



ATTORNEY SEARCH

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Using Social Networking in Your Job Search

In the current economy, it goes without saying that job seekers need to take advantage of all available employment resources. This includes, of course, traditional avenues such as recruiters, colleagues, friends, family, and job-posting websites. More than ever, it also includes exploiting new, innovative, and even unconventional methods. Those who embrace and exploit these newer technologies will gain a significant advantage over their colleagues who are restricting themselves to established job-search methods. While there are a host of emerging technologies that can assist job seekers, this article will focus on the use of social networking and social media to expand the reach and scope of their pursuit of their next job.

First, a note on terminology. The phrase "social networking" was around long before the invention of Facebook. It generally refers to interconnected groups of individuals who are "tied" together by some common thread, whether it be dating, sharing news and information, or a love of Frisbee golf. The term has been co-opted by exploding Internet phenomenon like Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Twitter and now is commonly used to denote an Internet service that facilitates connecting and re-connecting with friends, colleagues, and family (and ex-girlfriends) to share information, stories, pictures, and videos and to let everyone know exactly what you are doing, all the time.

But apart from mere amusement, there is significant value in using these resources in a strategic manner to enhance and expand your job search. Below are a few suggestions to get you on your way.

Facebook (<http://www.Facebook.com>)

Unless you have been hiding out in a cave in Afghanistan for the past few years (that's you, Bin Laden), you are at least familiar with Facebook. In fact, Facebook reports that it has more than 175 million active users, with the fastest growth activity in the over-30 demographic. Think about that for a second. Where else can you, an individual, get access to 175 million people, and their associated 350 million eyeballs? Unless you plan to buy a Superbowl ad, the answer is nowhere. So, how do you leverage your Facebook account to help you find a job?

First, it may be time for a Facebook face lift. If until now you've used your Facebook account to showcase your recently re-discovered archives of drunken college photos (or drunken photos from last week), you'll need to do some spring cleaning. As tough as it may be, you must remove those photos (and un-tag yourself in your friends similarly debaucherous pictures) to be sure that your image isn't promptly tainted in the eyes of potential employers. Clean up your profile, your photos, your videos, and your wall posts. Don't leave anything that might give a potential employer a second thought about hiring you. If it wouldn't go on your resume, don't leave it on your Facebook page. (Obviously, I am not talking about the typical harmless Facebook banter among friends, but rather the borderline inappropriate stuff.)

Second, join Facebook groups. Lots of them. Join the affiliate and alumni groups for your college, law school, and current and past jobs. Search for and join groups for your elementary school, junior high school, high school, old

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neighborhoods, club sports, and favorite musical artists. Joining groups accomplishes a couple of important goals. First, you will be surprised at how quickly you will expand your Facebook friends. As you peruse these groups, sift through the other members and connect with as many old acquaintances as possible. Not only is it fun to catch up with people you may not have seen in 20 or 30 years, but you never know whether one of these long-lost contacts may be in a position - directly or indirectly - to assist in your job search. In addition, by joining these groups, you expand your visibility to an exponentially larger group of people who are not officially "friends" on Facebook. As noted above, part of any successful job strategy is to increase your exposure to those in a position to help you get a job. Joining groups is an effortless way to expand your reach to potential employers while also re-connecting with old friends and colleagues.

Third, don't be afraid to let your Facebook contacts know that you are in the midst of a job search. That doesn't mean that you should be updating your status to reflect how many resumes you've sent out, but you should let folks know from time to time, via succinctly worded status updates, personal notes, chats, and Facebook mail, that you are on the lookout and would appreciate any referrals. Again, half of the battle is just being sure that people have you in mind when they come across a potential opportunity. Don't be shy and don't be put off by any perceived stigma: with the hundreds of thousands of recently unemployed (many of whom are in the legal field), any stigma that may have been associated with being out of work has essentially dissipated. I personally have been contacted by more than ten people via Facebook who are looking for work, ranging from former co-workers to long-lost friends. Believe me, it works!

PAGE: 2

Lastly, if you just aren't ready to tidy up your Facebook world in the midst of your job hunting and would like to leave up all of the tawdry, bawdy, and other morally questionable information and photos, be sure to strictly control your privacy by permitting only your immediate friends to see the information on your Facebook page (change access rights under "Settings"). Even with the strictest of settings, most Google searches will turn up a generic Facebook page with your name and current profile picture, so at least keep that picture presentable!

LinkedIn (<http://www.LinkedIn.com>)

LinkedIn has been described to me as the old persons' Facebook (sorry LinkedIn marketing folks!). It actually is a very powerful business tool where you can post an exhaustive CV and, similar to Facebook, join myriad professional and social networking groups. Once you "link" with people on LinkedIn, you typically have access to all of the connections of your connections - sort of like a professional version of six degrees of Kevin Bacon. You can exchange private mail, seek introductions to third parties through your connections, post messages to networking groups, and peruse job listings which are typically posted directly by the hiring coordinators at firms and companies. Contrary to Facebook, LinkedIn is all business and you should treat it as such. Be sure to take advantage of its powerful search tools, which give you an opportunity to conduct focused and effective research on potential employers (and interviewers) by using an advanced search function. LinkedIn is an excellent personal marketing tool and is a must for all job seekers in today's economy.

Twitter (<http://www.Twitter.com>)

Twitter is the new kid on the block in terms of social networking and social media, and I think a lot of people (including me) don't quite know what to make of it yet. All I know for sure is that you should be using Twitter, and you should be using it now. Essentially, Twitter is micro-blogging. Via the site's home page, set up a free account, select a user name, and write a short, professional bio (50 words or less). You then will be presented with a blank slate that asks "What are you doing?" Before you write anything, go to Twitter's "public feed" (http://www.twitter.com/public_timeline) and just watch the flow of "tweets" from other users drift by. When you see something interesting, click on the username and you will be taken to that user's page, showing a history of their tweets. If they interest you, click on the "follow" button and "voila," this user's tweets will now appear on your page (you are now "following" them in the Twitter vernacular). Twitter also has some handy Web tools that will check your existing contact lists for Twitter users and help you to identify your friends and colleagues already using the service. You also can search for people directly via the Search page.

Once you're following a few people, you are ready to start tweeting yourself. You can do this from the website, your phone, your Blackberry, or any number of different ways. The catch is that you have to limit each entry to 140 characters or less (including links, punctuation, and spaces). You can tweet about anything you like, but if you're using Twitter to help search for a job, it's useful to tweet about professional topics relating to your field. If you read

an interesting article or blog entry, for example, write a short, catchy lead and then include a link for other users to the information source. If your tweets are interesting and useful to others, you'll quickly start to amass followers of your own, each of whom will now see your entries on their own page along with others they follow.

How does using Twitter help you find a job? Well, honestly, that's not entirely clear right now, but there is no question that it is a vast resource for communicating directly with thousands of people in the legal industry - lawyers, recruiters, hiring coordinators, legal scholars, and others - and gaining an insight into their daily (or hourly) thought processes. Unlike Facebook, your fellow Twitter users don't need to "approve" you as a friend for you to follow them (although you can be blocked), and users routinely follow 500 or more others. Like Facebook and LinkedIn, you can communicate privately or publicly with other users through sending direct messages and posting "replies" to users that appear on their public page.

Another critically important feature of Twitter is that it is an effortless way to keep up to date on news and information. Many organizations also are using Twitter, including major legal publications, law firms, legal blogs, and newspapers. By following these users on Twitter you will receive an up-to-the-minute snapshot of the current state of the industry. Many organizations are even starting to list new jobs on Twitter. Seek out and follow legal practitioners who have interesting tweets and don't be afraid to contact your fellow Twitter users directly to ask about job opportunities. Twitter still has the feel of an emerging technology and users are extraordinarily helpful to each other in providing information and introductions.

PAGE: 3

In summary, Twitter is a little hard to describe, but once you start using it you will see that it can be an extremely effective tool in your job search. Like the other services described above, it won't supplant traditional networking, but by expanding your connections and broadening your knowledge base, it will improve your chances of success in your job search.