

# Finding Your *Voice* In A Crowded World

*Personal Branding,  
Social Media and You*

Facebook

LinkedIn

Blog

Twitter



By Ron Miller and Julie Roads


## Foreword

The other day I got an email from Julie that was a copy of our first email exchange. Hard to believe it was only last June we began our friendship. I still don't know how it happened, but I know it began on Twitter, proof that you can make real and meaningful connections in social media. Somehow it evolved and we learned we were both fans of the work of David Meerman Scott. We both read pre-release copies of his most recent book *World Wide Rave* and we both were full of enthusiasm for the ideas he outlined in the book.

One such idea was an eBook. I don't remember which one of us suggested it, but I think it was me. I just dangled the idea, and as she does, Julie grabbed it with both hands and we hit the ground running. The idea moved from "we should" to "Here's what we are going to do." As with other business ventures we have undertaken together, we didn't think about it, we just did it. And here we offer you an introduction to social media, why it's important and a plan for getting started.

We hope the book gives you concrete ideas for getting involved in social media. Please feel free to contact us and let us know what you think. We look forward to continuing the conversation.

~Ron



*And here we offer you an introduction to social media, why it's important and a plan for getting started.*

# Finding Your Voice in a Crowded World: Personal Branding, Social Media and You

## Introduction



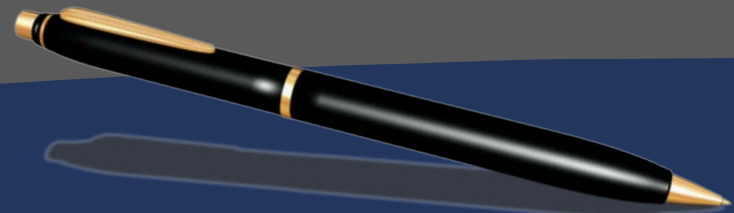
**Julie:** A marketing writer and a technology writer walked into a bar...okay, it was actually Twitter...but we walked in and met nevertheless—and despite, or perhaps because of, our contrarian views of the writing and conceptual world, we made for a fine match.

Bouncing our ideas off of each other, we realized we were both eternally interested in the concept of finding and expressing one's personal brand and authentic self in a crowded world—and then living it in the blogosphere and within social media networks.

But then, as we started to write this book, we quickly discovered that meshing our two authentic selves onto one? page was difficult, bumpy, and awkward, and we asked ourselves: Why, when we are writing about the importance of authenticity, would we squelch any part of our selves by coming up with just ONE message? So, we created a different kind of book format— one where we could co-exist and be defined in relation to each other. We simply started asking each other questions and taking turns answering them. It's something akin to a political debate that no one wants to actually win— but deserves to be heard.



**Ron:** The fact is that Julie is a much different writer than I am. The marketing writer is so much more gifted with the silver tongue (pen) than the technology writer that I am, but perhaps that's what's going to make this writing exercise so interesting. I'm certainly excited to see where this takes us.



## Who should be reading this?



**Julie:** Anyone with a presence online— it applies. Of course, if you're just starting out, these words will put you ahead of the game. Just this afternoon, I witnessed a cool group of people with a great concept and a fantastic url presenting themselves as a company on their blog and on Twitter (and only tweeting links to their blog!). So much potential, hidden personality and good intention, but they come across as spam —certainly as generic and unspecial.

- If you're an independent or freelancer, social media is a bastion of opportunity. Let people know who you are, shake some hands and enter your name into the word of mouth pool.
- As a small or mid-sized company, you can use social media sites to connect on a personal level with your customers— offer customer service, listen to what people are saying about you, understand what they're looking for from your product or industry.
- Of course, the big corporations benefit as well. Social media invites you to come down and meet the people. This is your chance to stop shouting at us through the TV and actually have a conversation— not to mention disaster intervention or clean up.

No matter what size your business is, it's clear that social media is a useful tool. But hammers don't work when you bang them softly and saws don't cut if they're upside down. It's imperative that you use social media tools correctly to make them effective. Identify your personality and brand, then place them at just the right angle. It's your voice that people want to hear, not just the company line. This is your opportunity to meet your customers face to face.



## So, the world is crowded. Who are all of these people?

### Who are you? Your life's multiple roles



**Ron:** When you think about it, you have a bunch of roles in your life. You are your professional persona, whatever that is. Joe the Plumber, for example, was instantly recognizable during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. Joe Wurzelbacher, the man who came to be known as Joe the Plumber was undoubtedly much more than his plumber role (as we later found out), but when people are referenced in the media, for better or worse, they are usually identified by what they do (or did; unemployed bank teller robs convenience store). But we are so much more than our professional selves. We are husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. We are friends. We have things in our lives we are passionate about, causes we care about, sports teams we follow, music we listen to, and on and on.

Our colleagues may see one side of us, our families another, and friends yet another. All people are complex, and part of what we are doing here is providing a way to show the different sides of yourself to build your online brand. Most of us, when we think of brands, think of ice cream or soda, beer or computers. We don't think of our colleagues, ourselves, or how we present ourselves to the world. But offline or online, we show ourselves in certain ways, share parts of our lives and our personalities, and to a large extent those qualities represent our personal brands.

### Who else does what you do?



**Julie:** Lots of other people, I'm sure. And this is both your reality and your challenge. But don't let it discourage you. Find community with your people and learn from them. It's not a bad idea to watch them, read their blogs, talk to them, even partner with them. Learn what they're doing right, discover what they're doing wrong— and fix it in your very own way. This is the way you begin to stand out in your crowd: find your defining contrast.

The world is crowded. Who are all of these people?

## How are you different from them?



**Julie:** There is only one of you. I don't care if there are 10 million car salesmen in the world. You bring life experience, hobbies, skills, relationships, education to the job that no one else does. How do they blend together in a way that makes your business, business model, marketing outreach, etc. stand out? What does the fact that you're a billiards fanatic have to do with your insurance practice?

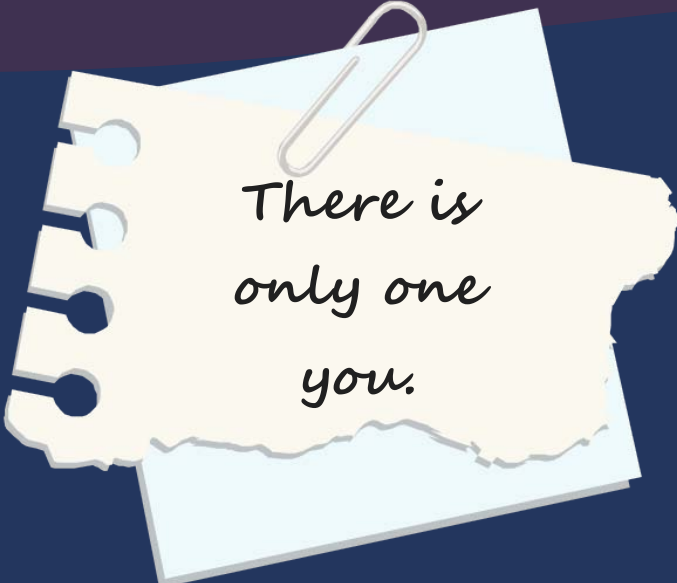
How do the chickens you keep in the back yard influence the car repair class you teach at the community college?

## How are you the same?



**Julie:** You are the same because you're in the same industry, maybe even the same geographic location. Or because you had the same mentor. Perhaps because you're making the same mistakes or experiencing the same success.

In the midst of this discussion about standing out in a crowded world, finding the sameness within your crowd is actually quite important because we all like common ground. When we find our points of intersection, we find safety and comfort. Common ground softens the blow of trying something new or putting ourselves 'out there.' It creates a 'place' to connect, and our commonality puts us face to face, human to human. This sameness also allows us the chance to share with people who understand what we're going through— a beneficial and supportive situation.



There is  
only one  
you.

## How do brand names work for people, not just consumer products?



**Ron:** Certain people have huge brand-name recognition online. They have thousands of people subscribing to their blog, tens of thousands of people following them on Twitter and friending them on Facebook. We recognize these individuals in the same fashion that we immediately recognize Coca Cola, BMW, or Apple.



These individuals have worked hard to create their personal brands in online forums, on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. They have written blogs, and they have shared information. They might have written free eBooks like this one and they are open and friendly and they show themselves to the world. And that's what you need to do to build your own personal brand.



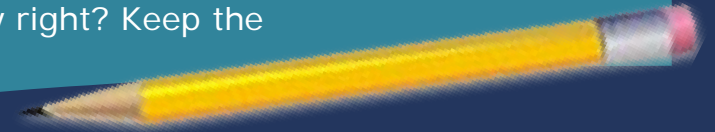
## You're already YOU

### What defines who you are?



**Julie:** Everything and anything. The possibilities are limitless: is it work, family, location, history, hobbies, passions, personality, habits, life approach? Brainstorm. Write it all down. Read it out loud and notice how each of the concepts or words you wrote down feels to your whole self.

This crazy thing happens when we transfer thoughts from our minds to the paper— sometimes they sound better, sometimes not so much. As you write them down and your hand gets a little shaky—check it out. Is that because the words are all wrong? Or because they are incredibly right? Keep the good ones, clear the rest (if not from your life, then at least from your 'this is who I am' identity).



### How do you show yourself to the world?



**Ron:** Picture the last meeting, seminar or class you took. People spoke and presented themselves and as they did, you built a picture of them, accurate or not. To you, one person might have been really smart, another funny, another shy, and another aggressive. These people, without realizing it, were presenting their personal brands to the world. Each time you go online, you present yourself in a similar fashion. You may talk about your products or your company, but you want to show more than simply your professional side and it's up to you to decide how to project the different parts of yourself.

One way is to share what you know. You can post useful links or answer questions. You could retweet (repost) a tweet on Twitter or you could comment constructively on a blog. All of these activities show that you want to share with the world at large and as you take these steps, you project an image as a helpful, responsible and caring member of the community (just as you would by taking similar corresponding steps in the offline world).



Conversely, if you are aggressive, mean, or too direct, you might give the wrong impression about yourself to people who might not know you otherwise. Branding is about reputation building, and you want to build a good reputation and show a positive face to the world online. It doesn't mean you have to be perfect (just as you're not offline), but you do have to show good faith effort that you are trying to be a good online citizen.

## How do you create an online Bio/Profile?



**Julie:** As a consumer, I bristle when a company approaches me, but I welcome (most) humans. This is why we're talking about being an authentic person or brand in the first place— so that you can employ relationship marketing, the kind that depends on authenticity. Relationship marketing, by definition, is a direct contrast to the kind of marketing where you just scream at potential customers (think TV ads). Ew.

Your social media bio is a first approach, a first impression. Personally, I'm much more likely to be interested and want to connect with someone whose bio reads like a human wrote it. While I realize that LinkedIn is meant to be purely a professional network and will lean heavily away some of these points, I look for the following on social media bios/profiles:

- ✓ First person (I, we, our, us)
- ✓ More than just what you do for a living
- ✓ At least some of what you do for a living
- ✓ Proof that you're interested in me
- ✓ How you present your experience and success creatively and in a way that matches who you are.
- ✓ Stories, not resumes.

This doesn't mean that I discount someone who doesn't show me anything beyond their professional persona— I still think there is a way to be crafty and unique, even if you choose to only present your professional side. Even on LinkedIn, I think. First person is a nice touch, it's personal and communicative, and groups are a great place to extend the personality of your profile.



**Ron:** I don't necessarily see it quite as absolute as Julie, but I do agree it's best to use first person. How much information you provide really depends on your social media goals. My Twitter bio is short and provides information about my professional self. Others I've seen, including Julie's, include both professional and private information. I don't discount following someone because their bio is strictly professional as mine is. It comes down to your comfort level and what you are trying to convey.

## Finding Your Online Voice

How do you find your voice?



**Julie:** Here's what I recommend for finding your authentic voice. Think of the person in your life who fits this description: they love you, they think you are superb, when they give you constructive criticism, you're excited to hear it and eager to make the change because they really understand you. Your relationship with them has NO: baggage, tension, lack of trust. (Hint: do not pick your mother or your life partner). Now, start writing to that person. Know that they believe in you and will be honest. Know that you want to be the best you can be around them and that you don't even really need to try...it just comes naturally. Imagine that every time you write, you're writing to them. That's your authentic voice, the good one. Once you find it, you can apply any tone to it and you can apply it to any topic.



**Ron:** I often describe different types of writing to people as finding the right tone. Technical writing has a certain tone and article writing has a different one. You can experiment with different approaches. You could try to be funny or flip or deadly serious. As you try each of these tones, you will discover the one that you're most comfortable with and you can use that on a regular basis, but whatever it may be, it doesn't mean that on any given day it won't change. You don't have to be rigid once you understand how to play with different ones.



*...That's your authentic voice, the good one. Once you find it, you can apply any tone to it and you can apply it to any topic.*

## How do you set boundaries? What is off limit online?



**Julie:** The answer to this question is unique to the answerer. But, I would talk this one over with someone, discuss topics like family, where you live, personal tidbits, and see how you feel when you imagine Joe Shmoe reading it. If you get the heebie jeebies, put that on the 'don't share' list.

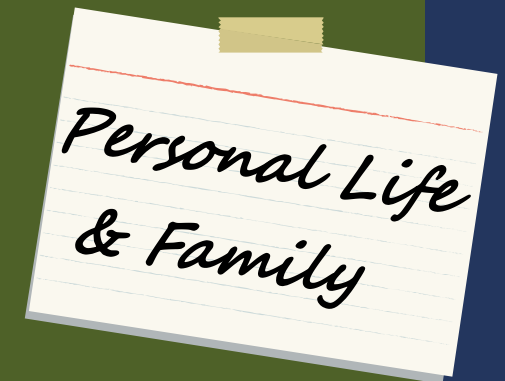
I think my idea for boundary setting as you write your blog, or book or whatever you're writing, is best described by example:

I have a client who's a life coach with an incredible family story who is working on a blog about/surrounding her upcoming book about coaching.

As I see it, she has four perspectives tugging at her pen. She can't, and shouldn't, keep them equally balanced at all times, but her goal is to make sure that no matter what she writes, each of these corners is okay, taken care of, considered.

### Here's the plan:

- Make four cards, one for each perspective. In this case: (1) Self. (2) Book Mission. (3) Personal Life and Family. (4) Coaching Work.
- Under each heading, write the definition of each perspective, the gist of what each perspective stands for, perhaps their boundaries.
- Tape them up in front of your computer.
- As you write, remember each perspective and make sure they're okay with what you're writing, that you meet each of their standards and requirements.



## Here's an idea of what those cards look like, all flushed out:

1. Self: Confidence, energy, humor, total support, real connection, authenticity, acceptance.
2. Book Mission: to help people with life in general, decisions, challenges, time management, relationships, balance, etc.
3. Life: children, husband, safety, personal boundaries (i.e., Little Rosie doesn't want her middle school drama plastered all over her mom's blog, but the realtime negotiations of curfews or friend choices is fair game).
4. Coaching: Coaching philosophies, mantras, guideposts, rules, ethics, the importance of using my life experiences to help my clients.



**Ron:** You might also consider taking it online and using an internet tool to help you. For instance, you could use Evernote and set up a notebook for each of your four selves, then create notes within each notebook outlining your boundaries. The beauty of Evernote is that it syncs automatically with your desktop, web and smart phone, so that all of your information will be available to you wherever you go so if you weren't at home in front of your computer, you could still access and reference your boundary ideas.



# Blogs

## Why are blogs important?



**Julie:** Static websites (that do not continually upload content, but act as an online brochure) do not perform well in site rankings. To compete in your industry and to be found by the world, you must add valuable, pertinent information to your website on a regular basis. A blog is the perfect platform.

1. Blog posts are dramatically less expensive than newspaper, magazine, radio, TV, or web banner ads. For instance, ONE well-placed newspaper ad that guarantees a view by all readers can cost upwards of \$50,000. Blogs can be free.
2. Blog posts are eternal. They live forever online, whereas a newspaper, magazine, radio or TV ads are gone with the trash/recycling or are missed when someone grabs a snack during the commercials. With a blog, you can be found by a potential client because they searched for a topic you blogged about 5 years ago.
3. Your main blog topic is the trunk of the tree, and each post is a branch that broadens your reach via topics, keywords and skill showcasing. While ads may have a headline, a company overview and contact information, each blog post offers vital information on each facet of your business or industry. This profoundly widens the net that you throw and establishes you as an expert in your field. Each blog post focuses on a specific element of your profession and contains highly researched keywords that pull qualified visitors to the blog and your site.
4. Because blogs are ongoing, the information you post is timely, relevant and cutting-edge, as well as proof that you are a steadfast, reliable presence.
5. Your blog is a showcase of your expertise and a portfolio of your work.
6. In essence, blogging is a pure form of permission (or relationship) marketing. Your readers and potential clients found you because of your content or word of mouth, you did not coerce them into visiting with bells and whistles and flashing lights. You offered value and information, and they came looking for you.



*Blog posts live forever...*

7. Traveling purposefully through the blogosphere is essentially a dream networking situation. This is not a Chamber of Commerce Meet 'n Greet. Here, you can pick and choose who you want to talk to (or read), you have time to think before you speak (comment) and you have more than a business card—you have your blog standing behind you, backing you up, and showcasing your expertise.

8. When you build your readership, the possibilities of additional income streams (not attached to how many houses you sell, clients you have, hours you work) is endless. Some examples would be product sales, advertising and webinars. (People are hungry to learn online in their own time, in their own home.)

9. Even though there are well over 100 million blogs...not everyone has one and most don't have a good one. Establishing yourself with a blog puts you ahead of many competitors in your industry— in value, content and design.

10. Blogs are made to grow. In size, readership, widgets, plugins, options, content, opportunities. The same blog platform can reach 5 or 5 million. The same blog can house a small outfit or a Fortune 500 company.



**Ron:** For me, it's more about having an outlet to write about what I want when I want without any editorial filters. I'm not at the mercy of editors and publication owners to print my work because I have an outlet that's all my own where I can express my opinions and write about whatever catches my fancy and publish whenever I choose. As a writer, that's just a huge treat. Now, for people who aren't professional writers like me, a blog can provide a way to share your expertise with the world, and in that case, it does give you all the advantages that Julie has outlined here, but if you're a writer, a blog puts the power to publish in your hands.

*A blog puts the power to publish in your hands.*

## What is a Blog?



**Ron:** A blog is a personal publishing platform. In the days before blogs, if you wanted to be published, you had to go to someone who owned the presses and hope they would hire you to write for them. Today, with a blog, anyone with a computer and an internet connection has the means to be a personal publisher. You often see a blog defined as a personal journal, and it can be that, but it has the potential to be much more. You can write personal commentaries, full articles, link to other works you find interesting, interview people, post pictures and video--in short anything you want it to be.

## Why are blogs successful for a business when they just give away free content?



**Ron:** There is something counterintuitive about giving away anything, especially your writing, but sometimes online things work differently than you might be used to in the offline world. When you create a web site for your company, chances are you'll work hard to find a good designer, create the perfect content and launch it for the world to see, but once you launch it, the content stays fairly static in most cases with only minor changes over time.

When you blog, you are constantly generating fresh content for your web site. This activates the search spiders and lets the search engines know there is something new going on on your site. It keeps your site relevant and good, regular content in your blog can drive traffic to your site, and while your blog readers are there, chances are they will notice your product or service.



**Julie:** It's human nature to wonder, 'what's in it for me?' When people come to your blog and see that you know a lot about your industry, they want to know how you can help them with their specific issues and questions. Your 'free content' is the lead in to building a relationship. Blogs are excellent at forming trust with your reader as they learn to depend on you, what you offer them, and the value/answers/solutions that you share.

## How do you build an audience for your blog?



**Ron:** Blogging, like many of the tools we discuss in this eBook is just part of the equation. To understand blogging, you should be reading other people's blogs and commenting on them too. Commenting not only raises your personal profile to other readers outside your blog, it shows you care enough to share your ideas and join the conversation. As Chris Brogan who runs New Marketing Labs says, "Commenting is the #1 thing I recommend for building your blog traffic." He adds, "It also, makes you human." What Brogan means by this is that when you leave your blog url in the comment, it drives traffic back to your own blog and at the same time, people see you as multidimensional and conscientious, qualities you want to project about yourself to build a positive personal brand.



**Julie:** I find social media sites, like Twitter and Facebook, a great way to get to know people— and it's an easy way to post links (in your bio and in updates— but, of course, don't only post your links on Twitter!). Get to know people informally (Twitter) and reconnect with people and/or introduce your business (Facebook and LinkedIn). Over 30% of my traffic comes from Twitter. I'd also add to Ron's comment about commenting. I've really connected with my readers by being involved in the comments on my own blog— commenting back or even sending personal emails in response.



## What if you can't write? Should you just forget about a blog?



**Julie:** This is a hotly contested issue: whether or not it's okay to let other people 'ghostwrite' your blog. Some people think it is just wrong, 100%, sacrilegious even. And I understand that because the blog is an online journal—it's supposed to be a collection of the owner's thoughts on their subject. But...

I do ghostwrite blogs for my clients. I believe that, in the same way that they hire me to write any of their marketing materials, this is okay. Like I do in any project, I'm listening to their voice, tone, message and, (Note: I honestly can't decide if this comma should go before or after the "and" but something feels wrong with this many commas!) then, turning it into words, content.

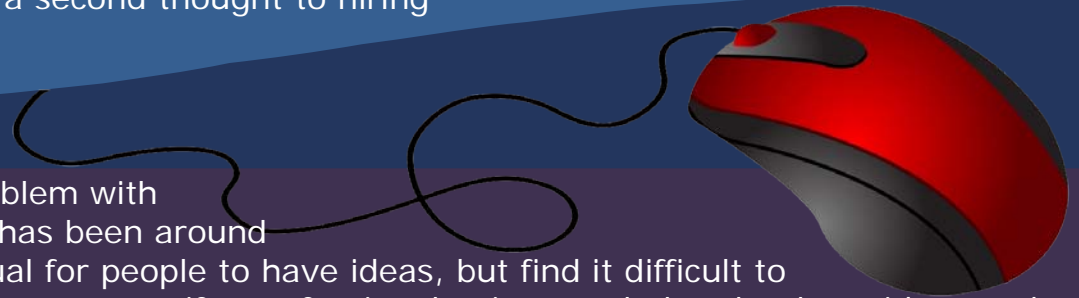
Huge surprise, but not everyone can write. But?, I don't think they should be excluded from the blogosphere or the land of social media because they can't transfer their thoughts to the keyboard. Do you?

In the end, your blog will sink or swim because of the content. If you have a cheesy, salesy blog with sub-par content (whoever writes it), it will sink. If your content contains You and it works like a two way conversation full of information, value, and back 'n forth, it will swim. And if you need help writing it because you have no ability or no time, then good for you for asking.

Guess what, I can't design anything. I can't format a simple page—I hire a designer to do that for me—but my personality is highly visible throughout my site. My contention is that because we were all taught to read and write by age 6, we assume that we should all be able to handle writing tasks. As a result, content production is taken for granted, or worse, devalued. On the other hand, web and graphic design are specialties, rarities, skills held by a? relative few, and, so no one gives a second thought to hiring a blog designer...it fascinates me to no end.



**Ron:** I don't necessarily have a problem with ghost writing per se. Ghost writing has been around long before blogs and it's not unusual for people to have ideas, but find it difficult to express those ideas in writing. In those cases, if a professional writer can help take those ideas and turn them into blog posts that reflect the blog owners ideas, why not? There's nothing inherently wrong with that, and the writer is giving the blogger the voice to express those ideas. But there are issues of transparency involved here that we can't simply dismiss and it's difficult to define a clear line between helping someone and becoming a promoter under the blogger's name. Because of this, before you hire a ghost writer, you should try it yourself. You might be surprised how easily the ideas flow after you start thinking about blogging on a regular basis. I write 12 blog posts a month for DaniWeb, and people ask me how I come up with ideas. I'm constantly on the lookout for ideas, connections, unusual bits of news that I can make into blog posts, and because I do this and collect these ideas, it's really not as hard as you might think. You begin to build it into your day without even thinking about it.



# Social Media Tools to Build Your Online You

What are some social media tools I can use?



**Ron:** The top social media tools that I use (and/or recommend) are:

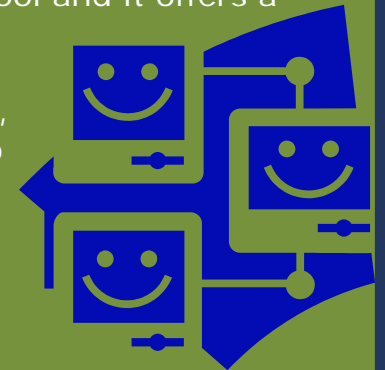
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Ning

## Facebook



**Ron:** Facebook began as a social network for college students, but over the last couple of years it has grown to be so much more than that. It's now a full-blown business networking tool and it offers a number of tools you can use to help you build your online brand:

- **Make Friends:** The most obvious way is to build a network of friends and colleagues, known on Facebook as friends. Once you have the network in place, you can begin to do some interesting things to communicate to the network. For instance, you can use Facebook as a platform to post links to your blog posts and to share other (perhaps related) links that your friends might also find interesting. This is the simplest and easiest way to use Facebook, but remember to use it as more than a promotional tool—you must show your true self and, above all, give as well as take.
- **Set up a group:** Once you have a network in place, you can take it to another level and set up a group where you can showcase a subject you are passionate about or you think your friends might be passionate about. If there is a group of people absolutely committed to your furniture business, start a group called Friends of [your furniture company]. Invite friends to the group and use it as a platform to publicize your blog, your web site, your business, and to let others in the community share their ideas directly with you. Ask the community to help design your next couch or to improve your product. Respond to complaints as well as praise and keep it real, above board, and fully transparent.



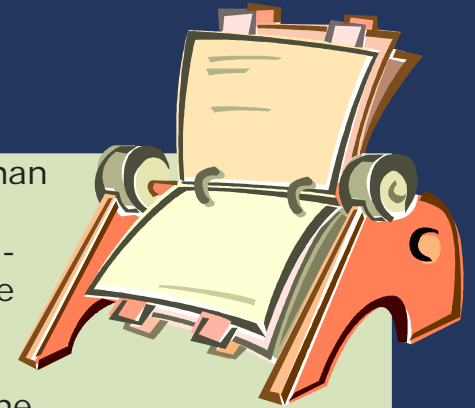
facebook

- **Write a Facebook App:** This particular feature may be beyond the means of most small businesses, but if you can create a Facebook App related somehow to your core business, you can create a lot of recognition for your company, your products, and yourself in the process. It takes programming skills, and it's not for everyone, but it's worth mentioning because it can be a very creative way to build your company's or your personal brand.

## LinkedIn



**Ron:** A colleague of mine recently suggested that LinkedIn was nothing more than a fancy online Rolodex. That description might have fit a year ago, but with the addition of groups and tools, LinkedIn has graduated from online Rolodex to full-fledged social networking tool. And unlike Facebook, which still has a lot of noise mixed in with some very powerful tools, LinkedIn is 100 percent professional. It's completely focused on connecting with colleagues and co-workers to build professional networks. To that end you can undertake any of the following activities to build your online brand:



- **Build a profile and link, link, link:** Build a complete profile. If you're not comfortable doing this, find someone who can help you. LinkedIn gives you a percentage of completeness to let you know how complete your profile is and even lets you know what's missing. After you have a good profile, look for friends, colleagues and co-workers and link to them. You can connect with people you meet in the course of your business, your business partners, people you worked with at former jobs--anyone that makes sense. But you should make sure you know them on some level, even if it's online interactions. If you're looking for good ways to find people you know, search by name or company or look at the profiles of people you know and see whom they are linking to. You'll find that you share common friends and colleagues with people you know and you can build your network by inviting these people to link to you.
- **Ask a question/answer a question:** LinkedIn has a Question and Answer forum. You can raise your profile by answering questions in areas you have expertise. If you have a question, you can also ask which provides a way to interact with people who answer you. As with many of the strategies in this eBook it involves give and take and interacting with a Community of people.

**LinkedIn**

- **Join a group:** You can take the previous item even further by joining one of the many groups on LinkedIn. There are groups for every interest from alumni at your alma mater to any number of topics of interest. For instance, you can belong to the Web 2.0 group to discuss subjects related to Web 2.0. You can start discussions, join discussions and, once again, interact with people who share common personal and professional interests with you.
- **Start a group:** Finally, you can start a group yourself as a platform for your business, publication, or area of interest. You can invite customers, readers or other interested parties to join the group and keep them informed of changes to your blog, web site, business, or whatever. You can use the group as a platform to discuss matters important to you and your business. You can use it as a forum for customers to share ideas, register complaints, and ask questions. It can be a very powerful way to share and interact with people who care about what you're doing.

## Ning



**Ron:** Unlike the other (sites?) in which you are part of a broad network, Ning enables you to set up your very own personal social network quickly and easily. You can choose your own web address for the social network, which lets you link it to your personal brand. It's free so it's a terrific way to build community and expand your personal reach without making a huge investment. Once you have it set up:

- Invite people to join using some of the other tools described in this eBook
- Set up groups for yourself and members.
- Each member can have his/her own blog.
- Each group can start its own internal discussions.

The word "Ning" is written in a white, serif font on a solid green rectangular background.

For a good example of how this works, check out <http://chrisvelanmusic.ning.com/>. Chris is using this Ning to create community and conversation as he gets ready to launch his second album. It's a truly powerful platform and what's great is that it can scale to allow for thousands of members, yet it's completely under your personal control. And you can reach your community easily, bringing them back to video, blog posts and personal messaging.

## How do you use Twitter?



**Julie:** To use Twitter effectively, you must, must, must be a person and not a company (unless your company is so relevant that people are dying to hear from it. Examples include: Dell, Google, CNN). Being a person on Twitter means:

- Don't do things like hook up an auto-response system to contact new followers via direct messages.
- Don't push your product: Let people be interested in you and they'll check out your site and dig deeper to know who you are.
- Put your actual picture in your avatar box—not the company logo.
- Use your Twitter bio well. Don't just list your profession—again, show that you're human—in 160 characters try to cast as wide a net as possible.
- Follow the 85/15 rule. This rule applies to so many things but, on Twitter, it means that 85% of your tweets should be outgoing, only 15% should be incoming. That 85% should be either retweets, links to articles you did NOT write, response to peoples' tweets or information that provides information and value to your people.
- The 15% (at the very most) can be about you—your blog posts, requests for help/advice and general, personal musings. Maybe it should be 90/10.
- Listen. People are asking for things all the time...the opportunities for you to present yourself as the helpful one or the expert with answers are limitless.
- Bottom line, be real, have fun, connect, give, give, give.

I do not discount anyone on Twitter—unless they are spammy. I love the variety. But, you never know where an important contact is going to come from. People can only fit so much into their 160 character bio—you have to look beyond it. Who's to say that @bigoledaddy's wife doesn't run the marketing department for Zappos. Who's to say that one night over dinner she tells her hubby that she needs a writer stat for a huge overhaul of their website and he says, 'Oh, I know just the person! @writingroads!' - boom, you're hired. Like I

said, I do not discount anyone on Twitter unless they are spam. I'm delighted to be part of your network and I hope you're delighted to be part of mine.



**Ron:** Twitter is about getting to know another side of people. Julie is not just the owner of Writing Roads, and as she chose to reveal that on Twitter, I got to know more about her, and as we exchanged Tweets, we built a friendship. That won't always happen, but you will be surprised how it can make you feel a little closer to people you have never met in person to see a part of them beyond their professional selves. As you watch Twitter traffic, you will get an idea of what types of things to post. There's no right or wrong thing to post (except if you are excessively Spammy), but you'll soon get a feel for how it works. Remember to give as well as take. If you post a link to your blog, retweet someone else's you find interesting. Post a link to a helpful article that has nothing to do with your business. Respond to a question. In short, be a good citizen. You can promote your own work--it's understood and expected--but don't forget to give back too.

twitter

# Social Media Etiquette to Build Your Brand Effectively

## Stay True, Be You



**Ron:** Of all the rules, perhaps this is most important. Stay true to yourself. Don't compromise your beliefs or your standards ever, for any reason.

## How does the 'Less is more, quality rules' mantra apply to social media?



**Julie:** The first thing that strikes me about this question is:  
Time is valuable. People don't have a lot of time.  
So:

1. If you, for example, Tweet a lot of nonsense on a regular basis, send millions of gifts on Facebook, or 'ask' questions on LinkedIn that only serve to promote your business—people will start to ignore your messages. And then they'll miss the really good stuff. So strive to only put quality information out there. That said, last night I tweeted maniacally during American Idol, which was fun for many, perhaps not so fun for some others. The #idol tweets were being pumped out at a speed of about 725 tweets/minute from the entire Twitterverse (not just from me). But, my point is that I only do things like that on a random basis, not every day. And last night I connected for the first time with some people because of our shared Idol-ridiculousness.
2. You are better off blogging something really good once a week than blogging nonsense every day. But, you are best off blogging really good stuff as often as possible. This also applies to length of post. Say what you need to say and get rid of the fluff. This is, of course, important for every writer—no matter where they are writing. Make every word count.

*Make every  
word count.*

## How transparent should you be?



# Trust & Transparency

**Julie:** Transparency, in the end, is a choice. There are some people that swing to the hardcore side and reveal everything. And some that stay strictly business within the web space, not showing an iota of themselves. If you're looking to build your brand on authenticity, add some amount of transparency to the stew. The goal, after all, is to prove that you are a person and connect with people to build relationships and trust. Hard to do—no, impossible to do—if you don't show yourself (if even through your opinions) to your network, readers, clients, audience.

The other side of transparency is that you are genuine in your work practices—when you reveal how you work, people trust you. When you hide things away, people wonder why. It's easy to talk about the way that you operate within your business during blog and other social media conversations. You can do this as a way of exploring frequent issues that confront your industry or offering helpful tips for handling such situations. An example would be me writing a post about whether I charge by the hour or by the project for marketing copywriting and why.

## How do you treat others?



**Ron:** If there's one theme that runs throughout this eBook, it's the power of sharing, of giving and taking. Give to others and be helpful and you will get paid back in ways you can't imagine, and you will build your personal brand as a responsible, caring individual who gives to the community.

## How do you connect with your network?



**Julie:** When I started using Twitter, I DM'd (DM = send a private Direct Message) every person that followed me. Eventually I let myself off the hook, on this. But it did serve a wonderful purpose—I was trying to build real relationships and I did. I didn't send auto-DMs, I found something in each person's bio or tweets that I could connect. I rarely just DM'd to DM, but occasionally I found myself out of juice but wanting to reach out. In retrospect, I should have just stayed quiet in those cases. I've been on the receiving end of DM's that say, 'thanks for following'—they're lovely but a waste of both of our time. Today, I DM new folks when I can and when there is something super important and connective to say.



## Where do you go for help?



**Ron:** One of the joys of building a network of people, is just as happens in the offline world, you make some friends you grow to trust whom you can turn to for advice. If you're not sure about what you're putting out there, don't be afraid to ask people in this trusted circle if you are crossing a line or risking your hard-earned reputation.



**Julie:** I second that on personal help. And I'll add that Twitter is a phenomenal place to go for information. When I was looking into buying a GPS for the first time, I asked my Twitter network if they had any recommendations and I got almost 30 (with links to products and deals) responses in about 15 minutes.

# Building a Personal Brand Action Plan

## Setting up Your Plan



**Ron:** Now that you've read the eBook, you're probably wondering what do I do now to get started. Like any other project, you have to set goals and milestones and get going.

- **Signing Up for social networks:** Determine the groups you want to join and sign up. That's the easy part and it gets you started. At a minimum, sign up for Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.
- **Making Connections:** Start connecting to others using the social networking sites.: make friends, link and follow.
- **Quantifying Your Level of Engagement:** How often are you going to visit each site? For instance, you want to update your status on Facebook daily, Tweet five times a day on Twitter, and join at least one LinkedIn group by the end of the month and participate in two discussions.
- **Setting up Your Blog:** Choose your blogging platform, select a design (a canned design is fine for starters, although you may want to get something professional done over time), establish a blogging schedule (how many times per week you will contribute) and check your statistics daily.
- **Committing to Commenting:** Start subscribing to blogs you like and then make a commitment to leave a comment at least once a day to at least one blog. It doesn't have to be in-depth, just enough to let people know you were reading and your feelings about the post.

*Like any other project, you have to set goals and milestones and get going.*

If you make a plan with defined goals, whatever they are, you have a structure to work with. You can make a list and follow it. Social networking doesn't have to consume your life, but you need to make it part of your day, every day, to stay engaged enough to make this work.

## What goes in to the plan?



**Julie:**

- Personal boundaries
- Goals—personal, professional and per venue (blog, twitter, etc.)
- Picking the social media networks you want to be part of. I suggest that you pick one to three and do them well—less is more to start, and social media participation takes time and effort.
- Tools for measuring how it's working (comments, feedback, twitter followers, facebook friends, pageviews, blog feeds, etc.)
- Permission to grow and change
- A really good, positive attitude
- The belief that who you are matters, that people want to hear from you, that you are unique and fantastic

## Checking the Plan



**Ron:** As with any project plan, you need to check it and make sure you are keeping up with your proposed goals. You may find you have to push yourself to get started, but as you get into it, you will likely find, that it's not a chore at all. As you make friends and meet people, you will look forward to the interactions throughout your day. Remember, it's part of building your personal profile and, at the same time, building your business.



## Conclusion

We hope you've found our eBook useful and that you'll take our advice and go forth and get involved in social media to grow your personal brand, make real business connections and get involved in online social communities.

As you discover the advantages of social media to your business, and you want to learn more, we hope you'll check out our blog, <http://www.socmedia101.com>, which acts as a logical extension of this eBook and provides you with concrete tips and how-to's on how to use social media more effectively. It's built as a comprehensive resource for social media beginners.

If you have ideas or feedback, we'd love to hear from you. And remember, social media is all about giving. We hope this eBook gives you a running start in the world of social media.

--Ron & Julie



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