

Your Social Media Brand: Who Do You Want to Be?

3

Remember: Whatever happens in Vegas . . . stays on Google.¹

— SCOTT MONTY, COMMUNICATIONS
CONSULTANT AND FORBES TOP 10
SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDING AND JOURNALISM

If I were to do a Google search of your name, what would turn up on the Internet? I've never met you before. But those tweets, snappy Instagram videos, and bio descriptions all add up to convey who you are. That's your brand.

What comes to mind when you hear the name Anderson Cooper? Robin Roberts? Bob Woodward? Brian Williams? The images you conjure up in your mind are their brands. And if you've never heard of these journalists, you'll probably search online, where what you come across will give you a first impression of them—of their brand.

Brand and *branding* are terms people typically associate with marketing and advertising. Some journalists turn their noses up at the idea of branding in journalism. But step away from the preconceived notion of what a brand is.

In reality, journalists have always built an individual brand based on the quality and style of their writing, reporting, and delivery, among other factors. (Bob Woodward, for instance, created a brand for himself long before the Internet and social media existed.) Journalists' brands have traditionally been tied to their affiliations with news organizations.

In this chapter, you will

- Explore how social media provides journalists the opportunity to build a brand through the type of information they share and their interactions with the public.
- Examine online presence as an extension of your reputation as a journalist. It's your digital business card.
- Discover how using social media in journalistic ways will make your brand stand out to potential employers as well.
- Learn how to conduct a social media audit and steps to build your brand as a journalist.

Today, mobile and social media allow journalists to build their own brands by sharing their work directly with the audience and fostering an informal relationship with them. Journalists don't have to rely solely on the outlet they work for to find a following for their reporting. The brand they establish through their online presence can make them a go-to source for information. In turn, this also benefits their news outlets.

You too have been establishing your individual brand. Every tweet, like, and comment is a reflection of who you are. When you apply for a job in journalism, or even an internship, you can expect hiring managers to scrutinize your social media profiles. The result of a Google search is the new resume—a digital business card, if you will. What you've posted can come back to haunt you. It also can set you apart from the competition by demonstrating you know how to use mobile and social media in smart ways, as a journalist.

Your online presence and digital savvy will be a key part of interviews for journalism jobs. I frequently hear from current and former students who share interesting information about the process. One senior who applied for a TV reporting position in a small market was given a breaking news scenario. He was then asked to write a TV story and a web version based on the scenario, in addition to crafting posts for Facebook and Twitter. A student who interviewed for a prestigious journalism fellowship had her social media accounts dissected by members of the hiring committee. They asked questions about her approach on different social media platforms as well as about how she uses mobile devices in the field. Fortunately, the students were well versed in the tools of the trade, and their online presence shined. Both were offered the positions. (Chapter 8 outlines what to expect during the job hunt and interview process.)

Now is the time to start taking ownership of your brand across all platforms. Even though you're a digital native (you grew up with these tools at your fingertips), do you know how to use them as a professional journalist? That's key.

The goal from here on out in this book is to build your journalistic skills with mobile and social media in three areas: newsgathering, distribution of news, and audience engagement. We start in this chapter by getting you going on creating a solid foundation—your own brand.

Key Points About Building Your Brand

- **Go-to source.** Journalists can use social media to build a tribe for their work. Become an audience's trusted source for credible information by providing quality content and interactions.
- **Real person.** Engage authentically and conversationally to create meaningful connections with users. Be professional, but don't be afraid to show your personality.
- **Traditional journalistic standards.** If you wouldn't say it to your audience in person, don't post it on social media. Your social media presence is an extension of your reputation as a journalist.
- **Slow and steady.** Building your brand takes time and requires consistency across platforms.
- **Digital business card.** Using digital tools in journalistic ways will make your brand stand out to potential employers as well.

DIGITAL SKELETONS: SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIT

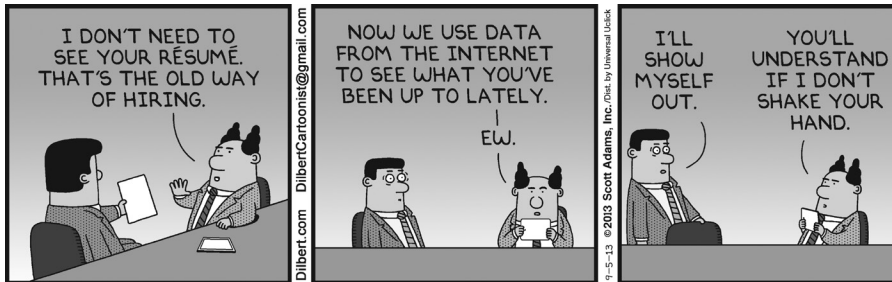


Photo 3.1

DILBERT
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Have you Googled yourself recently? Not at all? Now is the time to clean up your past. After all, 93 percent of managers say they review job candidates' professional social media profiles prior to hiring.² What they find could determine whether or not you get an offer. Fifty-five percent have reconsidered a candidate based on information they got online.

A social media audit will shed light on your digital footprint and help put your best foot forward. As part of this chapter's checklist, you'll also team up with a classmate to audit each other's profiles.

Search

First, conduct a search of your name using at least two search engines. Use Google and Bing or Yahoo, as these are the three most-used sites for searches. Odds are someone sniffing around for information about you would turn to these sites.

- Log out of e-mail accounts and clear your web browser history. This will give you a better sense of what someone searching your name encounters—what's making it to the public. Search engines tailor results based on your browsing history and other information that's part of your digital viewing. If you're logged into personal accounts and haven't cleared your history, the results may be different from what potential employers see when they search.
- Search your name. If you have a common name, enter more specific information. For example, let's say you're John Smith, a student from Champaign, Illinois, who's studying at the University of Texas at Austin. Try several different search terms, such as John Smith and Champaign, Illinois and John Smith and University of Texas at Austin, to weed out results for other people with the same name.
- Moment of truth. Don't stop at the first page of results. That's only part of your digital story. It's equally important to click on the Images, Videos, and News tabs located at the top of most search engines. You'll see content specific to your name and those three areas. When I have students conduct these audits, this is the point where I usually hear some of them cringe a bit, most commonly because the results turn up photos posted to Facebook, even if

someone else tagged them. They're not necessarily inappropriate photos, but the surprise comes from the fact that these can be picked up by search engines for anyone to see.

There's typically another camp of students surprised at how little the results say about who they are. These students usually have social media accounts, but are inactive on the platforms. For aspiring journalists or journalists looking for a job, social media *inactivity* can also influence your social media brand. Your use of mobile and social media on a consistent basis will make you appear more engaged and more attractive on the job market. Odds are if it comes down to two candidates, one using social media in smart ways versus another who hasn't touch social media in a while, the former is going to get the job.

- Now, visit each of your social media pages and other digital spaces, such as a website, associated with your name. To view each as the public would, sign out of each account. Having classmates who are not friends or don't follow you on these accounts conduct searches is also beneficial. They can stay logged into their accounts on Facebook and Twitter, for instance, to check what they're able to see about you.

In addition, Facebook has a feature that allows you to view what your page looks like to other people. While signed in to Facebook, locate the Privacy Shortcuts menu button at the top right of your screen—it looks like a lock icon. Click on that icon, go to Who can see my stuff? list, and choose View as from the What do other people see on my timeline? section. You'll see what your profile looks like to the public. To view how your profile appears to specific persons and what they can access, click View as Specific Person at the top of the page and type their names.

Analyze and act

At this point, you should analyze what your searches revealed. Here are key questions to reflect on when auditing your online brand.

- **About you.** Are your bios informative and consistent across platforms? Do they tell us who you are? Does a professional photo accompany your bios?
- **Content.** What type of content do you typically share? Is it an accurate reflection of your interests as a journalist? Of your general interests? Both?
- **Frequency.** How often do you post on each platform? How often do you engage with followers?
- **Personality.** What do your posts say about you? Do we get a sense of you as a person?
- **Professional interests.** What about your professional interests? Have you highlighted your journalism skills and career aspirations?
- **Journalism skills.** Speaking of skills, do posts show any sign that you use social media for finding story ideas and sources, sharing interesting content—including your own reporting, and engaging with your followers?

If your brand doesn't reflect who you are as a journalist, there are specific actions to get you on track to building a standout online presence. More on that in the next section of this chapter.

I posted that! Now what? If you find something that you now regret sharing, deleting the post is your best option. But don't assume it will be gone for good. It will take at least a few weeks for the item to no longer be picked up in search engines. Keep in mind, people may not know the context around that photo or video you posted. So if you think it would make your grandmother cringe or question why you posted it, get rid of it.

I recommend deleting inactive accounts—those that you haven't touched in a while, as long as they're not needed as part of your professional brand. (A list of important platforms is addressed below.) Let's say you created a website in high school, but haven't updated it since. As time goes on, this will reflect an outdated version of you. If you don't plan on using this website as part of your professional work, consider deleting it. The other option: Breathe new life into an old website by using it as the centralized place to highlight your work, as we'll discuss shortly.

Some items are difficult to get rid of. Do an internet search of the name: Vandon Gene. You'll easily discover how this self-described aspiring journalist, who worked for a Canadian news station, has made a name for himself. And not in a good way. While covering a deadly shooting in Ottawa, Gene asked CNN's Anderson Cooper to take a selfie. Cooper rejected the request, saying it would be wildly inappropriate, considering the context. But Gene, with his mobile phone recording, wouldn't back down. He continued to insist Cooper take a selfie with him. Gene posted the video to YouTube and turned to Twitter to lambast Cooper. Gene was let go from the news outlet, and that incident will forever be part of his digital business card.

This case underscores the importance of acting appropriately on and off line. Journalists are accountable to the public. Journalism relies on the trust of the public. What you post on social media can easily break that trust, undermining your reputation and that of the industry. As we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 7, crossing the line on social media can ruin your brand and your reputation, and cost you your job. Anything that would make the public question your integrity, ethics, and general professionalism as a journalist should be avoided. That's why scrutinizing your social media activity is so important.

Assume everything is public

But it's only accessible to my friends. Not true.

You should assume everything you post online is in the public domain—for good. Even the strictest privacy settings on your social media accounts don't ensure your content is locked down. Everything you post is fair game. You don't have any reasonable expectation of privacy on social networking platforms. A photo of you post behind the wall, can easily be downloaded by a friend and shared with anyone.

You also have very little control over what someone else posts about you. Certainly, if a friend tags you in a photo or posts something of you that's undesirable, you can

ask the friend to untag or take it down. But you can't undo the potential harm done if the post doesn't portray you positively. A few social media platforms, including Facebook, allow you to approve or reject being tagged in posts. You must first activate this feature in your account settings.

From the Newsroom



JUSTIN AUCIELLO
(@AUCIELLO)

Founder, Jersey Shore
Hurricane News

Freelance journalist Justin Auciello (@auciello) has carved out a niche by building a brand on social media. Around the time Hurricane Irene hit in 2011, Auciello launched a Facebook page, Jersey Shore Hurricane News, and related Twitter account, @JSHurricaneNews. Jersey Shore Hurricane News became the go-to community resource. Its popularity grew after Superstorm Sandy devastated the Jersey Shore in 2012. His social media-only outlet was a lifeline for people who needed information about their homes, communities, and loved ones.

The Facebook page has more than 245,000 followers. Auciello's work attracted a following by focusing on hyperlocal issues that many mainstream media outlets no longer covered with consistency in the months and years following the disasters. He has filled a desperately needed void in the communities. The platform was even used by the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management to communicate with people who needed to be rescued, as 911 was overloaded.

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR JERSEY SHORE HURRICANE NEWS?

It really started when I got on Twitter in 2007 and I saw the emergence of citizen journalists. The emergence of technology to facilitate not only the sharing of info, but also the collaboration—doing journalism by piecing together information

gleaned from eyewitnesses on the ground and using that to build a report. I had been into social networking even before social media. The trigger was when I saw the potential with Twitter and began to build my personal brand as someone interested in emerging media. I started to blog about the changing media landscape and how citizen journalists could play a part.

When the moment came in August 2011, you can say I was prepared in a sense. When Irene was coming, I said this was an opportunity to create a pop-up news outlet that is two-way and can democratize news where I live, because there was nothing else that existed at that point. It caught on very quickly because of Facebook. People were desperate for information. I came in and let people know that I needed their information and I would package that with traditional journalistic methods and standards. It snowballed from there. After Irene, I had first thought this would only last for a few days, but people kept hanging around. It turned into something that was beyond just a hurricane. It turned into daily news, traffic, weather, et cetera. The takeaway is that once the community was connected to Jersey Shore Hurricane News and found value in the content, it unfolded organically.

WHAT'S YOUR EDITORIAL PROCESS? HOW DO YOU CURATE THE CONTENT AND FACT-CHECK?

On a day-to-day basis, there's about one breaking news story in this area, for example, a car accident with a fire that shuts down a major road. In a case like that, I couple content from official sources and social media users to piece together a narrative and verify information. Because I'm cynical at first and doubt everything, like any

good journalist should be, I fact-check in a few ways. I get information from official sources to corroborate what I'm being told and see if anyone else on social media is sharing something similar. Giving people credit also fosters a trusting relationship, making them more likely to send content that is reliable. I give credit to contributors in order to reinforce that they're part of the team. It's a social contract. People love it and are more willing to engage in the future.

HOW CAN STUDENT JOURNALISTS BUILD A BRAND USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

Write a lot, and publish it. Create a blog where you can share your best content. Be active

on social media. That's a given. But many people don't use social media for community building, so be in tune with how to do that on social media. To build a community you need a specific focus. It could be a very niche community or topic. Focus on what interests you. Know enough about the area or topic to be somewhat of a go-to expert for people.

For me, I was familiar with the Jersey shore, so that played a key role in engaging with people in such a way based on my knowledge and passion for the area. Now, people reach out to me for anything going on in this area. Stay true to the focus.



BUILDING A SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND

Your brand is built over time by your behaviors. The content you post and your interactions—both good and bad—all make up your online reputation. In this section, you'll learn to how to craft your professional social media brand.

Trust and integrity are two of the coins of the online realm, in my opinion. . . . People will determine whether Joe is trustworthy by what he says, what he does, who he associates with, how he talks with others, who he links to, what he links to and who he's friends

with and follows. People develop that sense of Joe over a period of time watching him and talking with him.

—John Robinson (@johnrobinson),
journalism instructor and former editor of the
*Greensboro News & Record*⁵

So now is a good time to think about who you want to be as a journalist. When people see your name or come across your Twitter account, what do you want them to think of? Keep that question at the forefront of your mind as you fine-tune your digital footprint.

Separate personal and professional accounts?

I'm frequently asked: Should I create separate profiles for my personal and professional activity? Having only private accounts would defeat the purpose of a journalist's use of social media. These profiles would be accessible to friends only. As a journalist, you need to optimize your profiles so anyone can follow and engage with you.

The best approach is to have one account for each platform, but it's a personal decision, and there are varying views depending on who you ask. Managing both personal and professional pages on a variety of social media platforms can be time consuming. Maintaining one account on each key platform simplifies your digital life.

In addition, what are you posting on a private personal page that can't be shared on the public one? Again, this goes back to basic concept, everything you post should be considered public.

There's one exception: Facebook. Facebook has an option for brands—journalists, businesses, politicians, and the like—to create professional pages. This approach has advantages for a number of reasons, mainly because professional pages offer an analytics feature, something personal pages do not. In the addition, the Facebook culture is generally one where you share more personal moments with real-life friends and family. Photos of your summer vacation in Europe. A video remembrance of a family member who passed away. Sure, you may end up sharing some of this type of content with a general audience. But, simply put, some things are more private than others. For that reason, having a separate personal Facebook account is a logical choice.

The answer to whether you need to establish two separate accounts may also be determined by the policy of the newsroom where you work. According to a study conducted on newsroom social media policies, two-thirds of local television news managers said it's the policy of their station to own the professional social media

Facebook Privacy Settings

Check the privacy settings of your personal Facebook page. Recommendations for the most privacy:

- Allow only friends to see your stuff.
- Turn off the feature that allows search engines to include your personal Facebook page as part of search results.
- Enable reviewing of posts in which friends tag you before they show up on your timeline.
- Who can see posts you've been tagged in once you approve them? Limit to friends.

accounts of reporters.⁴ This type of policy is becoming common across the industry. In some cases, this means journalists are required to submit their passwords to news-room management, and such a policy raises the question of whether employees are allowed to keep their accounts and associated followers when they leave the news-room. This policy alone may be enough to eventually force you to establish separate personal and professional accounts.

The online spaces you should be in

Your professional online presence should consist of the following:

Website

A website serves as your portfolio. Create your own website to highlight your professional work and skills. It's the perfect place to publish your reporting for journalism classes. Include the website link in all your social media profiles and on your resume. When applying for jobs, the website serves as a centralized spot where hiring managers can quickly get a sense of you.

I recommend creating your site through WordPress (*wordpress.com*). I require my students, starting in their first year, to create a WordPress site. WordPress allows you to create a free account or purchase a premium plan that includes a more customized domain name. With the free version, *wordpress.com* is part of the website address. The paid version removes *wordpress* from the URL, creating a cleaner link (For example, *anthonyadornato.wordpress.com* versus *anthonyadornato.com*).

WordPress has a variety of website templates. Whichever platform you choose for a website should have built-in analytics. The analytics dashboard measures key metrics, as we discuss in Chapter 6, that you'll need to understand as a journalist. Without the analytics, it will be difficult to measure how website material is performing, and what role your social media activity plays in driving traffic to your website.

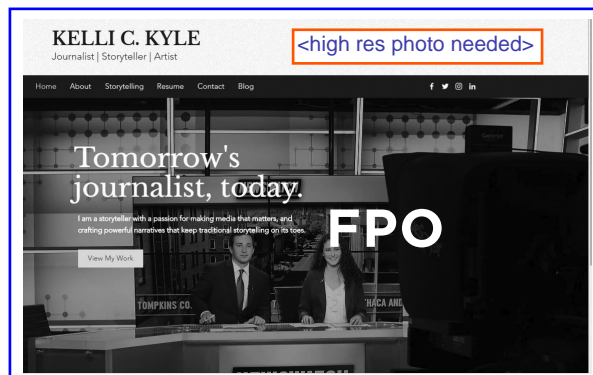
- **Domain name.** A domain name is what people type into their browser to go to a site. It's your unique web address. When you set up a website, you'll be asked to select a domain name. Check whether a domain with your first and last name is available. A domain with your full name makes it more likely that your website will turn up when someone searches for you. If a domain with your full name is already taken, use only your last name. Still, no luck? Include your middle name or initial. Bottom line, keep your web address as close to your name as possible.
- **Home page.** This is the front page of your website. The welcome mat. By default, many website templates, including those from WordPress, publish posts (these are stories or blog posts) on the homepage. In your website settings, you can change the location of where your published posts appear. For example, you may want your About page to be the first thing people see when they come to your site and have your posts live on another page.
- **Site title.** A site title is important, because it's what appears in the header on a browser tab when someone visits a website. You can customize the site title

in the settings section of your site. For branding purposes, using your first and last name makes most sense.

- **About page.** Include a short blurb about yourself and professional photo followed by your resume. Do not simply link to your resume or attach a file that someone has to download to view. Embed the resume in the page for easy viewing.
- **Contact page.** This is where you want to include your e-mail address and links to your professional social media accounts. Make sure you hyperlink the text. A hyperlink allows readers to simply click the text and be taken directly to the page you're linking to. Otherwise, they have to open a web browser and type in the information. This all goes back to making content user friendly.
- **Portfolio page.** Put links to your best work here. If you're just starting to get your feet wet in reporting, you may not have enough content for this page. No worries. Add this page later. It could be reporting you've done for a campus outlet, for a class, or during an internship. Include the title of the story, the outlet, and a hyperlink. I recommend listing stories on this page even if they're already published somewhere else on your website. This makes it easier for visitors to see your most compelling work compiled in one area.
- **Twitter widget.** Widgets are the featured elements typically located on the side of a website. The Twitter widget embedded on a site gives visitors a flavor of your social media activity. It displays your most recent tweets. These time-lines are interactive, so visitors can reply and retweet favorite tweets straight from your website. How you add a Twitter widget depends on the platform you use for a website (see your account's settings area).

Social networking platforms

Your profiles on these social networking sites should be open to the public: **Twitter**, **Facebook**, **Instagram**, **LinkedIn**, and **Snapchat**. Why these sites? They're the most frequently used by journalists and news organizations. And they're where audiences



Photos 3.4 and 3.5 Journalism students should create their own websites as a way to build their professional brands. These two websites are easy to navigate and give visitors a sense of who the journalists are. Notice the integration of social media on both websites.

are most active. (LinkedIn isn't necessarily a go-to place to distribute content, but it's a great tool for showcasing your brand, finding sources for stories, and networking for jobs, as we discuss in Chapters 4 and 8.)

Reminder: Create a professional Facebook page instead of using a personal one for your brand. To set up a professional Facebook page, go to facebook.com/pages/create. In the Artist, Band or Public Figure section, select the Journalist category. Enter your first and last names. In the next chapter, we dig into specifics of these social networks.

Whether you're creating new accounts or updating existing ones, make it your goal to maintain them beyond the semester. Carry these digital tools throughout your journalism studies and as you enter your career.

Video sharing sites

Create an account on YouTube or Vimeo. Either of these sites can serve as a centralized spot for video content you create. Video editing apps (Chapter 5) allow you to upload your finished video directly from a device to either of these sites. From there, you can embed the video in stories on a website and share to social media.

Creating standout social media profiles

Building the best version of you online begins with your profiles. Be consistent with how you present yourself—through your handles, profile and cover photos, and bios—across platforms.

Handles

Most people in the social media world know others by their handles. A handle is a username. In the professional world, you want to be recognized by your name. So when it comes to building your brand, choose a handle that is as close to your name as possible. Think @FirstnameLastname.

Username consistency also makes it easier for connections to find you in the social media sea. Ideally, when you choose a username, stick with it for all your accounts. If you previously chose a handle that has nothing to do with your brand, the good news is that many social networking sites allow you to edit it at any time.

A quick note about LinkedIn. The system automatically generates a unique link for you that doesn't include your name. You should edit your profile URL to include your name.

Profile and cover photos

A profile photo is the smaller thumbnail size image associated with your account. Some social networking sites also give you the option to upload a cover photo, larger images typically at the top of your profile page. Just as you would be careful to avoid errors on your resume or in a story you write, your profile and cover photos also need to be well thought out.⁵ For starters, don't leave these spaces blank.

Profile Photo. Would you go into a job interview looking the way you do in your profile photo? A single profile pic can impact the perception of you. They're most likely to see you first in that format. As people scroll through their feeds, the profile

photo is often how they determine who is sharing the content, and their perception of you impacts how they perceive that content. Choose a headshot photo that is professional and shoulders up so that people can easily recognize and see your face in the thumbnail pic.

Sree Sreenivasan (@sree), technology journalist and former Columbia University journalism professor, recommends this formula for a good profile photo:⁶

- Clear, recent close-up shot of your face
- No shots of you with a celebrity, national monument, pet, or child
- No wide shot of you at a landmark
- No hats, wigs, or sunglasses
- No tinting your photo (or putting a digital ribbon on it) in support of the cause du jour

Cover Photo. A cover photo is an opportunity to give followers a visual sense of you as not only a journalist, but also a real person. Because of the large size of a cover photo in comparison to a profile pic, the image you choose must be of high quality. Otherwise, the photo might appear grainy. Here are some tips:

- Upload a photo that represents your work, but keep it authentic and not overly promotional. Use a photo from the field in order to highlight some of your recent reporting. Or give followers a behind-the-scene glimpse via a photo that shows the inside of the newsroom or studio.
- Think beyond your professional world. A cover photo with coffee would let me know that we have something in common. Enjoy traveling? Upload a photo of your latest destination. These types of images humanize you. Whatever you choose, make sure it's understandable to the audience.
- Avoid including text with your contact info here. Save that info for your written bio.
- Even if you have the highest Facebook privacy settings for a personal account, every Facebook cover photo is public.

Bios

Create two distinct bios. The first is a short version for your social media profiles. A longer bio will be used for your website and LinkedIn profiles.

Short bio. Your elevator pitch: short and sweet. You have 30 seconds to tell someone about yourself. In this case, you have a limited number of characters. On Twitter and Instagram, for instance, the character limit for a bio is 160 characters. It's more than just your followers who will look at your short bio. This bio will turn up in results when someone searches your name online.

- Think about **keywords that describe you professionally.** Try to include a few of those in the short bio. But be specific. If you cover arts and cul-

ture for a student newspaper, mention that. Don't simply write journalist or student at University of X. If you intern at news outlets, tell us where by including the outlet's name.

- **What are you passionate about?** Drop a few hints about your interests beyond journalism. Mix in a snippet about you personally.
- **Avoid buzzwords.** There's a laundry list of words that are overused in profiles and resumes, so overused that they have little impact on the reader—words like *creative* and *innovative*.
- **Speak the social media language.** Use @mentions for specific names if possible. If your profile includes the names of your student media outlet or the place you intern, use their handles. For example, I cover life and culture for @IthacanOnline or sports intern @9News. It's important to use the proper handle for each platform. A newsroom's Twitter handle may be different from its Instagram handle (although for branding's sake, I hope not).

- It's critical to **include your website link**. Some sites have a specific section for this that doesn't count toward the character limit. Either way, every bio should link people back to your website.
- Don't forget to **include your location**.

Longer bio. What's your story? Here's a chance to tell more about yourself. A longer, more detailed bio can be used for your website's About page and the Summary section of your LinkedIn profile.

- Writing in first person makes you feel more approachable. This is *your* narrative.
- Don't overload. This is not the space for a list of activities and positions you've had. That's what a resume is for.
- Show you can write. Being able to write clearly and concisely is an important skill for journalists. Demonstrate your ability with how you craft the bio. Keep it short and succinct—maximum of roughly 200 words.
- Tells us about your journey. Your collective experiences in and out of school, personally and professionally, make you you. In general, this bio should highlight your professional interests, give a brief recap of experiences, and tell



Nancy Loo

@NancyLoo

Reporter, @WGNMorningNews

@WGNNews Chicago. Emmy winner.

Scrabble & Social Media Nut. Oregon

Duck. #ChicagonistaLIVE. #MsTech AKA

#BigTiny nloo@wgntv.com

📍 Chicago

🔗 wgntv.com/bigtiny

📅 Joined July 2008

Photo 3.6 Nancy Loo's Twitter bio is personable and to-the-point. She also effectively uses @mentions and hashtags.

ABOUT

Emily is a May 2015 graduate of Ithaca College's Roy H. Park School of Communications. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in journalism with a minor in sport studies. Emily currently works as a digital editor at Aggrego, in Chicago, Illinois. Emily creates content, manages social accounts and generates engagement on posts about news, sports and entertainment. She has previously interned at Aggrego in Chicago, Illinois, Townsquare Media in Oneonta, New York, Amref Health Africa in London, U.K. and syracuse.com in Syracuse, New York, as part of Advance Local's flagship internship program. Emily is also a former staff writer, assistant and editor of *The Ithacan*, Ithaca College's award-winning, student-run newspaper where she won a 2013 *New York Press Association* award for best sports coverage. During the 2014–2015 academic year, Emily worked as a writer/editor at Ithaca College's Office of Marketing Communications where her pieces were published in *IC View* and *Fuse* magazines. She enjoys cooking, eating and Amy Poehler.



Photo 3.7 Emily Hull's website bio is a good mix of her professional story, skills, and interests.

Consistency

Now that you've created accounts and fine-tuned your profiles, be consistent across platforms. First, use the same profile photos, handle, and bios for each site. Revisit these profiles at least three times a year to make sure they accurately reflect you at that point in time. Rejuvenate profiles as circumstances change, such as when you get a new job or complete your degree.

Also, take small steps each day to be active on social networking platforms. Creating an online presence and then abandoning it can appear worse than not having one at all. When a journalist or journalism student has a Twitter account but hasn't posted in months or even weeks, that simply doesn't look good to the audience or a potential employer.

Come up with a routine, and it will become second nature after a while. Start by building time into your day to manage social media platforms. At a minimum, check social media platforms first thing in the morning, midday, and evening. That includes not only posting fresh content, but also engaging with followers by replying to their posts, sharing others' content, and asking questions.

What does posting regularly mean? It's different for each platform. As we discussed in Chapter 2, some sites are intended for less frequent posts. As a journalist, the type of story you're covering will also factor into how frequently you share. Breaking news warrants more updates than a feature story. There's no magic formula for how frequently you should post on each site. Much of it comes down to experimentation.

us something that shows you're multidimensional.⁷ Personalize your story. Consider sharing what fueled your interest in journalism or how you spend your off time.

- Show us, don't just tell. Use specific examples to back up the claims you make about yourself. If you're interested in environmental reporting, for instance, briefly describe an issue or story you've covered.
- By the same token, don't overhype. Have the goods to back up your portrayal of yourself. If you interned at a TV network, don't write that you've worked for the network. That comes across as deceptive.
- Unlike your short bio for social media, **don't use @mentions here**. It's not the style of this type of profile.

Here are general recommendations to get you started:

- **Facebook**—at least once every other day
- **Twitter**—at least three times per day
- **Instagram**—one to two times per week
- **Snapchat**—one to two stories per week
- **LinkedIn**—once per week
- **Website**—at least two stories and/or blog posts per week

Checklists in future chapters include reminders for staying active on each social networking platform and your website.

Think before you post

Don't post to simply post. Have something valuable to share. Even more importantly as a journalist, know where to draw the line when sharing personal thoughts and details of your life. As you prepare for a career in journalism, now is the time to think before you post that type of content.

As individuals, we all have our own opinions on topics. And it has become standard for people to share those thoughts on social media. But, as journalists, we have an obligation to try to remain unbiased, fair, and objective. Apply traditional journalistic standards. Just as it would be inappropriate for journalists to place political signs in their front yard, the same standard applies to online platforms.

As noted in the social media policy for student journalists at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Actions that call into question a journalist's ability to report fairly on an issue harm not only that journalist but his or her news organization and fellow journalists.⁸

Indeed, it can be difficult to back down from posting personal thoughts about emotionally charged situations and issues, such as the 2016 shooting at an Orlando, Florida, nightclub that killed dozens of people. After the shooting, a *New York Times* editor sent a memo to staff members reminding them to avoid editorializing, promoting their political views or taking sides on hot-button issues, on social media.⁹

Even if you personally are not involved in coverage of a particular topic, our colleagues are working hard to maintain *The Times's* credibility and evenhandedness, and we should not do anything to make their jobs tougher. People following *Times* newsroom staffers online expect them to be well-informed and thoughtful, wrote Philip Corbett, associate managing editor for standards at the *Times*.

What not to share

The following items are most frequently included in news outlets' social media policies.¹⁰ Sharing this type of personal content could jeopardize your chance of even getting an interview. Newsrooms do not want to take on the liability of a having an employee whose actions, online or offline, could jeopardize the public's trust.

- Personal opinions about issues
- Political affiliation
- Religious beliefs
- Advocating on behalf of a particular cause or agenda
- Your involvement in illegal activity
- Unverified information from sources
- Internal newsroom communication
- Details of personal life beyond hobbies or interests

What to share

As we've discussed, your social media activity should reflect your journalistic brand while also giving followers a flavor of you as a person. But what's the proper mix of professional and personal?

Consider the **80/20 rule of social media**. Keep 80 percent of your content professional related, but refrain from being overly promotional. The other 20 percent should show your personality.

In addition, the **rule of thirds for social media** is a surefire way to share the best mix of content, says Scott Kleinberg (@scottkleinberg), former social media manager at the Chicago Tribune.¹¹ One-third of the time, promote content related to your professional brand, another third of posts should come from other sources, and the final third of the formula involves being human.

I don't think in social media there is anything worse than following a feed that tweets the same thing all the time and never responds to your questions, says Kleinberg.¹²

Choose from this list to experiment with your own mix of professional and personal posts.

- Real-time updates while reporting in the field
- Behind-the-scenes look at the reporting process
- Links to your stories and/or blog posts
- Colleagues' stories and content from other credible sources
- Your own comments providing context for shares of social media posts from credible sources
- Your own questions, and responses ASAP to readers' questions
- What you're reading personally or professionally
- Hobbies and interests

Journalists' use of social media raises ethical considerations beyond what to share and not to share. For instance, liking a political candidate's Facebook page in order to stay abreast of campaign news could be misinterpreted. And is it appropriate to friend sources on Facebook? Chapter 7 delves deeper into these and many more ethical issues.

Become the go-to journalist

Social media affords journalists the opportunity to become a go-to source for information by owning a beat and cultivating a community online around a chosen topic. These activities define you as a brand.

Carve out a niche on a particular topic:

- **Original reporting.** Write about stories in your local community on issues related to a beat.
- **Curating beat-related information.** Use blogging and social media activity to curate stories from other credible sources.
- **Sharing.** Use social media to share your original reporting and curated content.

Beat

Certainly, journalists must be well versed on a variety of topics. Often, they don't know what they might cover day to day. But it can also be professionally rewarding to focus some attention on one beat. Blogging and social media are ways for journalists to show they're knowledgeable in a subject area, helping to differentiate them from other reporters and sources in general.

This allows journalists to be part of a community around a specific topic. Developing these relationships will be mutually beneficial. People passionate about a journalist's given beat will turn to them first, share their work, and pass along story ideas.

It's never too early to test the waters. In my mobile and social media journalism course, students choose beats, ranging from disability to sustainability. Each student uses a combination of social media, blogging, and original reporting to build a portfolio of work around a beat. This is in addition to general assignment, or nonbeat, stories they're required to cover. The approach allows them to demonstrate their reporting versatility and an ability to dig deep into a given topic.

Curating beat-related information is an important part of the process. *Curation* is the gathering and sorting of fragmented pieces of information, and then providing analyses and context. Journalists have always served as curators of information, but it's even more critical today as people try to make sense of the overflow of content. That's where journalists focusing on a beat can be valuable. They do the work of sifting through the sea of noise and providing online communities with what they need to know. They create order among the chaos of information.

Brian Stelter (@brianstelter) is a textbook example of a journalist who created a brand and career around a specific topic. It all started from Stelter's dorm room in 2004 when he was a freshman at Towson University.¹³ He launched a blog with news and commentary about news outlets' coverage of the Iraq War. He soon attracted a loyal audience, including TV industry executives. Stelter's work around a specific niche caught the eye of the *New York Times*. Straight out of college, he landed a position covering media for the *Times*. He continued to amass a following online through his social media savvy. Stelter is now CNN's senior media correspondent and host of its Reliable Sources blog.

Freelance journalist Justin Auciello (@auciello) used social media to create a niche beat and community focused on the Jersey Shore area. See the From the Newsroom section above to learn more about Auciello's experience.

Blog

Writing blog posts regularly is a great way to show your enthusiasm for a beat. Your website can serve as the centralized location for these posts, along with your original reporting. Here are tips to you get started blogging about your beat.

- **Consistency.** Write a post at least twice per week.
- **Keep it tight.** No more than 350 words. Headlines should be self-explanatory and easy to understand. A headline is your promise to readers. Deliver on it. Get to the point immediately, and keep the post focused on your promise.
- **Scanning friendliness.** Online readers skim impatiently to find information. Use short paragraphs, headings, bulleted or numbered lists, and pull quotes. These elements make reading much easier, especially on mobile devices. They serve as guideposts for readers.
- **Visuals.** Use pictures, video, and graphics in your posts. Visuals make posts more engaging and also break up text. Don't simply grab an image online. You may violate copyrights (Chapter 7), and that practice is unethical. You can either ask for permission from the original source or search the Creative Commons website (search.creativecommons.org). Content licensed under Creative Commons can be used as long as you properly credit the source. Each piece of Creative Commons content has instructions on how to attribute the material. This is a very helpful resource if you need an image to accompany a web story or blog post.
- **Reader engagement.** Your writing should spark a dialogue. Each post should make it clear you're open to interaction. To generate thoughtful discussion, consider asking a question that invites readers to comment. Remember to respond to comments.
- **Show your style.** Writing conversationally and in first person bring readers closer to you and the content. Write as if you're having a chat with a friend.
- **Research/informational value.** Don't merely regurgitate what others are saying. Nudge the conversation along by providing thoughtful analysis. Use credible sources, and avoid sharing your opinion.
- **Link.** Hyperlinking to the sources you reference is a general rule of thumb on the web. It's a way to give a hat tip to other sources. Links also provide an easy way for readers to check out what or who you're mentioning.
- **Keywords.** Place keywords in your headline and throughout your post as often as possible. This is often referred to as search engine optimization, or SEO. Using keywords makes it more likely people searching for the topic of your post will find it. Put yourself in the shoes of someone doing an online search. What words would they search for, if looking for information on the

topic of your post? Use those. Also use these words in the tags section that appears on the back end of a website when drafting a post or story. Tags are keywords. Filling out this portion will also make your posts more discoverable to someone searching online.

- **Share.** Even if you have a following, don't expect people to constantly check your site for new content. You have to let them know. Sharing on social media is the way much of your audience will be alerted that you've posted something new. It drives people to your work and can foster interaction on social media.
- **Analyze.** How'd you do? Monitoring website analytics sheds light on which posts got the most hits, how much traffic was generated from your social media posts versus people coming directly to your site, and much more. More on that in Chapter 6.

Social media

The most effective use of social media for covering a beat or a general assignment story involves sharing, listening, connecting, and analyzing. Future chapters explore specific methods related to these four areas:

- **Share.** Spread more than just your published work. Share information from others that you find interesting, relevant, and credible. Think, does what I'm about to post provide value to my followers? When you share other users' content, give them a shout-out by including @mentions or tagging them in posts.
- **Find.** Monitor social media to find conversations and content related to your beat. These could tip you off to story or blog ideas and give you something worthwhile to pass along to followers. Conduct hashtag or keyword searches to discover what's being talked about. Twitter lists are also a fantastic tool. Twitter lists, as we discuss in the next chapter, filter your stream so that you see only tweets from users you place in a list.
- **Connect.** Become part of a community. If you're passionate about immigration, start by following people who share information about this topic and will add value to your social media streams. Consider other journalists, nonprofits, and experts in the field. Rely on your community. Listen

“Disability” Overlooked In Diversity Discussions

ADDED MAY 20, 2013, UNDER: JOURNALISM EDUCATION



THE MOST APPROPRIATE LABEL IS USUALLY THE ONE PEOPLE'S PARENTS HAVE GIVEN THEM.

There's an important part of diversity discussions in newsrooms and classrooms that needs to be addressed: disability. People with disabilities make up an estimated 20% of the population in the United States, and one in five families includes a member with a disability. Despite these statistics, in comparison to other minority groups, people with disabilities are

overlooked in news coverage and classroom discussions about diversity in journalism.

This semester, I introduced the topic of disability into my diversity lesson plan in a broadcast journalism course. My goal was to expand students' understanding of diversity. I hope, as they enter the real world, they apply what they've learned. I also recently conducted a workshop at Your News Now (Syracuse) on this topic (See presentation below).

My workshop and lesson plan focus on why it's important to include disability in diversity discussions, the proper terminology related to disability, the framing of disability stories, and how journalists can include disability in news coverage.

Key takeaways

- **Terminology:** Use person-first language (notice I've been using the phrase "people with disabilities"). You should avoid terms that fail to emphasize people with disabilities as "people first." The basic idea is to name the person first and the condition second in order to emphasize "they are people first." I've worked for a disability organization the past three years. People with disabilities face unique challenges, just like anyone else. However, disability doesn't necessarily define who they are. Disability isn't something they "suffer from." That's another phrase to avoid. Also, when describing an individual, don't reference his or her disability unless it's clearly pertinent to the story.
- **Story Frames:** Disability is a way of being, not something a person "has." Journalists should avoid story frames or angles that center on pity, charity, weakness, suffering, and deficiency, among others.
- **News Coverage:** There are many ways news organizations can integrate the topic of disability into news coverage. *Focus on the issues impacting people with disabilities, especially unemployment and health care.

Photo 3.8 This post I wrote includes many of the important element of blogging: keywords in the headline, a visual, hyperlinks, bullet points for scanning friendliness, and data from credible sources.

and respond. Join existing conversations and invite people to weigh in. Be responsive by acknowledging audience feedback. Placing hashtags in your social media posts is a great way for others with similar interests to find you. Participating in tweet chats (Chapter 4) is also a valuable way to connect. A tweet chat is a real-time Q&A session on a topic that's regularly scheduled for a specific day/time.

- **Analyze.** What's working well? The effectiveness of your social media activity can also be analyzed by regularly visiting your analytics for each platform (Chapter 6).

Checklist

- ✓ **Social media audit.** Conduct a social media audit on yourself. Also, team up with one classmate to audit each other's online presence. Discuss your findings.
 - > Refer to the Digital Skeletons: Social Media Audit portion of this chapter for tips. Be sure to analyze bios, content, frequency of posts, personality, professional interests, and journalism skills.
 - > How would you describe your classmate's brand?
 - > What is your classmate doing well? What needs improvement?
 - > After your classmate's audit, clean up anything that doesn't reflect who you are in a positive light.
- ✓ **Build your presence.** Time to polish up and shine.
 - > Create a professional website. Follow the recommendations above for building a website. Establish professionally oriented accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. Set up an account on either YouTube or Vimeo. Remember, keep your website domain and social media handles as close to your name as possible. Invite people to like your professional Facebook page.
 - > Download mobile apps for each of these social networking sites.
 - > Create a short bio for your social media profiles and a longer version for your website and LinkedIn page. Have at least one classmate give you feedback on your bios.
 - > Ensure that your profile photo and bio are consistent across all platforms.

- ✓ **Choose a beat.** Select a beat/niche you would like to cover this semester. Ideally, this should be an area that you plan on pursuing in your journalism career. The goal is to carry the expertise and brand you build with you when entering the workforce.
 - > Write two blog posts per week.
 - > Share them via your social media pages.
- ✓ **Discussion.** What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the same social media account for personal and professional activity? Discuss as a class. Also, ask social media followers what they think about this. Include your class hashtag in posts—this is an easy way for you and classmates to track the online conversation.
- ✓ **Reminder.** Continue working on the mobile and social media strategy analysis that was part of Chapter 2's checklist. Use what you learned in this chapter to analyze the social media accounts of the two reporters you selected for the assignment.

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