

First impressions count: how to improve your online profile

By **Jay Munro**, Founder, Digital Clarity

Last week I discussed the importance of making sure you do your homework before jumping head first into social media. Namely, having a clear purpose, plan and strategy of what you want to achieve by using social media. It won't necessarily be a quick or easy task, but I do hope that you are collaborating with your staff and colleagues and coming up with some ideas.

In the meantime, I thought it would be important to look at what you could do to "tidy up" any of the profiles that you already have to ensure you're not causing any harm to your professional brand or potential business relationships. For those of you who are well ahead of the pack and have finished off developing their strategy, congratulations. Hopefully, some of these suggested tweaks will assist you too.

When creating or reviewing an online profile, it is really important to compare it to how you would act or want to be viewed upon meeting someone for the first time in real life. Think back to the last time you met a new contact at a networking event. Now ask yourself the following questions:

1. Was my appearance appropriate?
2. Did I establish and maintain eye contact?
3. Did I tell this new contact about myself?
4. When telling this new contact about myself, did I speak in the third person?
5. Did I divulge inappropriate information to this new contact?

I'm guessing (and hoping) that your answers were along the lines of something like this:

1. Yes, I was dressed appropriately.
2. Yes, I established and maintained eye contact upon meeting the person and during our discussion.
3. Yes, I told the contact about my experience, expertise and other relevant information.
4. Of course not.
5. No, it was a professional networking event.

I trust that you can see where I'm going with this... first impressions count. When someone reviews your online profile for the first time, they are going to formulate an opinion of you. That opinion is key. It will determine whether they are going to reach out to connect with you or accept your request to connect with them. And really, it's all commonsense kinda stuff that we're talking about here.

First off, avoiding eye contact will result in a lack of trust. Failing to establish and maintain eye contact when you first meet someone results in a failure to build any level of trust from the outset. But how do you establish eye contact and, therefore, that initial trust online? By selecting an appropriate photo.

It's important that people can see what you look like and that you are indeed a real person when reviewing your profile. Especially when you are requesting to connect with them. So having a photo on your profile is a good option. Just make sure the photo you select is appropriate. It's always a good idea to get a second opinion and have a colleague review your photo selection. Sometimes, the photo we see as being "a great one" of ourselves is considered just the opposite by other people. Another important point in photo selection is to ensure you are looking straight ahead. Your eyes need to be seen for that all important eye contact to be made. Try it for yourself. Find two photos of the same person – one where the individual is looking away and another looking at the camera. Which do you feel you can establish a connection with?

The rest is really simple. Make sure your profile is completed. If you are missing lots of information, or even worse, haven't filled in any of your public profile fields, how can someone learn about you or trust that your request to connect with them is legitimate? In saying this, you do need to make sure the information is accurate and appropriate.

Ensure your tone of voice or writing style is conversational. Think of how you would introduce yourself to this person in real life and try to inject this "reality" and personality into your writing style. Make it conversational but to the point (ie don't waffle).

One of my biggest tips is DON'T write your profile in the third person. Please. Just don't. Would you speak of yourself in the third person in real life? I really hope not. So don't do it online where you are trying to connect with, converse with and establish new relationships with people.

Although it seems like I may have only pointed out the very obvious here, you would be amazed at how many recruiters and other professionals haven't thought about these points. So, when meeting someone for the first time, whether in real life or virtually, think about how you act and remember that you should always try to;

1. be authentic
2. Build trust, and
3. Establish credibility

Follow the tips above and you should be on the right track. ■



Jay Munro has been an active contributor to the recruitment and online advertising industries over the last 11 years. He is the founder of Digital Clarity, an online strategy consulting company based in Sydney. With the ever growing acceptance and embracing of social media and new technologies, Jay now helps recruitment agencies to leverage these, extend their online profiles and grow their businesses.