

Personal Branding: How to Navigate Social Media

Michael Wong 09 June 2011

The *Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal* serves as a catalyst to uncovering innovative ways for Greater Philadelphia nonprofit as well as for-profit leaders to work together towards common goals. The following interview explores the concept of “personal branding” and how professionals might navigate social media to support their entities’ goals as well as their own career aspirations. To secure some of the latest insights, I interviewed Howard Levine, Principal with Heidrick & Struggles and previously a Vice President of Human Resources at Merck & Co., Inc., and Steve Ennen, President at Social Strategy1 and previously Founding Managing Director of the Wharton Interactive Media Initiative and Wharton Lab for Innovation in Publishing.

With “more jobs... lost in the recession of 2007-09 than in the previous four recessions combined” (Zuckerman 2011), astute professionals are building their own personal brands for sustainable career longevity. Importantly, they are prioritizing their limited hours toward a combination of social media and face-to-face interactions that support their employers’ goals as well as their own career aspirations.

How are business professionals leveraging social media to build their careers?

Steve: Regardless if nonprofit or for-profit, social media's impact is critical because, for an entity, it can help drive new sources of revenue and identify new opportunities on both enterprise and personal levels. Successful professionals benefit when they're able to leverage the business intelligence that social media generates.

Through active listening—using strategic analysis of the conversations on social media—companies can pinpoint information that helps them achieve objectives from fundraising to compliance and all points in between. For example, many companies are using social media as a recruiting tool to identify industry experts or those passionate about a cause, and speed the onboarding process. On a broader scale, in the nonprofit sector, social media are used to identify advocates, adversaries and benefactors and also galvanize support for any cause. Some groups, such as charity: water, use social media as a fundraising tool, a concept called social giving. The main benefit of social media, remember, is the ability for users to connect and share with other users across the globe. When a company's strategic goals are paired with the ability to spark, engage in and monitor that global sharing, business leaders have a very powerful tool.

On the other hand, if you're not strategic with your social media efforts, things can backfire, as we saw with the Skittles candy brand. In 2009, the candy manufacturer

opened its site to social media by aggregating several social media channels. In a couple of hours, a cacophony of profanity and unsuitable conversation collided on the site and imperiled the brand's image. The lingering effects were seen for months. Many folks say that the brand's image is in the hands of the consumer these days, which is partially true because consumers can create their own channels and use social networks to freely discuss a brand or cause. Companies in the social media era must be more sophisticated about brand and issue management as well as understand the power and purpose of the social media channels before embracing them.

For those individuals who have been able to successfully build social media strategies, how might they communicate such success within their own organizations as well as potentially outside?

Howard: Within their own organizations, the best way to share successful social media strategies is to demonstrate the direct link to how these efforts resulted in enhanced business results. This approach is especially important if you are in a leadership position and want to model, enhance or upgrade the performance of the entire team. In a sense you're sharing and hoping to more broadly leverage innovative best practices. One of the best ways to get this message across is to actually use an example of the social media that worked well in developing new business in your communication process

(e.g., launch an intranet blog to share and engage others around this content). To develop their own personal brand outside of the entity, there are many different potential platforms. The primary ones executive recruiters tend to use are LinkedIn and Plaxo; other recruiters for multiple-level positions also use Twitter (TweetMyJobs), LinkUp, Monster and many others.

The reason why is that LinkedIn, for example, tends to attract higher-level professionals/executives and therefore has an extensive executive candidate pool across multiple disciplines, and it is easy to search. These various platforms provide a current, minimal-expense vehicle to identify new and up-and-coming sources of talent globally.

Have you seen any innovative examples of for-profit organizations partnering with nonprofits via social media platforms?

Steve: As pharmaceutical companies continue to understand how their past efforts focusing primarily on physicians no longer work, a few of them are experimenting with new business models that creatively tap into social media. Within the Greater Philadelphia area, pharmaceutical firms are still an important presence, and I've seen GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca create blogs as channels of communication. They use these channels to deal with health issues in general, not simply sell their products. This is an intelligent approach because

individuals are always looking for reliable health information, and social media enable users to be savvy about where we can find that information. By entering the conversation as an expert voice, the pharma companies can establish their authority in the social media arena, without blatant advertising.

So with the various social media tools out there, is there still a need for face-to-face interactions?

Howard: Absolutely. Although social networks are an excellent way to extend and fully leverage your personal networks, which is the number one vehicle for successful job search, ultimately face-to-face interactions are key for several reasons. First, contacts made via social media on the surface appear to provide many vehicles for identifying your next opportunity; however, how many of these connections/people will proactively come back to you when there is a potential job match or advocate for you strongly for a specific opportunity? Once the connection is made, spending some face-to-face time with key contacts provides significant leverage to continue to build your brand and obtain a greater level of support and commitment from a broader base of key people. Second, in the end, the face-to-face interaction/interviews will land or not your next position. In addition to investing time and resources in developing your personal brand and developing extensive networks, you should focus an equal proportion of effort on your readiness for the face-to face interactions. This could

include proper preparation for the interviews (knowledge of the industry, company, position, etc.) and interview practice via friends and colleagues as well as professional video prep. Thus, a combination of online and human engagement training can make a significant difference in landing the next best career opportunity.

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Reference

Zuckerman, M. B. (2011, February). The Great Jobs Recession Goes On. U.S. News & World Report. Available at <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/mzuckerman/articles/2011/02/11/the-great-jobs-recession-goes-on>.