



# First Steps: Establishing a Professional Presence on the Web

By [Dennis D. McDonald](#)

*A friend, a professional engineer, asked me for tips on establishing a “web presence.” This is what I wrote:*

Before you jump into creating a “web presence,” you first need to figure out who are the people and organizations you’d like to “hang out with” on the web. Then, research them to see what you can find out about where they already are — which companies have blogs or forums (that you can post comments and discussion items on), which people have blogs of their own or memberships in networks like [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#), etc.

This research will give you lists of people and organizations you will want to interact with - potential customers, potential employers, potential gatekeepers, and just plain friends. Study the people and organizations and the presence they have on the web — what you like, what you don’t like, etc.

You might consider, initially at least, to concentrate this research on your geographic region. Be prepared to be flexible about that since, as you may already have found, web based networking can easily lead you to form relationships around the world.

Then you can start deciding what your web presence(s) should be, perhaps a professional looking and sounding blog (basically, a personal web site) with ancillary memberships in various networks, plus a list of web sites and blogs that you will visit regularly (or subscribe to) to see about posting comments in order to initiate and respond to conversations.

You should also have a list of people and organizations you subscribe to, either via newsletters, via stored searches (e.g., Google Alert searches), or “news feeds” you can subscribe to and read using a special feed reader (e.g., [Google Reader](#)).

Perhaps your professional association already has a site or discussion forum where you can discuss topics of interest. This also is part of your web presence. Whenever you leave a comment somewhere on the web you should also leave a link for your web site so people can link back to your blog.

Keep in mind that a blog is an interactive device. You can post ideas and text and audio and video items in the blog. There are also “comment” features which means that people can leave comments and discuss the items that interest them. It’s not like you’re hanging out a static resume; it’s an opportunity to interact with people based on the series of individual items that you’ll be posting.

Join as many online networks related to your goals as you want. Keep in mind that your membership in these organizations will only work if you actually participate and it’s easy to spread yourself thin. (To see what I mean, see [A Map of My Online Networking Tools: Part 1.](#))

There are many different ways to start a blog, and some are free. I have a monthly paid account with [Squarespace](#) and I don't accept advertising. Squarespace is a remotely hosted service. I can update [my blog](#) from just about any web browser on any internet-connected computer without installing any extra software on the computer.

I recommend giving some thought to the image you want to promote and how what you write will contribute to that image. Your blogging vendor should be able to supply a set of different templates that you can customize to fit your preferences. My advice: keep the blog simple structurally, content-wise, and appearance wise.

Three more items relevant to "web presence" are also available.

The first is a list management or contact management system that you can use to keep track of people and your outgoing and incoming communications. Perhaps you already use gMail, Outlook or something like that. I use [DabbleDB](#), which is a very flexible password-controlled web based database management system that I can access from any web browser.

The second is a way to bookmark and tag pages and sites you come across that you find useful. There are several available. I mostly use [del.icio.us](#) which is one of the bookmarking sites that you can get at from any internet connection and web browser. I also use del.icio.us to keep track of [comments](#) that I make on other web sites and blogs. (You can, if you like, mark selected del.icio.us bookmarks as "private" so that they cannot be viewed by others.)

The third is a way to get regular news about topics, people, or organizations. You can store [Google Alert](#) searches, for example, and have the results emailed to you whenever something occurs in a web based news story about a person or company you are tracking. Another way to get news is to use a service such as [Twitter](#) which enables you to send and receive brief (140 character) text messages to and from selected groups of people. This usually works best when the people you're interested in following — and who might be interested in following you — are part of the service.

This should be enough to get you started. If you have comments or questions, send me an email at [ddmcd@yahoo.com](mailto:ddmcd@yahoo.com). Hope this helps!

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# Comparing Apples and Oranges: LinkedIn and Facebook

By [Dennis D. McDonald](#)

In [LinkedIn vs. Facebook 6 Months Later](#), Bernard Lunn writes:

- **Similar.** *Both try to get you to use their messaging. That is such a retrograde step. Why would anybody use a proprietary email system that is limited only to that service? I have occasionally used LinkedIn messaging but only because I had no other alternative. If that person is a genuine contact, then I have their email address, why would I use anything else? One semi-plausible reason is spam control, but Gmail has got that issue pretty well nailed in my opinion.*
- **Different.** *Facebook prompts public communication e.g the Wall. That is fun/different I guess. I also assume it gets old fairly quickly. What is the business value? We are talking deals, not dates here. In business this is like online whiteboard services, used for collaboration. Do I need to be on Facebook to do that?*

I like Lunn's comment about messaging; sometimes I like the availability of a network's integrated messaging, sometimes I don't. Having to belong to someone's online social network in order to interact with him or her online seems like a bogus advantage that actually harms an individual's overall potential for online networking and communication, especially when it's necessary to bridge the gaps between markets, communities, or territories.

Lunn comes out pretty clearly with the view that LinkedIn is better for business use than Facebook. I agree — but I knew that six months ago. In fact, my use of Facebook as a networking/communication tool has plummeted so much that I recently wiped out all my Facebook group memberships in order to start over. (I've been documenting my own Facebook experiences in [Dennis McDonald's Personal Facebook Saga](#).)

Why start over with Facebook? Some people I know and trust do belong and use it, and it is an interesting sandbox in which various social networking applications are being tried.

Some things about Facebook definitely do annoy me, though, chief among them the way invitations to start using certain applications are handled; in many cases you have to accept an application invitation to see what you're getting into, and I find that too annoying.

As far as LinkedIn is concerned, I do continue to use it. It's a very useful research and networking tool and I enjoy the business orientation. One feature that I do find wanting, however, is how it handles messaging; I dislike how, when I don't have a direct connection with an individual, I have to go through all sorts of hoops to communicate with that individual. Generally I prefer not to ask others whom I don't really know well to pass along messages. I used to accept a lot of connections in my early days to build up my LinkedIn network before I discovered how counterproductive weak connections can be in many business networking situations.

One area of LinkedIn I have not explored is the increased availability of LinkedIn groups. Given that I already have so [many other outlets](#) for networking activities, though, I'm not sure how far I'll go with that. We'll see.

Finally, it's interesting to speculate about the "data portability" relationship between LinkedIn and Facebook. Here's what the [DataPortability Project](#) says about its mission:

DataPortability is a group created to promote the idea that individuals have control over their data by determining how they can use it and who can use it. This includes access to data that is under the control of another entity.

In my own meager attempts to keep track of what's happening on the DataPortability Project — I especially like their [podcasts](#) — I have come to realize how much of a problem controlling "...access to data that is under the control of another entity" is. Even if the problem of defining what a basic personal profile looks like is solved, defining the relationship between personally-controlled and network-controlled data seems insurmountable when approached on a general basis. LinkedIn and Facebook are cases in point.

Do I even care whether I can transfer my "connection" data back and forth between these two services? I once [may have thought so](#) but now I'm not so sure, given how differently these two networks function. In fact, I'm beginning to prefer that different networks develop different capabilities and features to differentiate themselves and compete.

I just don't want them to require me to turn over all rights in perpetuity to intellectual property I might generate as part of my membership. That seems a related — but separate — issue from being able to move personal profile and relationship data from Facebook to LinkedIn, or vice versa.

*Originally published May 6, 2008 at [Comparing Apples and Oranges: LinkedIn and Facebook](#)*

# Starting Your Own Professional Blog

By [Dennis D. McDonald](#)

I know some people who are developing their own blogs. They've asked me for advice a couple of times, and once [I wrote here](#) about it.

My basic advice: give some thought to the process. There's no shortage of advice on how to blog. Just today I ran across [this one](#) and I really like it, especially number five, "Begin in Stealth Mode."

You may be in stealth mode for a while, especially if some (or most) of the people you want to reach don't read blogs on a regular basis. Don't feel bad about individually emailing people links to your blog when you publish something that might interest them. I still do that on a regular basis and I have my personal contact database set up with topic tags to simplify the process.

One of the reasons I'm happy to give advice is that I've made just about every mistake there is to make in blogging, starting with creating a much too complex blog structure. That's one of the reasons why I've finally spread my basic navigational links across [two pages](#). (Side note: I was recently gratified to receive the following comment via [Twitter](#), where I regularly announce when I have a new blog post: Thanks for the follow. You have a very easy to navigate site. Like the post on why books will survive. Take care.) Holy Cow! He said "easy to navigate"!!!

The most important advice I have is to think about who the people are you want to reach — who are the people, their organizations, their associations, their employers, etc. Then study what these individuals and groups are doing on and off the web. Then create your own "mission statement" to guide what you are doing.

You don't have to spend a lot of time doing this, but believe me, the planning pays off — as long as you understand that you'll probably start changing your plans as soon as you start!

Also, if the individuals and groups are so diverse that you can't come up with a unified mission statement, you should then consider creating separate blogs, each with a separate personality.

Another question I get is, "How long should a blog post be?" My short answer is, "Beats me." Some of [my most consistently popular posts](#) are also my longest, so I have concluded it doesn't matter with a professional blog.

Happy blogging!

*Originally published November 10, 2008 at [Starting Your Own Professional Blog](#)*

# My Personal Twitter Rules So Far

By [Dennis D. McDonald](#)

So far I've found [Twitter](#) useful for keeping in touch, for getting quick questions answered, and for announcing new blog posts. I check in a couple of times a day if I'm at my computer. Here are my personal Twitter rules so far:

1. **Web only.** I don't use a phone for sending or receiving messages nor do I use other applications; plain vanilla Web access is how I use Twitter.
2. **No bad language.** I usually "unfollow" people after reading an obscenity, swear words, cursing, or plain nastiness. It's OK to call me old fashioned.
3. **Names, please.** If you follow me but make it impossible for me to tell if you are an individual human being or not, I probably won't follow you.
4. **No spam.** If you're just interested in selling me something that's fine, I just have no interest in following Twitter based advertising that has no personal element.
5. **No personal health details.** I'd rather not know your personal health details. My family has had its share of life-threatening and traumatic situations in the past and I have no interest in sharing such details with others.
6. **No blocking.** Usually I feel that if someone wants to "follow" me, that's fine with me, but just because you follow me that doesn't mean I'll necessarily be following you — especially if you don't provide any name or personal information. I seldom use the "blocking" function.
7. **Direct messages are OK.** At first I didn't remember to check to see if I had direct messages, now I do. I use the "DM" facility quite a bit now as a simple form of self contained email.
8. **No Twitter feed on my web site.** I experimented with this but dropped it. First, the aesthetics didn't match my [page design](#). Second, I didn't think it provided the same "social experience" that the main web view provides.
9. **Please no abbreviations.** I know it can be tough to get your ideas across in 140 characters or less but please, don't resort to abbreviations. How do I know if RE refer to "Real Estate" or "Re Insurance"? Does ECM refer to "Enterprise Content Management" or to "Electronic Counter Measures"?

For the record:

- As of March 27, 2008 I was following 224; 337 were following me; and I'd posted 1, 431 updates to Twitter.
- As of January 8, 2009 I was following 529; 925 were following me; and I'd posted 3,278 updates to Twitter.

Question: how do these rules compare with your own?

*Originally published January 12, 2009 at [My Personal Twitter Rules So Far](#)*

# Are You Building Professional Relationships or a Publishing Platform?

By [Dennis D. McDonald](#)

Years ago when I first joined LinkedIn I started receiving connection requests from people I'd never met before. Some were recruiters, some were fellow IT management consultants, and some were people I would probably never meet in a million years.

I posted questions about this on various forums and received the sage (I thought) advice, "Go ahead. By accepting connection requests from people you don't know, you extend the reach of your network. You'll be able to meet and communicate with a lot more people that way."

I accepted that advice and started accepting LinkedIn connection requests from everyone — even the people with thousands of connections who seemed to do nothing but networking for a living.

I soon found out that such links, while expanding my LinkedIn "reach," didn't really help me when it came to making serious connections one or two links away. Inevitably such communications languished. I ended up doing more research outside LinkedIn for email addresses. Several times I even researched the question "Does X really know Y," since I didn't want to commit an important professional communication to a weakly formed link.

These days my use of LinkedIn is much more targeted. It's one of many different networking tools I use and, interestingly enough, I now view LinkedIn as more important than ever since it has maintained its focus on business and professional relationships.

I bring up this experience since I see something similar happening with Twitter. DJ Francis started to get at this in his recent blog post [Why I'm Quitting You On Twitter](#) where he states in his explanation why he is "unfollowing" people on the microblogging service Twitter,

*By keeping my interactions meaningful, I can create more friendships and that will probably result in more tweets for the community at large. Which means I can provide more relevant content for you (which is the goal for me anyway).*

*I know there are technologies that can help me sort and organize tweets, but I've still only got one pair of eyeballs. I'm not interested in Tweetdeck or anything like that - maybe I'm stuck in my ways. But I do know you deserve someone who can give you the attention you deserve. And it ain't me, babe.*

*And that's why, in order to stay sane, I've gotta quit you.*

Francis seems to have found the same thing about Twitter that I found out about LinkedIn. You can use it as

the basis for building an ever expanding network — that you can then use for a variety of purposes — or you can use it as the basis for building or maintaining a group of relationships.

Some people who use Twitter as a way to build a large network have learned how to use their network as a distribution system for professional publishing. Guy Kawasaki and Robert Scoble are prime examples. They have refined the art of managing large networks of people and regularly provide information that many thousands of people find useful. Their networks are, in some ways, focused publishing platforms.

Where this gets sticky, as we found recently when social media guru Chris Brogan published a blog post about a sponsored department store [shopping spree](#), is that advertisers realize the value of what I call the “trusted celebrity.” Advertisers are willing to pay for these trusted celebrities to broadcast their message to these existing networks. Old time radio and TV celebrities such as the late [Arthur Godfrey](#) would fit right in to the idea of making money [this way](#).

If you’re a professional starting out to build and interact with online networks based on professional relationships and interests, I recommend you consider what you hope to do with the networks you build. Are you building professional relationships, or are you building a publishing platform?

This is not really an “either/or” question since tools such as blogs — and Twitter — can support both goals. But I think the question is worth considering.

*Originally published December 16, 2008 at [Are You Building Professional Relationships or a Publishing Platform?](#)*

## About Dennis D. McDonald, Ph.D.



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### Services:

- **Planning.** Strategic planning, cost analysis and estimating, business case development, project planning, and business-IT alignment.
- **Project Management.** Short- and long-term project and program management, product development and testing, and setting up and running project offices.
- **Coaching.** Helping professionals develop their own tactics for professional blogging and networking.
- **Writing.** Proposal management, technical and business proposal writing, researching and writing “white papers,” newsletters, and marketing and sales collateral.
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