

FLASHPOINT CHICAGO

A CAMPUS OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE HOLLYWOOD

BUILDING ONLINE NETWORKS

Social media has redefined how we as a society connect, communicate and network with other people. Using technology, you are able to connect with and influence high-value contacts from around the corner or around the world — in ways that didn't exist just a few years ago.

To successfully build a strong online network, however, you need the right tools. **Follow the six tips below** to start making meaningful connections that will help you achieve your career goals.

6 TIPS TO START MAKING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

1. BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR GOAL. Before you do anything else, define your target industry or job title. Once you do that, you'll be better equipped to strategically follow and interact with those people, companies and industries most relevant to your goal.

2. MAKE SURE YOUR PROFILE IS COMPLETE. Social media is a way to differentiate yourself as a job seeker and, with the proper care, can help send a clear message about who you are and what you're looking for in a career. Many employers now use software tools to review candidates' social media profile data to help inform their hiring decisions. The good news? You have control over the online information you make available to others, which means you can manage and curate your online image.

- **Use customized URLs where possible.** Creating customized URLs on the social or professional networking sites you use makes it easier for people to find you on social media, and they look nicer on your cover letter or resume.
- **Use a professional photo.** A professional profile photo adds legitimacy to your online presence and can help identify you, especially if you have a common name. The image you choose can be casual, but it should be employer- appropriate. (Hint: If you wouldn't want your grandma to see your profile photo, it's probably not a wise choice).
- **Include a professional summary.** Describe your strengths and explain how you bring value to your industry or organization. Be sure to also include your desired career direction.
- **Include work history and education.** Promote a sense of consistency throughout your materials (your résumé).
- **Add key accomplishments** for employers and peers to get a snapshot of your capabilities.
- **Give and request network recommendations** using personalized and sincere messages.

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3. UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF KEYWORDS AND LINKS. Every time an employer or recruiter is looking for new workers, they have a specific need in mind. Know which words to build into your profile, updates and posts to reinforce your employment goals and engage your target network.

4. SHARE, CONNECT AND NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS. Many professionals welcome the opportunity to share pearls of wisdom — all you have to do is reach out. Social media can help facilitate such connections.

- **Read group discussion posts and join the conversation.** Acknowledge the author and point out the parts of the discussion with which you agree, as well as on which parts you'd like to get more clarity. Don't hesitate to add your own experiential stories to the discussion.
- **Start discussions.** Drive traffic to your profile by posting blogs and articles from influential sources. Read professional blogs and media outlets and post relevant links with a brief introductory comment such as: "Interesting perspective on _____." OR "My favorite part was _____." OR "My most valuable takeaway from this was _____." "Then, ask your followers what they think about the article.
- **Post questions.** Avoid asking questions specifically about how to find a job or employer. Instead, focus on issues surrounding the challenges of the job. All jobs, at their core, are about anticipating, preventing and solving problems that regularly arise. Questions about improving skills and finding solutions are typically more engaging. For example:

"Hello, I'm a recent Recording Arts graduate from Flashpoint Chicago. I recognize that Sound Design has an important role in advertising. What can we do to anticipate disengaged viewers and take action to get them re-engaged in particular products through sound?"

5. INTRODUCE YOURSELF. Connecting like-minded people is a powerful way to enhance your network. Introducing people who can further each other's success will strengthen your business reputation and open the door to new opportunities.

If you're asking someone to make an introduction for you, always make the reason for the connection clear. For example:

"Sally, I noticed you are connected to George. Would you mind introducing me so I can talk to him about his insights on Digital Marketing field? I recently graduated with a degree in Digital Media, and would love to learn more about his experience in this field and build my network."

If Sally follows through, be sure to take time to thank her and follow up with her on how the meeting with George went.

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6. BE MEMORABLE. Thinking creatively and grabbing attention is the only way to differentiate yourself in a world overwhelmed with information. Always keep your objective in mind when you use online tools to communicate. Propose opportunities for follow up, make a clear request, or include a call to action. Ensure your writing is concise, memorable and typo-free. If you do not get an answer to your communication, go back and rethink your approach. You may need to be more creative and clear.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STATUS UPDATES

Once you know the clear direction you want to take your career and the value you can bring to your audience, you are in a great position to get the word out. Networking is all about fostering healthy, reciprocal relationships. Use status updates to promote by including people and organizations. By cross-promoting, you are not only getting some publicity for partnerships yourself, you are also contributing to elevating the image of others.

UPDATE YOUR STATUS ON SOCIAL MEDIA WHEN YOU ARE:

- Training and developing yourself professionally.
- Contributing to or collaborating in your industry.
- Volunteering.
- Participating in or attending an event.
- Working as a team member on a school project.

SOCIAL MEDIA STATUS UPDATE SAMPLES:

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:

- Tonight's presentations on Networking at @CareerServicesWeek helped drive home the message about the importance of nurturing and engaging our networks. Thanks to @SteveSmith, @MarkLawrence, @PaulaKraig, and @GinnaLugatti for moving the conversation forward.

CONTRIBUTING AND COLLABORATING:

- Excited to speak at Young Women's Leadership Network's annual College Bound Initiative Celebration where my classmate @SarahSmith and I will celebrate amazing young women. I look forward to sharing what I've learned over the years. Learn more about this empowering education program for low-income youth and see how you can get inspired or involved: <http://www.ywln.org/>

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VOLUNTEERING:

- I've picked up 370 pairs of denim, 30 blazers, 6 boxes of separates and a few more stops to go! The #DressForSuccess charity event at 900 North Michigan Shops (Level 4) is going to be amazing. Wait till you see what we have for you on Friday to help catapult your job search success!
- Just finished washing, steaming and hanging every single outfit for #DressForSuccess charity event on October 18. Your generous donations are slowly coming to life!
- Huge Success! #DressForSuccess charity event helped over 1,000 individuals and brought them closer to their dreams. Thanks to @JillHinrichs, @SusabMyburgh, @KellyParker, and @CarlosMartini for all your blood, sweat and tears to make today a true achievement.

PARTICIPATING IN OR ATTENDING AN EVENT:

- Last night I was thrilled to attend a taping of #WaitWaitDontTellMe at the @ChaseAuditorium, #NPR. Which included a fun interview and trivia game with Super Model @CindyCrawford.
- The perfect end to a crazy day... a delicious private dinner at @TheKitchen with lovely friends, old and new – @MichaelJohnson, @RickyGonzalez. I love making new connections and staying in touch with the old. Great conversation about the power of #storytelling.

WORKING AS A TEAM MEMBER ON A SCHOOL PROJECT:

- Excited to be working with the creative and talented @CrystalAllen, @JazGresham, and @MichelleUn on this quarter's Production in Action project. @FlashpointChicago always does a great job to promote teamwork and collaboration!