

Taking Control of Your Online Identity

Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, these days, most of us have an online presence. For many of us, it is the social tools that we use in our non-work life. Social networks such as Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter account for a significant amount of time spent on the web. Today, there is an estimated 1.2 million terabytes of data held by big online storage companies like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Facebook. Academics increasingly use these services to keep in contact with colleagues and to collaborate on projects. These tools can also be used to gain recognition for your expertise and to promote the research that you are performing.

When starting with your online identity, it is helpful to think in terms of footprints and shadows. Your digital footprint is all the content you have created online. It includes blog post that you may have written, comments made on social media sites, posts, photos, etc. In contrast, your digital shadow is material that is created by others. It may be posts placed online by close colleagues, but as physicians and educators, it also includes physician rating sites, government quality reporting, student social media networks, etc. The best way to overshadow your shadow is to create a strong online identity.

The benefits of a strong online identity

1. Gain recognition in your field
2. Share your research with a wider audience
3. Connect and network with academics with similar interests
4. Increase your impact
5. More easily reach your learners
6. Be in control

Building blocks of the networked scholar⁵



So how do you actually take control? Follow these 4 steps!

Step 1: Assess Yourself

The first part of assessing your online profile is to find out what is already in existence. Start by checking all three major search engines for variations of your name, “Dr. your name,” “your name,” “Your Name, MD,” etc.

www.google.com

www.yahoo.com

www.bing.com

If you share a name with another physician, try adding in your institution or subject area, “your name, emergency medicine,” “your name, your institution.” Since most people don't look beyond the first page of the search results, simply take note of what comes up first. You may also wish to use the specific searches such as images and videos.

Think about:

- What results did you find? Do you have a distinctive identity?
- Are all of the results from your institution? Publications? Social media profiles? Physician rating sites?
- If the results have nothing to do with you, would that be obvious to somebody looking for you?
- Are you appearing how you would like to appear? Is your niche obvious?

After a general search, it is helpful to get more specific. If you have published, use Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com) to search for yourself and your output. You may also wish to use other focused search engines for academic output (www.scopus.com).

Think about:

- Which of your articles came up in the search?
- Did all of your articles come up or only some of them?

Finally, how do you measure the impact of your work? Altmetrics (alternative metrics) are ways of tracking the impact that your content is making. These go beyond traditional citation-based metrics to include how people are interacting with your content on the web. If you have ever viewed a journal article on the journal's website, it is likely that you have noticed the altmetric donut (pictured below). Each color of the doughnut represents a separate area of online engagement with your scholarly output.

The Colors of the Donut

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ● Policy documents | ● Google+ |
| ● News | ● LinkedIn |
| ● Blogs | ● Reddit |
| ● Twitter | ● Research highlight platform |
| ● Post-publication peer-reviews | ● Q&A (Stack Overflow) |
| ● Facebook | ● Youtube |
| ● Sina Weibo | ● Pinterest |
| ● Syllabi | ● Patents |
| ● Wikipedia | |



Step 2: Create Your Profile

There are many ways to increase your online visibility. It is quite easy to become lost in the weeds given all of the different services that allow you to exist online. As you begin to consider your profile, it is important to choose carefully in order to maximize impact and minimize the time cost. One or very few well-maintained profiles is far better than a minimal profile in multiple places.

You may choose to begin with your institution. Many academic institutions have pages dedicated to their faculty. This may be an easy way to maintain a presence as your department will likely desire to "show off" the outputs of their faculty members. Review this page and ensure that the content is up-to-date and relevant, your contact information is accurate, and that you are being portrayed as you desire.

Maintaining a personal website is another way to ensure that you are being portrayed correctly. Personal websites allow you to control your identity by allowing you to post and discuss content related to your niche, share your academic outputs, and grow your brand. These days, it is easier than ever to create a custom webpage. The following services all can be utilized for less than \$100-\$200 per year:

www.squarespace.com

www.wix.com

www.wordpress.com

Finally, consider the use of social networks as a method to boost your online reputation. Professional sites, such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) or ResearchGate (www.researchgate.net) allow you to maintain a professional appearing online identity. You can connect with other academics with similar interests, share your scholarly work, or redirect interested parties to your personal sites.

Think about:

- Do you utilize any of the services above?
- Review your professional profile through your institution. Is it accurate and up-to-date?
- If you already maintain multiple profiles, are there any that you can eliminate?
- Do you want to use different profiles for different purposes?

Step 3: Increase Your Content's Availability

Once you know what is out there and begin taking control of your online profile, it is likely that you will wish to increase the visibility of what is already online or to create additional online content.

One of the easiest things that you can do is to place all of the articles you've written online. Check first with the publisher's rules to determine which article you may share. Research Gate (mentioned above) allows you to privately archive all of your articles. Those that are open access can be shared publicly, and you may utilize your archive to share privately upon request. The following link explains copyright rules and how best to stay in compliance:

<https://explore.researchgate.net/display/support/Copyright>

As you publish in the future, consider moving towards open access journals. Open access publishing allows you to increase visibility. Articles published in open access journals likely have a citation advantage, ranging from an increase of 45% to as high as 600 %. You do need to be cautious, as there are many predatory journals on the web as well. You can find a list of open access journals here

<https://doaj.org>

Also consider sharing far more than your "typical" scholarly work. These days, it is easier than ever to share all of your routine academic work.

SlideShare (www.slideshare.net) allows you to upload your presentations or handouts and provides you data about the number of views and downloads.

You may also wish to record your lectures and share them online through video services such as YouTube (www.youtube.com) or Vimeo (www.vimeo.com). Both sites provide metrics about online engagement.

Step 4: Communicate and Interact

Finally, a well-established online profile allows you to grow your network through interactions with others with similar interests. While content creation gets significant recognition, curation may be more desirable given the sheer amount of content that already exists. Curation involves the collection of high-quality content to share with others, similar to the way that a museum curator chooses the best art pieces to display together. One of the easiest ways to do this is by utilizing social networks. Twitter (www.twitter.com) has found significant uptake with the Free Open-Access Medical Education movement. Familiarizing yourself with twitter is a quick way to become a curator. You will find that as you share, others will engage and you will become a part of the larger community in medical education. As you become familiar with Twitter, consider taking part in a medical education “Twitter Chat.” Two good examples:

#HMIChat: <https://www.harvardmacy.org/index.php/hmi-blogs/blogger/hmichat>

#MedEdChat: <https://twitter.com/MedEdChat>

Conclusion

It has been stated that if you don't take control of your own brand, someone else will do it for you. Hopefully your digital identity is much larger and more prominent than your digital shadow. As you consider how you want to be represented, take this guide with you and apply the steps. Consider the various thinking points and build your brand, step by step.