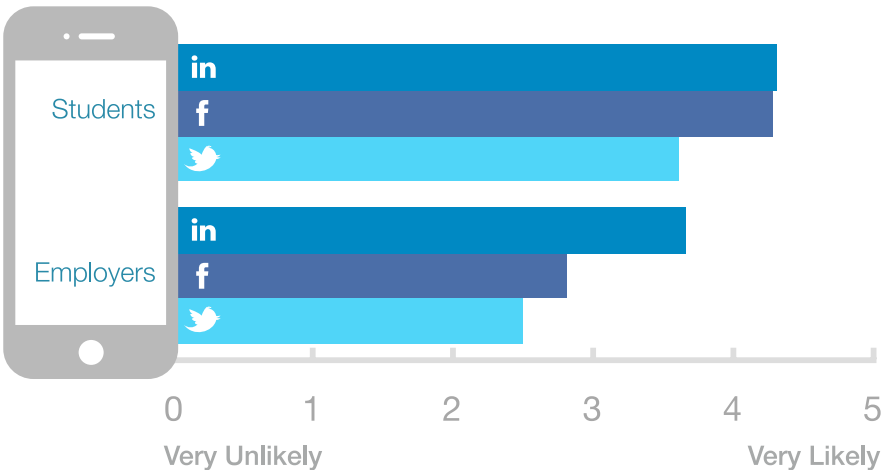
There are also some discrepancies in students' perceptions of employers' motivations for using social media.

| <i>Why do employers use social media?</i> | Employers (%) | Students (%) |
|---|---------------|--------------|
| To advertise job vacancies at low cost | 73 | 60 |
| To headhunt candidates | 45 | 44 |
| To screen candidates | 43 | 91 |

Employers are more likely to search for potential candidates on LinkedIn than on Facebook or Twitter.



Employers are also more likely to screen candidates on LinkedIn than on Facebook or Twitter. Students are more likely to overestimate how likely employers are to screen candidates on all social media.



71%



of employers look for previous employment on LinkedIn.

18%



look for previous employment on Facebook.

59%



of employers look for industry-related posts on any social media.

65% of employers look for specific skills when researching candidates on LinkedIn.

That's why you should research what skills people in the industry have and try to develop them yourself. This will increase your chances of getting noticed.

1/3

of employers

look for personality traits on Facebook to assess cultural fit. Keep this in mind when posting.



5 Positive & Negative

behaviours on social media that can influence your job application, **as rated by employers.**



Professional image - Keeping an overall professional image in line with the field in which you seek to be employed 01

Good communication skills - In any job, good written and oral communication is crucial 02

Behaviours helping an application

Information confirming qualifications/experience - Consistency with your CV is important 03

Posts/information showing interest in the field - It shows employers that you are passionate 04



Positive impression of candidate's personality - This can help employers assess whether you'll fit in the team 05

01 **Discriminatory comments**

Behaviours hindering an application

02 **References to use of illegal drugs**

03 **Inappropriate photographs & sexual posts**



04 **Derogatory comments about work colleagues or former employers**

05 **Offensive language**



Employers' Advice

“

If you can't manage your own social media, how can I trust you to manage a team or even your job?

”

*Beverley Tricker
(Tricker PR)*

1. Be sensible

Nobody is asking that you don't post pictures of you having fun with your friends. Seeing a photo of you having a beer won't reflect badly on you, but if you post a picture of you driving 15 minutes after, that will. Be sensible and responsible.

Remember that all you post online can, one way or the other, become public. If you wouldn't be comfortable with a potential employer seeing something you post, you shouldn't post it.

One employer recounted a story about an employee going on sick leave and then posting a picture from a party online at the same time. So be aware of what you post.

2. Make yourself visible

If you don't have a LinkedIn profile, make one! That's the first place employers look for information. And make sure to keep the information on LinkedIn consistent with what is on your CV. There is nothing worse than inconsistencies between your CV and information employers can find elsewhere. That being said, make sure that your LinkedIn lists all of your skills/experience/achievements, not just what is on your CV. Having references on LinkedIn is also a plus. Ask one of your tutors or your manager, if you have a part-time job, for a reference.

3. Look professional

Make sure your LinkedIn profile picture is professional. Although it is not as important, keep your Twitter and Facebook profile pictures professional too and try to have the same profile picture on most if not all social media. This gives consistency to your online profiles.

4. Add links to your CV

It is sometimes very useful to link to your LinkedIn profile in your CV. It saves your potential employer time when trying to look you up and gives them the opportunity to see immediately your full set of skills and experience. This can improve your chances of getting an interview or a job.

5. Network online

Use Twitter to get in touch with people who would be difficult to reach otherwise. On Twitter you can connect with professionals from your areas of interest and ask them questions you wouldn't be able to address to them on other platforms or face-to-face. Apart from the possibility of getting answers from experts in the field, you'll also showcase your passion and interest in the field.

6. Like and Follow

Find businesses or institutions from your field of interest and like or follow them on social media. This will help you stay up-to-date with what they are doing and receive news about job openings or internships.

7. Engage

Liking and following will help keep you updated but businesses can start noticing your interest in the field if you engage with them via social media. Comment on their posts and give your opinion or showcase your knowledge and expertise. Share their content and engage in discussions.

8. Tailoring your content

Just like a CV or a cover letter, you should tailor your social media profiles - remember that what is appropriate for one field may not be for another! Below you'll find some illustrative examples.

Social life

Publicly sharing pictures or writing posts about your social life may not reflect well on you if you are applying for a job that has a strict separation of the personal and professional, such as teaching, care work and medical professions. However, some employers may want to see that your passion for the field is reflected in what you enjoy doing outside of work. For example, if you were looking for a position with a beer brewing company, posting about trying your new favourite craft beer on a Friday night is unlikely to be detrimental!

Sharing details about work

Sharing information about your research and discussing it on social media can showcase your interest in the field. However, if you were an intern for a law firm, sharing details about specific legal cases would not be a good idea.

Political views

In fields such as business, expressing political views may lose you clients if your views clash. In addition, jobs like the Civil Service require you to be politically neutral and therefore public political posts could limit your opportunities. However, talking about politics may help you secure recruiters' attention if you are looking for a job in journalism or a certain lobbying firm.

Everything in moderation

Remember that what is considered appropriate will largely depend on its prevalence. Occasional pictures from nights out can show that you are outgoing and sociable; a daily update on which nightclub you're in is unlikely to impress a prospective employer. Occasional light-hearted posts on LinkedIn of amusing content will let employers see your personality; a constant stream of memes will give the impression that you cannot be serious and that you do not understand the purpose of the platform.

If you're not sure, look up people in similar positions to the job you're applying for to see what's appropriate.



Postgraduate Students

If you are a postgraduate student, all of the tips and advice in this guide apply to you as well. However, there are a few things that you can do to further enhance your employability:

- Update your university web page or create a new academic web page to let potential employers know what areas of your field you are interested in and what you are studying.
- If you are undertaking a postgraduate research degree, make sure to include information about the lab you are working in, who you're working with and what your research interests are.
- If you have any published work including conference posters or papers, link to it on your academic webpage.
- Keep your academic webpage updated and make it easy for potential employers to find what they are looking for by creating clear and easy to find sections.
- Join relevant LinkedIn groups for your field of studies and post about your interests and findings to stand out from the crowd.

Resources



Hootsuite can help you manage multiple social media accounts and keep them up to date more easily by scheduling posts.



Rep'nUp can help you keep your online presence tidy by identifying potentially damaging content that you posted online.



The University of Aberdeen's Careers Service offers careers information and guidance for all students. We are easy to find in the Students' Union Building. www.abdn.ac.uk/careers

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