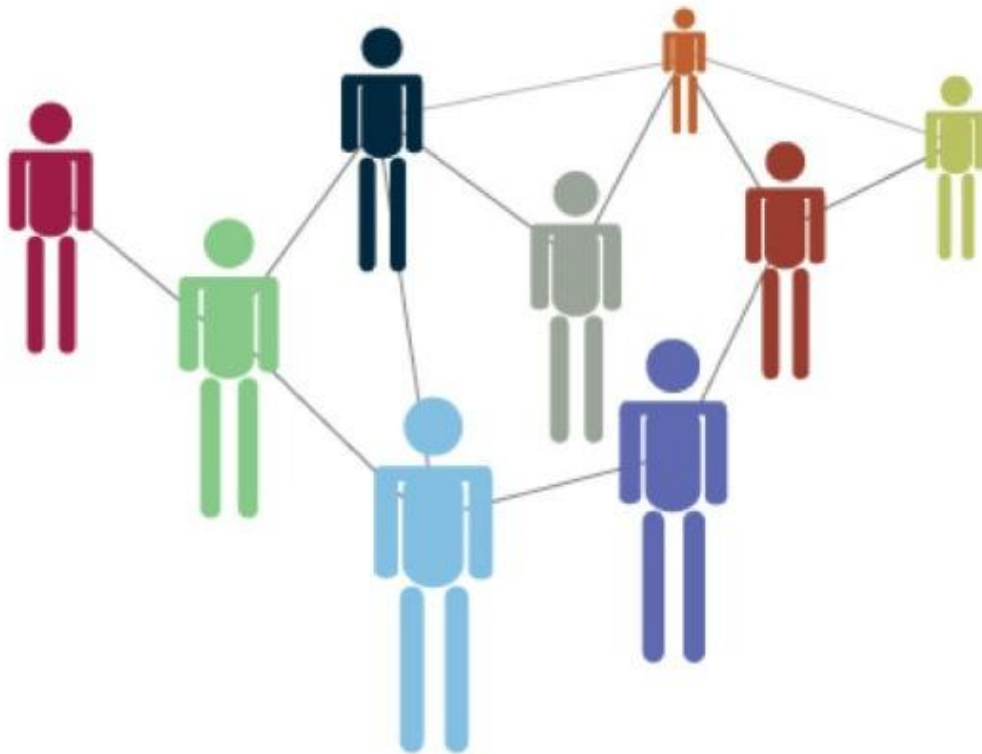


Build Your Own Opportunity Network

Getting Started in Social Networking

Updated: 5/2011



By: Steve Woodruff

[@swoodruff](https://twitter.com/swoodruff)

www.stevewoodruff.com

Graphic: David Armano

Preface

This modest e-book is offered as a straightforward guide to help people who are new to social networking get started successfully. My goal is to provide a very general overview, and some simple step-by-step guidance to using social networking platforms effectively. The brush strokes are broad, and deliberately so; the social networking arena evolves rapidly. A generous sprinkling of links to outside resources is included, since so many people have written helpful instructions about specific tools and approaches (and, that also means I have to write less!).

While much of what is presented here will relate to anybody looking to understand social networking (including businesses), the main thrust of this guide is to help individual professionals find their way in this fast-moving on-line wilderness and build their own [Opportunity Networks](#).

Much of my consulting work is with people in the pharmaceutical marketplace. I'll point to a handful of pharma-specific resources in this document for that audience; those will be found in Appendix A.

If you're wondering how to present/project yourself in social networks (and in life!), you may enjoy going through a brief personal branding exercise (Appendix B).

This is quick-read document, more of an extended outline/booklet than a fully-formatted production. If you find it helpful, and/or have suggestions for improvement, please feel free to contact me.

About the Author

Steve Woodruff is the founder of [Impactiviti](#) – a consultancy which focuses on “matchmaking” pharma training and marketing clients with optimal outsource providers (Sales/Training, Marketing, Social Media). Steve is very active in the social networking world, maintaining several blogs ([Impactiviti](#), [Connection Agent](#), [Steve's Leaves](#)) and contributing to a few others, including MarketProfs Daily Fix. Steve can be found on Twitter at [@swoodruff](#); he is the co-founder and co-moderator of Twitter's weekly [LeadershipChat](#).



Steve is also the Chief Connection Agent for the [Connection Agency](#), a group endeavor providing high-quality business referrals across a network of trust agents. This community is seeking to re-introduce **t-commerce** (trust commerce) to the business world.

Steve also conducts individualized *Identity Discovery Sessions* (aka “[Brand Therapy](#)”) with select entrepreneurs and small businesses.

What is an “Opportunity Network”?

- “Safety net” – fear and circumstance-driven
- “Opportunity network” – confidence and future-driven
- Greatest opportunities, for you and others, will be through ties of shared interest, sympathy, and connections

Let me begin with a confession...

I am not a natural networker.

You know the type I mean, right? They walk into the room and immediately light the place up. They bounce from person to person, seeming to know everyone's name and smoothly schmoozing with a gregarious smile. Perhaps you, like me, have viewed such personal magnetism and sociability with a twinge of envy.

I like meeting people, and I've learned to enjoy networking (except in noisy crowded rooms...yes, I have my limits!) But I also value alone time, reading time, thinking time. Too much concentrated people contact wears me out. Yes, at core I'll always be a bit of an [introvert](#).

Here's the news: *it doesn't matter*. You can build a great network – you can be a great *networker* – without a personality transplant. The tools now available for on-line social networking are designed so that anybody can make valuable [connections](#), and can start building personal and professional networks that will open up future opportunities (for you and others).

Is social media important? I say YES (why else would I be writing this??). And when you look at the skyrocketing [growth numbers](#) (Jan 2011) of social networking sites, and the growing amount of time spent on them, it's easy to conclude that this phenomenon is not a flash in the pan. It represents a convergence of many trends, and we're very much in the early days of something that will quickly become the new normal. Just look at how kids stay continually connected via Facebook and texting and you see that electronic-mediated communication/connection is here to stay. Some of the biggest growth numbers for social networking sites, however, aren't the kids –the [appeal is global and crosses all age groups](#) (March 2011)!

Not only is it important because all the cool people are doing it – social media is a great avenue for personal advancement. This [Wharton article](#) underscores why you want to build an opportunity network of your own.

So what is social media anyway? For a great little animated overview, check out this quick video ([Social media in plain English](#))– in a few minutes, you'll know more about the basics of social media than most people you know! And if want to take a peek behind the curtain at just what is fueling social media growth, see my posting (including video and SlideShare) on [The New Normal](#).

What's the most difficult aspect of social networking? [Just starting](#). It can all seem a bit overwhelming at first. Where do I begin? What are the first steps to success that won't drain away inordinate amounts of time and suck me into a virtual vortex of on-line confusion?

The good news is: it can be done. You [can create your own extensive opportunity network](#). As we begin, let's spend a bit of time thinking through the *Why* and the *What*. Then we can move on to the *How*.

Foundational Perspectives

Before we get to practical steps and suggestions, and discuss the specifics of various platforms, let's take a moment to consider three very foundational perspectives.

First, you need to have a clear purpose. Why are you building a social network? What are you seeking to accomplish? You may have goals that are professional or personal (or both) – either way, go into it with some sense of what you want to accomplish. If you start getting into social networking for no other reason than that it's the current fad, and with no nobler goal than accumulating a huge number of (less than meaningful) connections, then you're probably wasting your time.

Networking Goals

- Establish reputation
- Open connection channels
- Help others
- Find professional opportunities
- Learn and grow
- Strengthen "strong ties" and create "weak ties"

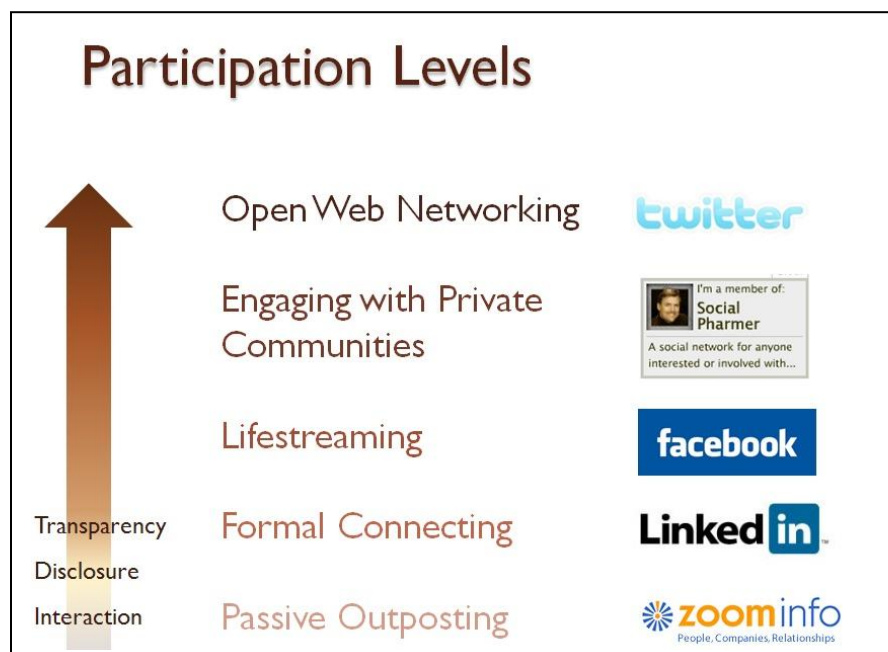
Second, if you are seeking to project a professional image and, to some extent, "brand" yourself via social networking, it's a good idea to brainstorm how you're going to express what you're about as you create on-line profiles and start communicating with others. In the Appendix B of this document, there is a brief overview of Personal Branding, with a simple worksheet that you can use to think through your core identity and how you present yourself. [This post](#) by Dan Schawbel has a number of other thoughts of interest on Personal Branding.

What's your "brand"?

Answer for yourself...

- Who am I?
- Where do I bring the most value?
- What are my professional goals?
- What's my ultimate ambition?
- How can all that be summed up and expressed?

Third, you'll need to decide what your level of participation will be, at least initially. I've identified five levels, as follows, each with greater or lesser degrees of interaction, transparency, and disclosure.



At the very least, you want to begin to get your identity and profile out via **passive outposting**. Why? Because as Brian Solis put it, "[Google is your new resume](#)." Many people now turn to Google to do some background on potential new hires, co-workers, clients, suppliers, and other contacts (I certainly do!) By pro-actively putting accurate profile information about yourself on sites such as [LinkedIn](#) and [ZoomInfo](#) (and potentially others, like [VisualCV](#) and [Plaxo](#)), you can at least become "find-able" with some information that you control. The first level of activity in on-line social networking is being in the room, and this can be accomplished with very minimal privacy concerns through establishing your presence on a few core sites.

If you Google "Steve Woodruff", you'll see that with steady effort over the years, I have not only become "find-able", but quite dominant in any search on my name. Yet, a few years back, a cop-killer in California by that same name came up very high on a Google search! Not only has that Steve Woodruff been incarcerated, he's also been....well, **displaced in Google rankings**. And that's a good thing, at least from my perspective! If you aren't pro-actively putting accurate and helpful information about yourself out there, then you're leaving that door open for others – who may be neither accurate nor helpful.

I initially used [Facebook](#) as a fairly passive outpost, to be find-able by people from the past, but as often will occur with these networks, my usage evolved to a somewhat more active "lifestreaming" use (see below). You may start your on-line networking at a very modest level and then, as your comfort level increases, you will likely move up the participation curve.

The next level up is **formal connecting** – LinkedIn is a great platform for this. You begin to find people you know (many of them will already be on LinkedIn) and connect directly with them. This facilitates keeping in touch with people you've met or worked with, but it also opens up the exciting potential of reaching out to other people in networks one or two degrees away through recommendations and electronic messaging. Connecting with more people multiplies the number of "weak ties" (connections of connections), from which much of the power of an opportunity network derives. LinkedIn Groups are a great way to connect with others who share similar professional interests.

Some social networking tools are designed to enable **lifestreaming**, which should be thought of as a sharing of many aspects of life (often more on the personal level) with your audience. Lifestreaming is the aspect of social networking that is most often lampooned ("Why would I want to know what you had for breakfast?"), but rightly handled, it has the potential of deepening bonds and creating new connections even for the professional networker. Did you know that Facebook is now the largest on-line repository for photographs? It's because they've made it so easy to share "stuff" with your connections, and now with ubiquitous digital cameras, you can immediately upload and make available something we all like to share – our pictures and videos. That's lifestreaming.

You can also participate in **private communities**. These walled gardens exist for every area of interest imaginable, and in fact, you can create one yourself in no time with a tool like [Ning](#). These communities are often private and invitation-only, which enables a freer environment for sharing since identities and information are not exposed to marketers, lurkers, or the wider web. An example of this is the site [Sermo](#), available only to physicians, who can share peer-to-peer in a protected environment.

Finally, there is **open web networking**. If you blog (or comment on blogs), your writing is open to the world at large. If you use [Twitter](#), you have (potentially) a global audience – even though you may select your followers, many others may follow you, and re-post your “tweets” (a tweet is a 140-character-or-less message distributed via Twitter). This can actually be tremendously advantageous in creating an opportunity network, but for many, it’s a gradual evolution before reaching a comfort level with this type of transparency and connectivity.

The good thing about social networking is that you start wherever you wish, and go as deep and wide as you want. You are free to start, grow, evolve, phase out things that don’t work, and try new things. And you’ll find that a whole bunch of smart people out there are doing the same thing – those who’ve been most active in social networks all went through (and continue to go through) the learning process. The greatest reward is not the pursuit of connection numbers, or of dominant Google vanity searches. It’s “[pre-meeting](#)” great people, and sometimes getting to meet them later in real life. The ultimate goal isn’t having a mere electronic network. **It’s building community.**

Let’s get started!

It’s impossible to cover the many social networking sites in this little e-booklet, so we’ll just look at a few of the most popular. I’ll provide very basic direction on getting on-board, and links to tips and advice created by others that will provide plenty of additional guidance.

How to get started on: Basic profile sites

If you’re interested in posting a resume or bare-bones profile information on sites like Monster.com, VisualCV, Plaxo, or the like, it’s pretty simple. Just register at the sites of interest and post as much or as little profile information as you’d like. You may want to create a special e-mail address (in Google’s Gmail, for instance) that can be used for your contact information; this keeps your primary work/home e-mail private, and you can set up your Gmail inbox to [auto-forward](#) all messages to your primary address.

Just by this small step into the world of being “find-able” on-line, some have had new professional opportunities presented to them. It’s the very least that any professional should do as a first step.

How to get started on: LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional networking platform. You can create a very robust profile of your skills, experience, and job history on LinkedIn, and you can also give and receive viewable recommendations to/from others you know. Many HR people and recruiters – as well as job-seekers – use LinkedIn to scout out new positions or candidates.

This [little animated intro video](#) will give you a great sense of how LinkedIn works, though it is a bit dated. LinkedIn also has a complete [learning center](#) for those starting out.

Registering at the site is very simple. The key is to be as complete as possible when you fill out your profile. This [BNET post](#) is a great guide to getting you started. And your best bet in finding your initial batch of connections is to import your e-mail address book (from Outlook or other programs) – don't worry, nobody gets spammed. LinkedIn shows you, once your contacts are imported, who is already on LinkedIn, and makes it absolutely simple to start connecting.

Three other powerful features of LinkedIn: **Recommendations**, **Groups**, and **Status** updates. Overcome any shyness about asking people you're connected to for a personal recommendation – this is a very important element of your profile. One good method is to write up recommendations of people you think highly of – you can visit their profile and click the Recommend this Person link (upper right). And, on a regular basis (every day or two or three), put something interesting in your Network Update status box (What are you working on now?). It can be something about a work project (non-proprietary, of course), or a link to a news article, or an interesting resource you've found. This keeps you “top of mind” in your network, as these status updates show up on the LinkedIn homepages of your connections, and it gives you the opportunity to be a value-adding resource.

You also want to start exploring LinkedIn **Groups**. Just plug in keywords of interest to you (your company name, or market sector, etc.) – there are likely groups of like-minded people who have joined LinkedIn sub-communities. You can find a lot of targeted contacts this way.

At the very least, make LinkedIn a robust passive outpost, with some close connections (be sure, under Settings/ Profile/Privacy Controls, that you enable your profile to be visible on the web – [here's mine](#), for example). But you can also steadily become a very valuable connector on LinkedIn and broaden your opportunities considerably. You may want to participate in the **Answers** section to make your profile more visible on the platform. Use LinkedIn to send messages to people you know, and to reach out to people you should know. Be helpful, courteous, and pro-active. You know – the stuff your mother told you. Usually LinkedIn will be an approved site on your company servers (which may not be the case with other, more social sites below).

How to get started on: Facebook

Facebook is generally used as a more personal/social platform, though some people use it as a hybrid of both personal and professional contacts (as I do). Many professionals shy away from Facebook, but the fact is, you can make a personal/professional separation by only accepting connection requests from one group or another, depending on your strategy. Also, Facebook has a number of privacy settings that you can play with, so that certain information you post on the site is only visible to specific groups you designate.

Facebook is great for friends and family and formers from the past (classmates, colleagues, old flames and prom dates...). Depending on the nature of your work and your approach, you may wish to use it to deepen ties with those you're connected with in your professional network. However, care must be taken here, as people tend to share more freely on the platform.

For professionals seeking to build a robust network, I recommend connecting on other platforms (and in real-life) first before initiating contact via Facebook.

How to get started on: Twitter

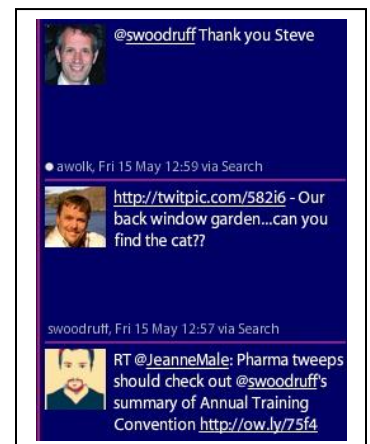
Twitter has been in the news a lot lately, yet many do not understand its value or utility. So what is Twitter? Start with this quick Commoncraft animation video, one of the best quickie overviews of the platform: [Twitter in plain English](#). This [quick overview](#) by Chris Brogan is also a nice intro.

Twitter is a way of connecting with people through short messages (tweets – max. 140 characters) – it's like a virtual water cooler/neighborhood fence, where you can interact with a variety of folks you know, and meet others. Yes, some people tweet trivia (“ewww...my cat just threw up!”) but many of those on Twitter share quite a bit of valuable information, and engage in some thought-provoking dialogue.

Twitter is a wonderful platform for several reasons; it's simple; it's an easy place to make new acquaintances; it's opt-in (you choose whom you follow); and it's a lot of fun. It can even be a [life-saver](#)! There is a professional side, however – new business partnerships are being formed; collaborative efforts enabled; resources shared; new jobs found. Twitter has actually become my primary Help Desk.

Those who [follow me on Twitter](#) get the most complete picture of me, because I share professional, personal, philosophical, political, and photographic facets of my life there.

It takes a little while to get the hang of Twitter, and you need a certain critical mass of people you follow, and people following you, before the value starts to emerge. Many dialogues begin on Twitter and extend into phone calls, e-mails, and face-to-face meetings at conferences and local “tweet-ups” (meetups of Twitterers). Tools like [Twellow](#) (a Twitter directory) can help you find



people to follow, but you generally build your network by connecting with some key people, then finding out who they are connected with that seem to be interesting as you read their tweets.

How to get started: Blogging

While LinkedIn is the platform I've been using the longest, my immersion into social networking really took off when I started blogging in 2006. It was through blogging, and reading/commenting on other people's blogs, that I started networking more intensively, and that is how I've been able to meet so many fine people throughout the world.

Not everyone is cut out for blogging, however. You need to have a passionate interest; some ability to express yourself coherently in writing; time; and determination. It takes 10 minutes to launch a blog. It takes long-term commitment to be a blogger. A blogger wants to communicate and connect. Fortunately, the tools are now quite mature and easy to use.

If you're going to start blogging on some topic, I suggest starting out with the free hosted platform at WordPress.com. I've used Blogger as well; it's fine, but I prefer WordPress. Here's a [very quick video intro](#) for setting up a blog in WordPress. If you want to get serious, spend 10 bucks and get Gavin Heaton's (blogger in Australia – yes, I've now met him in real life also!) [Dialup Guide to Blogging](#). Oh, you want to get even more serious? OK – Prologger (Darren Rowse) has [some advice for you](#).

If you want to begin blogging on a topic or theme, I'd suggest that you spend a couple of weeks finding other blogs ([Google](#) will help you!) on similar themes and start reading them. Get a feel for how bloggers write. Begin to leave comments on posts. Reach out to the authors (bloggers are generally a friendly and helpful lot) and introduce yourself. Look and listen first. Below you will find a recommended list of some bloggers you might want to start following.

Interestingly enough, some blogging templates can actually be used to create the look and feel of a more traditional website. My main [Impactiviti](#) site is actually built using a WordPress blog template, as is [SteveWoodruff.com](#), my “umbrella” site. For no cost, you can create your own website, and for a few dollars a year, you can purchase your own URL (www.YourName.com if it is available, or something similar) and point it to your website. This is a nice way to “up” your on-line presence, become more findable, and consolidate your social networking footprint.

How to get started: People

You can learn a lot from those who have walked the path before you. Chris Brogan has this helpful post, looking back on his social networking venture: [If I started today](#). There are many smart, experienced, and helpful people who can help you on your journey. This would be a VERY long e-book if I listed ALL the people I now network with via social media; I'm just going to list a handful as a “starter pack.” As you follow and interact with these folks, you'll quickly come across a whole bunch of others!

Liz Strauss – Liz runs an annual social networking conference, advises people on web stuff, and is an overall great networker. Her blog is [here](#). On Twitter: [@lizstraus](#)

Mike Sansone – Mike is a quality guy, who's been involved in social networking for a long time. He can be found in Iowa meeting with folks at Panera U, but he's also on-line at [Converstations](#). On Twitter: [@mikesansone](#).

Ann Handley – Ann is a blogging/marketing maven who runs [MarketingProfs](#), one of the best known on-line destinations for marketers. She's a gem. The [MarketingProfs Daily Fix](#) blog is a fabulous resource, and Ann is a hoot. On Twitter: [@marketingprofs](#)

Chris Brogan – Chris is a leading social media thinker, doer, sharer, and writer. His [blog](#) is a must-read if you're serious about social media. On Twitter: [@chrisbrogan](#)

Lisa Hoffmann – Social media consultant. [Blogger](#). Regular gal. Nice person. On Twitter: [@lisahoffmann](#)

Beth Harte – Marketing and communications consultant. Experienced in social media, and very helpful. Great person. Her blog: [The Harte of Marketing](#). On Twitter: [@bethharte](#)

Mack Collier – Mack gives, instructs, thinks, shares. He's a social media consultant and awfully nice guy. Follow him, read [his blog](#), and you'll learn how to do social networking – by example. On Twitter: [@mackcollier](#)

Karen Swim – Karen is a wonderful example of transparency, caring, and sharing on-line. She's quite a good [writer](#) as well. On Twitter: [@karensim](#)

Tom Clifford – Director Tom is a filmmaker who is using social networking in very [creative and engaging ways](#). He's also one of the nicest guys I've met through social media. On Twitter: [@thomasclifford](#)

Lisa Petrilli – Lisa is my LeadershipChat co-host and a challenging thinker and leader. Her blog is [LisaPetrilli.com](#); on Twitter: [@LisaPetrilli](#)

This Twitter list, which I call [Backyard Fence](#), is a collection of 50 people I interact with regularly. It's a great selection to start with.

Getting started in social networking may seem a bit daunting at first, but if you simply take a few steps, you'll find that the people you interact with are quite friendly and helpful, and soon you'll realize that you can create your own on-line community, your own neighborhood, your own opportunity network. The old "safety nets" are torn and unreliable. But a growing network of smart and connected people is your best resource for mapping out your professional future, and they provide great companionship on the journey.

[Believe](#) that your main job – your professional security - is building a professional network. Don't get overwrought about [numbers](#). One new quality connection made per week equals a high-powered network you can cultivate that will reach 50 within a year.

Overwhelmed yet? Hey, there's a lot for all of us to learn! [Breathe](#) deep, jump in and get networking. The water's fine!

Appendix A: Social Networking Resources for Pharmaceutical Professionals

My Stuff

[Impactiviti blog](#) - News, commentary and resources for pharma professionals.

[Impactiviti Collection](#) (e-newsletter) – free weekly newsletter with updates, news and links (plus some fun stuff) for pharma sales/marketing/training professionals. Subscribe at the link.

[Impactiviti SocialRx](#) Links/Resources page – loads of links to Pharma-oriented blogs, Twitter-people, and other social networking resources. If you're looking to get started connecting to pharma folks, this is your place.

[LinkedIn networking group for pharma sales/training professionals](#) – this already-built community has hundreds of Pharma professionals – a great place to start!

Other people's stuff

Jon Richman's [Dose of Digital Wiki](#) – lots of pharma social media links

Shwen Gwee started up a Ning group for pharma folks interested in social media: [SocialPharmer](#)

Other pharma-related **LinkedIn Groups**: [Pharmaceutical Sales and Marketing](#), [Pharmaceutical Marketing Coach](#), [US Biotech Sales Professionals](#)

I would urge all pharmaceutical marketers who are considering social media as a “tactic” in their promotional plans to [first get involved – professionally and personally – in social networking](#). Join communities. Build relationships. Understand the culture. Learn the ropes. Gain credibility. That is how you will begin to understand what will be the value-add of a brand presence.

Appendix B: Networking and your Personal Brand

People often question if they “need” a personal brand. Here’s the news - you already HAVE a personal brand. The only questions are: what is it? And are you projecting it effectively?

When people see you, think of you, and relate to you, words and images and feelings come to mind. That is your personal brand. If people who know you think “friendly,” “diligent,” “kind,” when they see you and talk about you, you are well on your way to possessing a positive personal brand. Of course, you can easily see the flip side of this as well if the top-of-mind descriptive terms aren’t so flattering...!

So, you have a brand. **Do you know what it is?** What distinguishes you from the teeming masses of humanity? What are you known for?

What you’ll find is a constellation of qualities, and perhaps 1-5 characteristics that really stand out. Those are what you build your brand on. And, once you really have a grasp of it, you can communicate to people much more effectively what you’re all about. Where you fit in. Even what your future business endeavors should look like. You project your brand NOW as you network - but you can project it more effectively when you actually know what it IS, and feel comfortable in your own skin.

As you build a personal and professional network, it becomes much easier when you can distill what you’re about. People need mental “hooks” on which to hang memories of you. If you’re simply a nice person, you may be easily forgotten. If you’re a nice person who is an entrepreneurial communicator with a passion to eventually create a cross-cultural advertising firm, now you’re memorable.

Let’s make one distinction. There is your personal brand *essence*, which is that grouping of personality traits, character traits, strengths, and capabilities that make you YOU. Then there is your *role*, which is how you function in the world and marketplace. Your role may change, but your essence remains the same, and hopefully, your functional and professional role will increasingly be aligned with who you (essentially) are.

Think of it this way. Your personal brand is **You - Projected**.

You - the **real** you. Not some faux image you want to project. Not some imitation. If it isn’t authentic, it’s worthless as a “personal brand.”

Projected - **pro-actively**. Personal brands can “just happen” to some extent, but anyone involved in any kind of branding knows that you need to actively put forward your identity. I won’t go into the myriad of ways in which this is accomplished; just note that building a personal brand, like building anything, is not a passive endeavor.

Projected - **by others**. Here’s your reputation. Ultimately, the power of a personal brand multiplies when you have a great reputation among others. And when others actually do have an accurate knowledge of you, and talk about you to others, your brand is on its way to being well-established.

When you begin figuring out your "personal brand," you're identifying where you add value. And you should think about your value-add on at least 2 levels - the professional level (how do I help my employer and clients succeed and make money?), and the community level (how do I help my family/church/neighbors/network grow and succeed?). Usually, you'll find quite a bit of overlap, because you are you in both realms, and your strengths carry over.

Below is an exercise- six questions for you to answer - to help you think through your unique strengths and abilities, and how you might express your personal brand with others. You might want to print this out and use it as a worksheet to jot down your thoughts:

What (in my opinion) are the terms that most accurately describe me (try to find 5-8 adjectives or nouns that summarize what you do best). *What is my value-add?*

What are the words that others most commonly use to describe me?

What are the activities in my professional role(s), and in my personal life, where I seem to add the most value to others (and enjoy myself the most)?

If a friend or co-worker was describing me to someone, what would I *want* them to say about my character/personality/strengths? What would I want them to say about key professional roles ("so-and-so is the go-to person for _____")

If the sky was the limit, what would I REALLY like to do professionally for the rest of my life?

What's a one-sentence summary of my "personal brand" that I can share with others? How can I take that summary and weave into the various ways that I present myself?

Now, take what accurately describes you as you are, AND what you'd like to become, and find the best ways to project that, including your summaries (self-descriptions, "About Me" sections, etc.) on social networking sites.

For further reading – the original personal branding article by Tom Peters – [The Brand Called You](#).