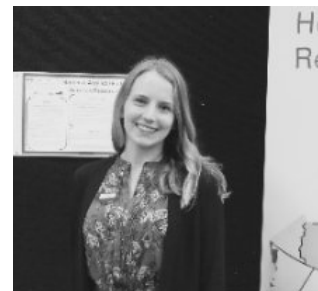


Impression Management: Spring Cleaning Your LinkedIn Profile

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How we present ourselves to others in the professional world has consistently been recognized as critical to success, for both organizations and employees. This self-presentation is heavily impacted by our ability to engage in impression management, a conscious process in which we attempt to influence how others perceive us. With the birth of social media, impression management now extends beyond the office and boardroom, and onto the internet.



A social media of particular importance to employees and employers is LinkedIn, the largest professional networking platform that is an immensely powerful tool for professional impression management. With more than 364 million regular users in over 200 countries, LinkedIn specializes in assisting users to portray their best professional self while building valuable business relationships. In a net shell, it allows for the creative creation, management, and sharing of the user's professional identity in an online context.¹ Further, this professional identity is then used by viewers of the user's profile to make judgements about the person, such as their credibility, expertise, professional ethics, trustfulness, and social and professional attractiveness. Thus, online impression management is important to your LinkedIn profile because without it, you may be hindering your ability to advance in your career aspirations by fostering negative perceptions from fellow professionals.



For organizations, the importance of LinkedIn really boils down to corporate image (i.e., the image of the organization to those inside and outside the company). Employees' profiles, as representatives of the organization on LinkedIn (as the company is typically identified on their profile!), contribute to either a positive or negative image of the organization in the eyes of other employees, new hires, and clients. But, employees are not the only source of corporate image. Having a company profile on LinkedIn that is up-to-date, attractive and an accurate representation of the company's goals and values sets the organization up for a positive reputation, while potentially attracting new hires that align with the organization thereby creating greater opportunity for person-job fit.

Online Impression Management and PQ

Although all PQ elements directly and indirectly impact one another, there are three key elements that come into play when considering your online impression management via LinkedIn profile.

Mentalizing. Impression management is key to successful communication, and in the era of social media, how you manage impressions online is equally important for socializing with others both online and in-person. When someone is searching for you online (and vice versa), how you present yourself may impact how they understand your emotions, desires, thoughts, and anticipate your future professional moves.

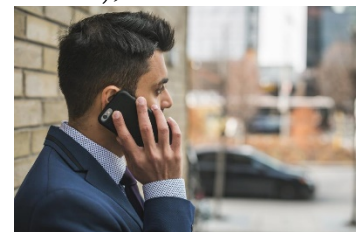
Neuroplasticity. Researchers suggest that LinkedIn can stimulate creativity in users' professional identity, in addition to expanding their networks in the most unlikely of places.²

Professional Self. By reviewing your online impression management techniques via your LinkedIn profile, you can check in with your professional goals, work ethic, and principles, and evaluate whether you are being meticulous in all aspects of your professional image.

PQ Dimensions and Strategies for Spring Cleaning

Individual. LinkedIn provides the user with the opportunity to represent their career goals, values, interests and work ethic (through referrals and endorsements from other users), all whilst expanding their professional network with the click of a button (literally!).

Strategy: If you currently don't have a LinkedIn profile, do some searching for examples of successful profiles (i.e., those that are eloquent and comprehensive) and use them as inspiration for creating your own. If do you have a profile, recruit someone with a profile that you admire and show them your profile along with a list of what you would like to portray (e.g., flexibility to new tasks), and ask for suggestions of improvement.



Interactional. Research suggests that individuals check out your profile after just meeting you or before meeting you for the first time, sizing up your background and the type of individual you appear to be.³ By having a professional and up-to-date LinkedIn profile, you may be setting yourself up for more successful communication in professional environments.

Strategy: Make connections with people who can provide good recommendations (i.e., statement of reference) to be added to your online profile. Be sure to consider what you would like them to say when making the request and offer a recommendation in return. Given that people tend to rely heavily on recommendations, this strategy may go a long way in your next interaction with a new colleague or client.

Corporate. Researchers have found that many companies lack coordination in their online impression management on social media platforms.⁴ However, online impression management through a company profile on LinkedIn can build a positive corporate image. For example, fostering a positive corporate image may include posting articles on your profile that are relevant to your employees in your network (be it online professional training or work-life balance).

Strategy: Ask a handful of interested employees and management to briefly review your company's online representation, and ask for their feedback on where things are going right or wrong, and how it can be improved.

With the rejuvenation of Spring upon us, take this opportunity to hit refresh on your online impression management by giving your LinkedIn profile a quick clean-up.

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