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Take THE Lead

PLUS

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You're Being Googled

4 Steps to Building and Managing Your Online Identity

People are making decisions and forming impressions about you based on what they find online.

In today's new competitive world of work, it's essential for you to build and proactively manage your online identity. Whether you're meeting with a client, running for a board position, or applying for that exciting new job, you can count on being Googled. Google is used over 200 million times a day by people in virtually every country. People are making decisions and forming impressions about you based on what they find online. And they are people who matter. Google is now the best source for discovering your untold story!

In a 2007 study done by Execu-net, 83 percent of recruiters and hiring managers Google potential candidates and 45 percent of them will eliminate candidates based on their findings.

So, when you Google yourself, what's revealed about you? Does your online identity accurately represent you the way you want to be known? If you don't show up in Google, do you exist? What if your Google results are unflattering and inconsistent with how you want to be known?

Your online presence is crucial to your successful career management. Here are four steps you can take to increase your visibility and credibility, to begin building and managing your personal online identity:

Step 1: Know What's Out There

First, you need to Google yourself (type your name in quotes – "First, Last") to determine where you stand. What comes up?

We've learned that when somebody Googles you, they use two measures to decide what they think

about you. One is volume. If there's tons of stuff about you, it makes them believe that you must have something to say. The second thing they look at is relevance, which is how clearly the results communicate your personal brand and what you want to say.

Ideally, what you want to find are lots of results about you that reinforce your personal brand. Is it consistent? Is it easily understood? Does it clearly separate you from your peers? Fortunately, this is easy to improve by creating the online profile you need to express, in order to bolster your personal brand.

Step 2: Know How You Want to be Known

Before building your online reputation, you need to know what you want your Google results to look like. You must uncover and clearly define your personal brand by being able to answer these questions:

- What do you want people to know you for?
- What makes you stand out?
- What is your area of thought leadership or expertise?

- What words would people use to describe you?
- Who is the specific target audience who needs to hear your message?

You want your personal brand to be injected in everything you do, and you need to focus on that every step of the way.

Step 3: Clean Up the Dirt

If there is negative or inappropriate content about you online, which might include photos and comments that conflict with how you want to be known, and hinder your reputation? We call that digital dirt. You need to vacuum it up. Self-posted dirt can easily be removed by you. If you posted it, simply take it off.

If someone else posted it, it can be more difficult to remove. Sometimes you can ask the site-owner to remove it, and they will. But it's not always that easy. If it's in a major high-ranking publication, such as the *New York Times*, most likely it's there to stay.

One option is to create high-ranking entries that reinforce your brand, and will push the dirt down. Most people won't look past page three. You can create these entries by following the six Ps in the following step.

Step 4: Build Your Online Identity Using the 6 Ps

You can start with one post, one profile or one article. Take what you're already doing in the real world that communicates how you want to be known and think about ways you can repurpose it for the online world to increase your visibility. Here are six things you can begin to do today:

1. **Publish** – Create great content that is interesting and helpful, and showcase your expertise online. Repurpose material that you may already have offline; you've already worked hard to create it, so reuse it by introducing it in the virtual world.
 - Build your own Web site – It's easy to create your own weblog on typepad.com or wordpress.com. This is the best way to ensure your online brand says what you want it to say.
 - Create a blog – This is a great way to establish thought leadership and connect with others in your area of expertise, but only do this if you

can commit to posting at least once a week.

- Video – If video is your passion, YouTube ranks high with Google, so post your “on brand” videos. Keep them short and keep them relevant.
 - Presentations – Are you already recognized for giving powerful and compelling presentations? If so, upload them to Slideshare.net and let everybody see them.
 - White papers and articles – If you've already created lots of content that may not be online, here is an opportunity to simply update them and publish them on Web sites, or in article banks such as ezinearticles.com. Publish the content that connects with your target audience, and become a thought leader in that area.
 - E-book – Writing an e-book will take some time but the rewards are immense. If you enjoy writing, an e-book can be colorful and easy to read, much more so than a white paper. Make sure it has remarkable content and think about giving it away for free; it can go viral almost overnight.
2. **Post** – Write reviews of relevant books and post them on amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com. If your area of expertise is “award-winning design,” don't confuse your brand by writing about something totally unrelated, such as “dog training,” just because you love it.
 3. **Pontificate** – Go to technorati.com or blogsearch.google.com and search for blogs that align with your area of thought leadership. Subscribe to them, and when a new post is made you will be notified. Commit to regularly posting comments that are helpful, valuable and interesting, and this will demonstrate your knowledge and become part of your online identity.
 4. **Publicize** – Don't wait for someone else to write a press release about you. Companies do it for themselves and so should you. Announcing your promotion, a speaking engagement at a conference, volunteer/community

recognition, or a newly appointed board position are just a few ideas.

- free-press-release.com
 - prleap.com
 - prnewswire.com
 - 24-7pressrelease.com
5. **Partner** – Connect with others with whom you share something, and leverage social networking sites to build your identity. Don't try to do them all, but pick one or two and learn their features and how to use them efficiently.
 - LinkedIn • Facebook
 - Twitter • Ning • Flickr
 6. **Profile** – Create a fun, memorable and magnetic bio, and add it to your profile sites to assure people will find the right information about you:
 - google.com/profiles
 - zoominfo.com
 - naymz.com
 - businesscard2.com
 - ziggs.com

Building and managing your online identity is an ongoing process, and you need to commit to being steadfast in maintaining it. You will find your Google results are changing all the time, so be sure to monitor them on a regular basis. Subscribe to Google Alerts for your name (google.com/alerts) and set up a weekly time to Google yourself. This way, you'll be the first to know each time you show up online, and you will remain “on brand” even as the information changes.

Only 20 percent of executives have taken proactive steps to create a positive presence online, according to a Jobster, April 2007 survey. So here's your opportunity. Get ahead of the pack now!

Maren Finzer couples her enthusiastic, creative personality and drive for excellence, with over 20 years of business and marketing experience, to help high-achieving professionals bring their brands to life. Based in the Seattle area, she uses webinars, teleseminars and workshops to teach others how to uncover their unique promise of value and to clearly communicate that message to stand out in the marketplace. Reach her at maren@marenfinzer.com.