

## Using Social Networks to Your Job Search Advantage

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*ExecuNet is a private network for high-level executives who believe the right connections, insights and market intelligence can lead them to the right opportunities. A recognized authority in executive recruiting and human capital, ExecuNet also provides access to confidential six-figure job opportunities and authoritative resources to help top executives advance their careers.*

There's no denying the strength of online social networks today. They are growing at an amazing rate and are attracting a wide range of users. The potential to reach an incredibly large group of people beyond just close friends and colleagues is certainly increasing in appeal to individuals seeking new career opportunities. However, just like any job search method, you have to be prepared and know what you want to accomplish before you begin.

“One of the traps many of us fall into when we're starting a job search is that we tend to jump into it with a ready-aim-fire behavior, but before being really ready,” says Dave Opton, founder and CEO of ExecuNet. “By doing that, one of the first things they blow is the chance of making a good first impression.”

Online social networking has made it easy to make that first impression with just a click of the mouse without as much thought that typically does — and should — go into a job search campaign. It's important to recognize the power of the social networking arena and how this can make the Internet more of a proactive, instead of reactive, tool.

“The Internet is a strength and a weakness,” adds Opton. “It's a strength because it gives me tremendous ability to communicate, research and access information. But the weakness is it can seduce me into being more proactive in those areas before I'm ready. It can seduce me into spending hours a day sending résumés to job boards as opposed to strategically trying to identify what I'm going after and developing a strategy to do that.”

Opton says that of the members ExecuNet speaks with daily, at least 70 percent say networking helped create a change they made in their careers. “It did not

happen because they answered an ad,” he says. “You’ve got to have a strategy in balance with what the data tells you; the data is networking.”

Data also points to the strong role social networking currently plays overall in our Web 2.0 world. “Member Communities” are more popular than personal email, according to The Nielsen Company’s *Global Faces and Networked Places* report. That popularity is not just attributable to the younger generation. According to the Nielsen report, the 35 to 49 year-old age group showed the largest increase in visitors to “member community” websites worldwide.

## HOW EXECUTIVES FIND CAREER OPTIONS

Networking.....	73%
Responding to job postings.....	14%
Posting résumé to database/Maintaining online profile.....	9%
Researching target companies/Cold calling.....	3%
Broadcast résumé campaigns.....	1%

Source: ExecuNet’s 17<sup>th</sup> annual Executive Job Market Intelligence Report

As executives navigate social networking media for job search and other career development activities, employers (hiring managers) and recruiters are certainly taking notice of how these executives are conducting themselves in the social media world. Creating a successful online social media presence can help job candidates differentiate themselves from the competition if done correctly.

Meghan Biro, principal of Massachusetts-based TalentCulture LLC, says that she is currently working with a C-level executive who is seeking a position in the high-tech industry. He hadn’t focused on social media tools, such as VisualCV (an Internet-based résumé) and the various features of the LinkedIn social networking site. “I coached him on social media tools and have empowered him to get in touch with, and take more ownership of, his personal brand,” says Biro. “My client company was so impressed with this executive’s social media career portfolio that they are now more seriously considering his candidacy for new role. The executive is, in turn, more empowered and enthusiastic regarding his career search.”

## FIND YOURSELF FIRST

Perhaps you have already begun creating your online presence in the social networking world or you haven’t done much with this yet. If you’ve started, take a closer look at your current profile to determine if it provides an accurate and complete picture of your skills and qualifications and what unique value you can bring to potential employers. When talking about online profiles, the rule of thumb is: Less is not more.

Michael Sherman, a senior product manager at ExecuNet overseeing the company’s Associate Membership and the Executive Suite group on LinkedIn, regularly reviews the profiles executives submit for display on the site when they register as new ExecuNet members or apply to the LinkedIn Executive Suite. Sherman says he has viewed many profiles in which executives don’t clearly communicate who they are and what they are looking for. Oftentimes, they use generic phrases such as “seasoned executive” or “employable executive.” Sherman says, “That tells me nothing about who they are.”

Because you truly don’t know exactly who will view your online profile, it needs to be more comprehensive than a standard résumé. It needs to answer enough questions about your capabilities and skills to make readers want to contact you for additional information — and possibly a job interview. Sherman says that only mentioning one’s last job is a mistake. “They don’t show the progression and that doesn’t give a complete picture. They’re selling themselves short. The online profile is a combination of the résumé, a custom cover letter and elevator pitch. The listing of jobs backs up who you are, what you’re good at and what you’re looking for,” explains Sherman.

Sherman feels some executives don’t create a strong profile because they don’t see immediate value from spending the time on it. “They’re reluctant because they don’t know who’s going to read it,” he says. It can seem like more of a passive job search task. But Sherman notes that creating a strong online profile — and online presence — is anything but that.

“I’ve handled more than 100 requests from recruiters to introduce them to someone online,” says Sherman. “The people they contact have followed the rules in terms of how they present themselves and the value they provide a potential employer.”

“I know people are being found by recruiters and HR people,” he adds. “The people being found are doing what they’re supposed to do. All the seeds for success are put in the ground when you create your online profile correctly.”

## HELP A RECRUITER FIND YOU

Recruiters are increasing their reliance on online social networking sites to find appropriate candidates. So posting a profile on such sites is important — as long as it is garnering the right kind of attention. “The more complete your online profile is, and the more you optimize it, the higher you will turn up in search rankings,” says Pamela Claughton, president of Massachusetts-based Custom Search Group Inc. Claughton stresses that the profile needs to be written to attract recruiters looking for individuals with very specific qualifications. As the

candidate, it's up to you to illustrate that you possess those niche skills.

Claughton explains how recruiters typically just enter a few keywords when they begin a search, by typing in a job title (such as product manager) and geographic location. When that generates hundreds of results, Claughton says that she will enter industry terms (such as wireless) and may even add technologies (such as WiFi or USD) that are relevant to a specific search. For example, if you are a product manager seeking a new role, the job description in your profile should contain great detail and many experience-specific buzzwords, such as “wireless” and “product manager” and “software.”

Claughton also suggests repeating these buzzwords to improve your ranking in a search and adding relevant technologies. “Look at job descriptions for similar jobs at your own company and be sure that the details there are reflected in your profile. Also, look at job descriptions for positions you are applying for and make sure all of your relevant experience is clearly in your profile,” says Claughton.

Just as résumé-writing services have been a popular option for many job seekers, a similar offering is emerging in the social networking arena. “Many résumé writers and career coaches (myself included) now write corresponding online profiles and help clients with social networking services,” says Chandlee Bryan, a career coach and résumé writer with Best Fit Forward. “If you're too busy, you may be able to find someone else who can help you with the process.”

### **BEING FOUND: BEYOND THE PROFILE**

While more and more recruiters are using online profiles to identify top talent, they are also using other facets of social media to find the best possible candidates. Glenn Gutmacher, founder of Recruiting-Online.com and vice president of Aribita ACES/JobMachine, says that recruiters sometimes join online groups to search their directories and find candidates with expertise in a particular industry or topic.

Jennifer Scott, founder of Connecticut-based HireEffect LLC, says that in addition to using services such as LinkedIn and Facebook, she is also involved in social networking communities such as RecruitingBlogs and MyWorkButterfly. Scott uses keywords to search for candidates, and she says she relies “on referrals and responses to messages through status updates and group discussions.”

By joining these groups, candidates can increase their chances of being found by recruiters. Claughton suggests searching groups

by keywords (such as “marketing” or “product management”) and then joining groups that match your interest and experience.

Recruiters and career coaches alike suggest that executives use the social media platform to position themselves as thought leaders. ExecuNet provides several ways in which members can accomplish this. The foundation of communications in social networks is your profile. ExecuNet members set themselves apart by regularly updating their profiles with skills, keywords, names of companies they are well associated with and cordial introductions of themselves.

Members can then search for company and industry leaders through the membership directory — all of whom have opted in to networking with others. Also, executives can exchange job leads, ask and answer career questions, and interact with peers and career experts in ExecuNet's central discussion Forum.

By joining an ExecuNet Executive Roundtable, members regularly view and participate in business discussions with peers who share their special interest. Discussions are enabled through email for greatest ease and allow members to respond to the group or privately to individuals. The Roundtables are categorized into eight different industry-specific segments, from finance and consulting to general management and human resources.

The Roundtable business conversations garner additional visibility for participants as they become well-known to other members for the quality of their comments and may even be quoted in ExecuNet publications that enjoy wide circulation in and outside of the membership. Plus, guest participants find the Roundtables a good sounding board. Former Medtronic CEO and renowned business author Bill George recently challenged Roundtable members to share their insights on a key leadership topic, sparking a lively discussion that continued for several weeks amongst Roundtable members.

LinkedIn provides a similar venue with its LinkedIn Answers feature, which Gutmacher notes that recruiters follow as well. “LinkedIn Answers is a way to see who is posting relevant, intelligent answers to questions. The ‘Advanced Answers’ search lets recruiters quickly identify people with subject matter expertise. Many recruiters also post open-ended questions that are likely to attract answers from the kinds of candidates they want to know,” says Gutmacher.

### **TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NEWEST SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES**

As people get accustomed to the social networking offerings available to users today, more services will likely continue

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ONLINE PROFILE SPACE

Just as it's important to include the most relevant and impactful information on your résumé, the same strategy should apply when you're crafting your online profile. Ensuring that recruiters and hiring managers can easily see what you offer is crucial.

Meg Guiseppi, a New Jersey-based personal branding strategist and master résumé writer, suggests looking at what appears on the screen when you access your profile. "Are you taking advantage of what you do with the initial screen view to promote and evidence your personal brand?" she asks.

Guiseppi offers these suggestions to bolster your profile:

- Add a relevant keyword-rich tagline directly below your name, indicating your brand value. Hiring managers and recruiters searching these terms will be led to you.
- Keep working on building your number of contacts and brand-reinforcing recommendations.

- Add links to three websites or web pages, such as your VisualCV or blog. Add a link to a published article or white paper that you created.
- Regularly refresh the status updates that are available on some online networks. This helps you stay top-of-mind with your connections because they are notified whenever you refresh your answer.
- Personalize your LinkedIn public profile URL. Replace the characters at the end with "your name."
- Generate chemistry by leading the "Summary" section with your personal brand statement.
- Follow your brand statement with two or three standout contributions you made that indicate the value you bring to your next employer.
- It's okay to bring forward critical information that would otherwise land further down in your profile. If you have an MBA or relevant certifications or training, don't hide them at the bottom.

to launch. One such example is Twitter, a micro-blogging application that enables users to send "tweets" that can be no longer than 140 characters. You can create your own community on Twitter by "following" other users and posting information that compels others to follow you. This exchange of information not only helps create relationships, it can be a platform to demonstrate your communication, thought leadership and networking skills.

Alexandra Levit, author of *Success for Hire* [ASTD Press, 2008] and other career-oriented books, suggests following people within your industry who you admire through Twitter. "Post intriguing, expert information on a regular basis, and if someone has a question, don't be shy: jump in and answer it," advises Levit. She also recommends following recruiters and HR professionals who work at their target companies. "Sometimes these people will post job alerts, and other times, you can establish relationships so that you're at the forefront of their minds when a relevant position becomes available," adds Levit.

## BALANCING YOUR SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT

For many executives, it seems like the moment they complete their ExecuNet member profile or post one on LinkedIn, they are invited to connect with a friend or colleague on another social network. However, before connecting, they must join this site — and create yet another profile. Is it worth the effort? Or should executives just focus their efforts on one or two networks?

"Ask others in your 'circle' where they are listed, and then decide where you want to be found," says Bryan. "It isn't necessary to join 'all' the networking applications that are available."

"You should pick a few networks that make sense to you and you enjoy spending time on," adds Levit. "Then, set your own rules. For instance, some people use Facebook to keep up with personal contacts, and LinkedIn to keep up with business contacts. Once you've set up your own system, don't hesitate to explain it to other people. In the event that you don't want your direct reports seeing those embarrassing high school photos, there's nothing wrong with telling her that you'll connect on LinkedIn but are reserving Facebook for family and close friends."

There are also some differences between open networks (LinkedIn) and closed networks (ExecuNet), although both can help you connect with valuable contacts. "Open networks allow you to meet people from various walks of life who you might never have the chance to connect with otherwise, and they are invaluable for breaking into a new industry. But closed networks offer much more intimacy," explains Levit, a syndicated columnist for *The Wall Street Journal* and a blogger for *HuffingtonPost.com*. "I also think networking ties are much stronger among individuals in a closed network."

Regardless of which networks you join, it's vital to maintain and grow each one. "Build your network whenever you get the

chance by inviting people to connect with you,” says Megan Driscoll, president and founder of Massachusetts-based PharmaLogics Recruiting, who also suggests inviting trusted recruiters into your network.

Cloughton says that the larger your network, the greater your chances of being identified in recruiter searches. “The way to build your network quickly is by connecting to super-connectors — people who are open networkers, meaning they welcome invites from people they don’t know,” she explains.

## NETWORKING IS NETWORKING

One of the key things to remember about social networking is that it is like traditional networking in the sense that assistance must be reciprocal. You need to be willing to help others with their career endeavors for them to want to help you. JobAngels.org is a community that requests its members help one person find a new position. In just two months, JobAngels.org has more than 9,000 members, according to founder Mark Stelzner. He says that the community has equal numbers of job seekers and JobAngels.

“You’ve now got these social networking opportunities...but you should get involved in those things because you want to, not because you’re interested in using it as a means to an end,” says Opton. He adds that executives must be prepared to give help to others before they receive help with their own endeavors. Stephanie Fierman, chief marketing officer at Revolution Money, has used social networking for job search many times in her career, and still monitors Twitter to share job leads with others.

“My experience is that, when a person is in the midst of a job search, social networking done well can deliver two key things: knowledge and access,” says Fierman. “To find a great job, first you need the knowledge that there is one — or could be one — and a way in. And this is where social networking can really shine.”

An ExecuNet member who recently landed an executive vice president position in just three months notes how traditional search methods (such as sending résumés and cover letters) can be ineffective as hiring managers are inundated with data. He credits his success in landing a new position quickly to the effectiveness of social networking platforms and boards. However, connections are worthless unless you use them. Just like with traditional networking, don’t be afraid to ask for help.

Fierman notes how being connected with individuals on social networking sites “means nothing — everyone’s ‘connected,’” she says. “You’ve got to keep up with people to the point where you won’t be embarrassed to pick up the phone and the person will take your call because they know you would do (and have done) the same for them.”

“Network often and use all the tools for networking to your advantage,” adds an ExecuNet member who utilized such tools to recently accept a new position as a director of IT. “Don’t underestimate the power of your family, friends and old co-workers in helping you gain entry to a company or to learn more about companies.” If you know what you want and can communicate that to your social network, it will increase your chances of reaching your career goals.

“You have to be focused and know what your objective is,” adds Romona Camarata, president of Indiana-based R.C. Consulting LLC and ExecuNet networking meeting facilitator. “If there is no objective, then you are part of another social networking tool that will ‘burn up’ your time in front of the computer and decrease your time in front of a person.” ■

## EXPERT RESOURCES:

- Meghan Biro, TalentCulture LLC ([TalentCulture.com](http://TalentCulture.com))
- Chandlee Bryan, Best Fit Forward ([BestFitForward.com](http://BestFitForward.com))
- Romona Camarata, president of R.C. Consulting LLC ([camarata@iquest.net](mailto:camarata@iquest.net))
- Pamela Cloughton, Custom Search Group Inc. ([CustomSearchGroup.com](http://CustomSearchGroup.com))
- Megan Driscoll, PharmaLogics Recruiting ([PharmaLogicsRecruiting.com](http://PharmaLogicsRecruiting.com))
- Stephanie Fierman, chief marketing officer at Revolution Money ([RevolutionMoney.com](http://RevolutionMoney.com))
- Meg Guiseppi, Executive Résumé Branding ([ExecutiveResumeBranding.com](http://ExecutiveResumeBranding.com))
- Glenn Gutmacher, Recruiting-Online.com and vice president of Aribita ACES/JobMachine ([Recruiting-Online.com](http://Recruiting-Online.com))
- Alexandra Levit ([AlexandraLevit.com](http://AlexandraLevit.com))
- Dave Opton, ExecuNet ([ExecuNet.com](http://ExecuNet.com))
- Jennifer Scott, founder of Connecticut-based HireEffect LLC ([HireEffect.com](http://HireEffect.com))
- Michael Sherman, ExecuNet ([ExecuNet.com](http://ExecuNet.com))
- Mark Stelzner, JobAngels.org ([JobAngels.org](http://JobAngels.org))