



THE NEW NETWORKING

Those in a position to hire you for your dream job are closer than you think, but you'll need the right tools to find them. By MEGAN MCCHESENEY (@meganmcchesney)

Back in February, Marc Jacobs International was looking for a social media staffer. The company eschewed the standard job boards and headhunters and went straight to the medium itself, sending out a rallying cry from its Twitter account (@MarcJacobsIntl): “We are interviewing only people who are tweeting us. Be clever. Smart. Understand our DNA. Say it in one tweet! That is your interview!” One hundred and forty characters isn’t exactly a lot of space in which to shine, but this one tweet sums up the new world order if you’re hunting for your dream job. Never mind mixers and events and cold calls—if you want to be proactive about landing a plum gig, you need to take the party to social media.

Imagine meeting someone for the first time, someone you want to impress, and being forced to exchange dialogue in 140-character bundles. The conversation would obviously be bizarre, but you’d make sure every word counted, wouldn’t you? “There’s a lot of power in forcing people to be concise, and I think that’s one of the things that makes Twitter so powerful,” says Kat Tancock (@kattancock), a Toronto-based digital content and social media consultant.

It’s not the only thing making Twitter powerful. Data from the 2011 Social Recruiting Survey—conducted annually by Jobvite, a company that creates job recruitment software—showed that almost half of the respondents, primarily a mix of recruiters and employers, use Twitter to recruit for open positions.

But Twitter is actually one of the smaller pieces of the social media recruitment pie. Fifty-five per cent of respondents to the Jobvite survey use Facebook to find job candidates, and a commanding 87 per cent use LinkedIn. But when this new way of recruitment first took hold, there were inevitable transition pains. “I don’t think any recruiter would deny the fact that it was a little scary,” admits Vancouver-based Jackie Ross (@JRossRrecruiter) of »

JRoss Retail Recruiters, who's worked for brands such as Club Monaco, Tommy Hilfiger and Holt Renfrew. "The initial predictions were that there would be no need for recruiters." Where a well-stocked Rolodex was once a headhunter's leg-up, now almost anyone can find and contact almost anyone else. But recruiters are still very much a necessity in this brave new world of networking—with so much information, someone needs to sift through it all. "The truth is that it's turned out to be a very positive tool if used right," says Ross. "It's expanded our scope and reach, and it's a great way to build relationships."

Building relationships online, as in real life, doesn't have a fail-safe formula. You won't form real connections with people if your social media presence is all business and no pleasure. Similarly, using the platforms for navel-gazing is unlikely to garner genuine relationships. "Twitter is nothing more than conversation and sharing—some of it banal, some gratuitous, some interesting and some vital," says Tancock. "It's just basic human interaction on a different platform." But it can be a valuable social shortcut if used well. Instead of wandering into a party and hoping to be introduced to the right people so you can dazzle them with your wit, you can connect with those people directly and form relationships in a gradual and sincere way. The party rules still apply, however: Don't be creepy, don't be too intense, and—it should go without saying, but it needs saying anyway—don't be a jerk.

Sarah Kelsey (@sarahkelsey) is an editor at the Huffington Post Canada and a freelance writer. She's been recruited through social media for paying jobs no fewer than six times in the past year or so, and for multiple writing, consulting and speaking engagements. She attributes her success in social media to her engagement and her tone. "I communicate with a variety of people, from PR students to tech experts," she explains. "I don't discriminate. I love learning from anyone and everyone." She also endorses a what-you-see-is-what-you-get approach. "There's no bullshit [with me] and that's important. Being genuine, I think, is absolutely key to succeeding in an online environment and at social media."

But while it's easier to show off your assets to the right people these days, it's also harder to hide your flaws (or your other, ahem, "assets," if you've shown those off online). "Most of us acted like idiots from time to time in college or university," says Maggie Fox (@maggiefox), founder and CEO of Social Media Group, a communications consultancy in Toronto, "but it's the out-of-context photographic and video evidence that causes problems."

"No one should ever assume that she has a private life online," says Amber MacArthur (@ambermac), a technology TV host, journalist, strategist and author of *Power Friending: Demystifying Social Media to Grow Your Business*. "No matter how

much fun you're having on your all-girls weekend to Miami, keep the racy photos offline." Sure, many sites have customizable privacy settings, but remember that these settings are not yours to control. Facebook has repeatedly caused ire and consternation by tweaking its privacy policy under the radar, requiring users to constantly stay on top of the privacy settings to keep their data, well, private. In June 2011, LinkedIn did the

same when it introduced a social advertising feature that required users to opt out if they didn't want their photos showing up in ads (however, the company rethought the practice shortly after launching it). "When in doubt," as the old adage goes, "leave it out."

And don't fool yourself into thinking employers don't care what you do on your own time online. "Anyone who applies for a job and thinks she isn't going to be Googled is deluding herself," says Tancock. Seventy-four per cent of respondents to the Jobvite survey admit they occasionally or always search candidates' online profiles. And companies can now even hire organizations to sift through web-based minutiae to look for red flags, such as evidence of racism or violent activity, references to drugs or sexually explicit photos.

Just as it would be incredibly uncouth if you marched up to a group of people mid-conversation and blurted out something about your skills as a stylist or web developer or interior designer, it pays to apply a certain finesse when getting to know people in the social media space. "Twitter is the best platform to meet people you don't know yet, or barely know," says Tancock. Gradually build rapport with new Twitter contacts by following and retweeting them, occasionally commenting on and replying to what they have to say. "It comes off as kind of creepy to friend people on Facebook that you don't know," Tancock continues. "And

with LinkedIn, I would only connect with people you've at the very least exchanged a useful email with." As for the newest network to the social media party, Google+, the verdict isn't yet in, but it looks like it's evolving into a more open, Twitter-like environment, where you can follow anyone you like.

For those who are still resisting making the move onto social networks (all three of you), not participating is really not an option if you're looking to expand your network. "If I'm a recruiter and I find nothing about you online at all," says Fox, "I will wonder what you have been doing for the last decade and whether you are an innovative person who's comfortable in a changing environment. How creative and curious are you if you've essentially ignored the most transformative technology to come along since the telephone?"

It may not always be as easy as landing a dream job with one clever, creative tweet—that's actually very unlikely—but social media offers wildly powerful tools for connecting with the right people in your industry. And they can't find you if you're not there to be found. □

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