



# Your Online Brand at Face Value

*Reputations can be made or ruined by Internet postings.*

BY SAM RICHTER

**Y**ou've spent your entire working career carefully crafting and protecting your reputation. You're honest, operate with integrity and treat everyone with respect. If anyone were to check your references, people would rave about you.

And then you opened a Facebook account.

From any mobile device, anywhere and at any time you can share what's on your mind. Out with your buddies and heard a great joke? Share it with your friends! Receiving poor service at a new restaurant? Gripe about it and let the world know! Agree with the latest political rant? Share it with your online colleagues!

One of the great benefits of today's Internet is that anyone can be a publisher and the world is the stage. The great danger of today's Internet is that anyone can be a publisher and the world is the stage. Not only can you share information and distribute it on a global scale without the benefit of an editor, worse, what you say online can be archived and made searchable, available for anyone to find... forever. This means that one online mistake can theoretically come back to haunt you for the rest of your life.

## Personal Brand Protection

When people type your name into Google or other search engines, what do they find? Following are simple tips that can be immediately implemented that will help to manage your online reputation.

Many of these are important to Google and other search engines, meaning, if managed correctly, you can be sure to have the information you want to be seen showing up in the top search results when someone searches your name. Best of all, you can control the message.

**Own your name online.** If your name is "Joe Smith," do you own [www.joesmith.com](http://www.joesmith.com), [www.joe-smith.com](http://www.joe-smith.com), and even [www.joe-smith-sucks.com](http://www.joe-smith-sucks.com) (and all of the .org and other variations of the above names)? If you don't "own" your own name, then you're leaving your online reputation in the hands of someone who does.

**Manage Your LinkedIn Account.** LinkedIn has become one of the key places for business executives to be found. Setting up a LinkedIn account at [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) is easy. Make sure you complete all of the fields and craft a well-written professional profile. Be honest, as it's fairly easy to verify or refute any information you enter.

**Leverage Your LinkedIn Account.** Set up other accounts in places similar to LinkedIn such as [www.naymz.com](http://www.naymz.com), [www.zoominfo.com](http://www.zoominfo.com), [www.plaxo.com](http://www.plaxo.com), [www.brandyourself.com](http://www.brandyourself.com) and [www.workface.com](http://www.workface.com). Copy your LinkedIn profile that you so carefully crafted and then paste the information into these accounts. Modify the information to fit the site's specific format.

**Create a Google+ Account.** Let Google know that you exist by setting up your own Google Profile at [www.google.com/plus](http://www.google.com/plus).

**Create a Twitter Account (and Use It).** Create a Twitter account at [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and tweet on a regular schedule. Refrain from tweeting about what you had for breakfast. Rather, tweet educational articles related to your business or industry. Share information that others will find valuable.

**Search Engine Optimize Your Name.** Companies spend thousands of dollars—larger organizations spend millions—search engine optimizing their company websites. You can do something similar with your own name to ensure it shows up higher in search engine results, and you don't have to mortgage your house to do it. Set up your free account at [Brandyourself.com](http://Brandyourself.com) and follow the prompts for ideas on how to better promote and monitor your name.

**Manage Your Facebook Account.** Create and manage your Facebook profile at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com). Remove any photos that don't show you in a professional manner and "unfriend" anyone who posts inappropriate content on his or her Facebook page.

**Set Your Facebook Privacy.** Set your Facebook Privacy settings so you control who can see your information. On Facebook's upper navigation, look for the inverted triangle.



Click on it and choose “Privacy Setting” and then customize your settings.

**Think Before You Post (or Send).** Most communication is non-verbal. Although you might be just slightly angry at someone, in an email, your comments can be taken out of context. Don't send,

post or comment until you're sure that what you say won't be taken out of context, and how you say it is done in a calm, professional manner.

**Email Yourself First.** Angry at someone for his or her online post? Before responding, write in an email exactly how you wish to respond at that very moment in your emotional state, including using all of the four-letter words and violent language you can muster. HOWEVER, send the email to yourself first. Then wait a bit, read the email and, once you've had some time to reflect, you'll most likely refrain from sending the original message altogether or you'll edit out the emotional parts.

**Give Yourself the Newspaper Test.** Ask yourself this question every time you're about to hit “Send” or “Post:” “How would I feel if this post made the front page of tomorrow's newspaper... would I be embarrassed?” If the answer is “yes,” then refrain from sending.

**Don't Leave Your Brand to Chance.**

Set up a Google Alert account at [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts). Set an alert for your name and, in the future, anytime Google finds a new website, article, blog post, etc. that features your terms, Google will send you an email.

In today's information-rich world, it's nearly impossible for you to not be found online. Whether it is information that you post or information that others post about you, nearly everyone today has some form of online presence—an online personal brand. The key question you need to answer is who is going to control your brand? Others? Fate? Or you? 



*Sam Richter is the author of “Take the Cold Out of Cold Calling” and can be contacted by visiting [www.samrichter.com](http://www.samrichter.com).*

Have you liked NAA's Facebook page yet? We'll like you right back: <http://on.fb.me/ZgV9gj>



# The Rumors are True.

We're having some work done...  
And there are no bandages required.

NAA's new website  
will be launching this spring.

[www.naahq.org](http://www.naahq.org)

Follow the official hashtag **#ANewNAAhq** for regular updates.