Your Virtual Brand

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Abstract:

Professional presence has always been important for librarians engaging and communicating with stakeholders, vendors and patrons. Now in our virtual world it is imperative to transition this professional brand into a virtual environment.

Keywords: personal branding | online presence | virtual brand | social media

Article:

Introduction

Librarians, whether job hunting, aligning projects or committee work, working with clients, faculty or others, and advocating for library resources, are vulnerable to virtual research into their professional profile. A strong virtual brand can provide a positive foundation for building quality relationships, but can also create distraction if not properly developed with credible content. Having a visible and accessible online presence can add a credible and viable point of view in building relationships with others.

As an active profession, librarians need a strong virtual presence to interact with constituencies and communicate across a broad network of colleagues including vendors, institutional relationships and peer collaborations. Once established, this virtual brand is important for promoting your ideas and thoughts, and providing a voice for advocating your skills and demonstrating your ability to contribute.

Traditional literature promoting professional presence focuses on grooming and/or outwardly appearance, non-verbal communication techniques, presentation standards, and other physical attributes, such as workspace upkeep or a general organized persona. In today's society, information professionals are communicating and developing relationships more often in a virtual environment than a physical one where the standards of professionalism still apply when

considering or demonstrating competence, conduct, a sense of responsibility or accountability, and professional contribution.

Social Media

Many virtual activities, both professionally and personally, are now within the social media sphere. An online reputation can impact who you are and how your relationships can be developed and influenced. Branding yourself through social media channels is highlighting your functional area of expertise and establishing what is different about you compared to others with similar skill sets.

Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, for example, provide a professional opportunity to connect with people with a professional orientation, as opposed to sharing personal activities as with Facebook. For librarians, this can be important for building relationships with faculty, subject specialist, vendors, colleagues, and professional associations that share your interest and expertise. LinkedIn also gives you the opportunity to join groups that can expand your connections broadly and thus take advantage of virtual tools that have a longer reach than physical connections.

Whatever social media platform that you choose, it is important to pay attention to the details of your content that you are putting out there. Bad, sloppy, or minimal content will work against you without you realizing it. Invest the time and effort to have proper photos; complete profiles identifying your work, education and experiences; and using fields that provide the opportunity to create a point of view, which helps draw others interest.

Another strategy that is important for establishing your brand is to be active. This can include posting comments and giving recommendations to other people's posts or feeds. This also includes publishing your own thoughts and point of view to contribute to a dialog over issues or problems within the context of a specific subject of interest.

Hiring Considerations

Social media is becoming increasingly important in hiring situations as many companies have started establishing hiring criteria around social media investigations. Once taboo to view people during a search, now it is coming more commonplace and expected for candidates to be "searched" to determine their online presence.

Meg Guiseppi (2017) provides an HR perspective on how an online footprint can characterize who you are before anyone even meets you. Her advice is to actively pursue developing a purposeful social media presence in order to provide support and control for how people can see you virtually. This presence becomes your brand: how people become aware of you, what image is drawn based on your content, and what type of interaction is possible with you. This can also include how others would be able to continue communicating with you and other factors that influence building a relationship.

Human resources strategists caution about making assumptions based on information obtained from social media. There have been no legal guidelines put in place to discourage persons as part of the hiring process from looking for online profiles and it has its pro and cons. Maureen De Armond (2017) outlines the human resources strategy for using social media and also makes a great point concerning the integrity of an online presence. This includes, especially in professional hiring, consideration that a successful candidate will be under scrutiny virtually as the new hire and that person would want their virtual brand to reflect the person just hired.

Focusing on virtual activities

Transitioning a professional mindset from a physical environment to a virtual one requires thinking about who you are and how you want to be seen by others (seen in the sense of what others learn about you from online resources, social media and correspondence). Traditional brand establishment requires a certain level of emotional intelligence and it is possible to apply emotional intelligence criteria into how you build virtual relationships. Ruggero Rossi de Mio (2002) makes the case for defining virtual emotional intelligence attributing trust, group identity, and sense of efficacy, along with exploitation of virtual communication channels, as characteristics that make this possible. Nauman, Elahi, Bhatti and Khalid (2006) echo this consideration in comparing emotional intelligence with virtual project management and aligning traits needed for successful virtual project management with emotional intelligence skills.

An important component to brand development is demonstrating emotional intelligence skills that provide a foundation for interaction with others and in this case within virtual environments. These skills can translate into relationship building skills as you demonstrate how you gather information, how you use or react to information usage, and how you deliver or showcase the result of collaborative endeavors with other individuals. Both studies highlight the importance of approaching virtual relationships with fully engaged emotional intelligence skills, such as self-awareness and empathy for others, filtered through technology.

Summary

Much of the work and communications of librarianship is now virtual based. A strong virtual brand is important to adding value and establishing a credible foundation from which to interact with other professionals. Utilizing the appropriate tools within social media programs and approaching content deployment with a developed sense of self awareness and sensitivity to others improves the quality of how your content will be perceived by others.

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