



John W. Kelly,  
FACHE

## Using Social Media to Boost Your Career

*When used judiciously, these mediums can go a long way toward creating a robust network.*

I am a member of a small healthcare study group that meets face-to-face once a year. During these annual gatherings, we discuss pressing healthcare issues and engage in traditional networking activities. Interestingly, it was during one of these more conventionally formatted meetings that I became introduced to the latest trend in networking: online social media.

About five years ago, one of our study group members told us how useful he had found Plaxo, an online, interactive address book. Maintaining current information via a Rolodex was becoming more difficult as people were changing jobs, titles, locations and contact information more rapidly than ever before. For my colleague, the advantage of putting his address book information online via Plaxo was that his contacts managed their own information for him. For example, Plaxo's software allows you to send invitations to all your contacts; in turn, your contacts enter relevant business information, which is then accessible to you, the end user. The convenience of Plaxo is that when a contact updates his or her information, the change is automatically reflected in your address book—no need to chase down the new information.

Depending on your network, the software also can scan your e-mail address list to see if you and another contact have a common connection; if so, Plaxo will allow you to invite that person into your network based on your mutual connection.

*Social media can be a convenient and effective way to solve a practical career problem through business relationships.*

As I became comfortable with maintaining and expanding my professional network online, I began to further explore the world of social media. The vehicle that works best for you—be it a blog, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or another among the growing number of portals—depends entirely on what kind of information you want to share and gain.

A **blog** is an online journal maintained by an individual who may post commentaries, disseminate information—essentially share anything that comes to his or her mind. Blogs can focus on specific topics, or they can cover a variety of issues in a more free-flowing approach, depending on the targeted audience.

**Twitter** is a Web site that allows you to track people in your network as they post tweets, which are 140-character updates of their activities, thoughts, ideas, promotions, interests and so on. Given the space limitations, being concise is key.

**Facebook** is a social tool that allows users to create a profile based on education and work histories, hobbies, interests or any personal information they deem worth sharing. You can use Facebook to download job applications, post photos, join common interest groups and write messages on other Facebook users' walls. As a Facebook user, you can make a friend request to anyone with a Facebook account. If your invitation is accepted, both users become members of each other's networks.

**LinkedIn**, like Facebook, allows you to create a profile, albeit one that more closely resembles a resume. Once you give the site permission to access your e-mail address book, you can decide who to add to your network as a connection. Most LinkedIn users build professionally based networks through these connections. As you connect with individuals, you can potentially link in to their network, resulting in a cascading chain of professional connections. LinkedIn also can be used to post Internet links, such as to your organization's

Web site, or upload documents, such as a press release, to share with your network.

I wanted a medium that was primarily career and business oriented rather than social. Thus, I chose to join LinkedIn. Certainly, the other above-mentioned media can be used toward such an end as well—they have been and will continue to be used by many individuals and organizations with great success. But LinkedIn was best suited to my purposes.

*Regardless of which social media platform you use, your profile on any or all of them is your opportunity to present the information that will cast you in the most positive light possible.*

Whether you are looking for a job, hoping to hire talented employees or trying to find answers to work challenges, social media platforms can assist in fulfilling your career goals by helping you do the following:

**Build a reliable business network.** At the heart of all social media are networks—those you create based on who you already know and those you tap into based on who others know. While social and professional networks can overlap successfully, I use LinkedIn because of the tighter controls, or gate access, it offers in connecting people and sharing information.

For example, LinkedIn users must have a personal connection (e.g., an

e-mail address) with another user in order to contact him or her. If you would like to connect with a specific person but cannot because you do not know that person directly, LinkedIn allows you to search for that individual by name. If the person you are seeking has a LinkedIn profile, the site will provide a map of the connections you share with that individual. You can then contact one of your mutual connections and ask to be “introduced.” An introduction from a trusted individual can often serve as a valuable reference. The result is that you are able to build a very reliable, trustworthy and strong network—qualities that are critical to both the job seeker and the employer.

**Create business opportunities and relationships.** Social media can be a convenient and effective way to solve a practical career problem through business relationships. For example, I wondered how social networking could be used for marketing purposes. Because this is a relatively new issue and I lacked the relevant expertise to tackle it on my own, I searched online networks using terms like “marketing consultant social networking.” One of the names resulting from my search was connected to a person I knew and trusted. I asked my connection about the consultant, we were introduced via LinkedIn and I was able to peruse the consultant’s profile before we spoke. Ultimately, I connected with the consultant, and my colleagues and I are now learning valuable information that will benefit our organization.

**Position yourself positively.** Regardless of which social media platform you use, your profile on any

or all of them is your opportunity to present the information that will cast you in the most positive light possible. You can highlight your accomplishments, outline your goals or present your areas of expertise—it is all in your control. To that end, one component of LinkedIn that is especially useful is the recommendations section. You can ask past or current superiors, colleagues or peers to post blurbs about their professional experiences with you that can be read by anyone viewing your profile. This is a powerful way to vouch for colleagues who are looking for employment or to research individuals you are hoping to hire.

**Connect to your community.** For most healthcare organizations, being connected to the communities they serve is a crucial component of their success. Sites like Facebook and LinkedIn allow you to create and join virtual groups representing not only hospitals and health systems but also local chambers of commerce, social outreach organizations and so on. These sites can provide a forum for the exchange of ideas relevant to your business and career as well as an organizational tool. Your participation in social media groups also enhances your presence in the community.

**Share information.** My organization is developing a community-based education forum. I have posted information about the forum and a downloadable brochure on my LinkedIn profile. As a result, I have exposed all my connections to this event, and they, in turn, can pass it along to all their connections without even having to take the time to

contact me. LinkedIn also provides shared space that can be accessed by a work group and used to share documents such as PowerPoint presentations, regardless of where the group members are located around the country.

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If you decide to become involved with social media, I recommend keeping the following points in mind:

Keep your networks manageable in terms of numbers, or they will become overwhelming. Be selective about who you let in.

Do not let your use of social media detract from your productivity and efficiency. These sites should be considered tools to enhance your efforts.

Be judicious in the information you share and how you present it. No matter what platform you use or for what purpose, the information on *all* of them is subject to scrutiny.

As convenient and effective as they are, social media cannot replace

the bonds developed through face-to-face interaction. But they can go a long way toward creating a more robust network while positively affecting your career. ▲

*John W. Kelly, FACHE, is division administrator at Marshfield Clinic in Wausau, Wis. He can be reached at (715) 847-3245.*

**Note:** You can join the ACHE Official Group on LinkedIn to make new business contacts with other ACHE affiliates and enhance your current relationships with a growing online network of leaders in the healthcare field. This group is exclusively for ACHE affiliates.

