



LHH

▶ **Build Your
Online Brand**

Why a Powerful, Professional
Digital Presence Will Keep
You Front and Center

Lee Hecht Harrison



It's no surprise that change is challenging. But job changes – entering the job market for the first time in years, vying for a new position, switching career fields – can be a special mix of exciting, invigorating, and nerve-wracking. Job changes always involve a measure of persistence and optimism.

If you're looking for a new job, the good news is that it's easier than ever to showcase your skills, experience and relevant qualities in a powerful way: all through the power of social media and other online tools. The democratization of digital – an abundance of simple, intuitive and mostly free resources available to all – means anyone can create an authentic, discoverable career story. Doing it right takes a reasonable investment of time and effort – plus learning a new skill or two – but the payoff is worth it.



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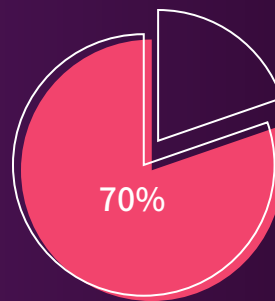


Employers are looking too

The advent of digital means that employers can easily get a read on who candidates are and what they stand for – sometimes without ever having a single conversation. In fact, according to CareerBuilder, the majority of companies – [70 percent](#) – screen applicants based on their social activity and online persona. The savviest candidates make full use of the online options at their disposal to overcome that first invisible hurdle of the job search.

But how do you craft a dynamic and engaging online presence that casts you in the best light and keeps you front and center for those ideal opportunities? In the pages that follow, we'll show you how to develop – and

strengthen – a digital showcase that ensures employers understand precisely what value you'd bring to the table. From taking stock of your current online profile to determining what elements to highlight and where your digital story should live, we want to give you the foundational tools necessary to create a next-level professional online presence.





Taking stock

Why your online reputation matters

For both candidates and employers, a universal truth when it comes to building and managing an online reputation is that taking risks should generally be avoided. Companies recognize that social media channels have become an always-on feature in peoples' lives, making both parties potentially vulnerable. It can take just one employee's errant comment, an offensive rant, a lapse in judgment or an accidental post from the company's Twitter handle, and suddenly businesses are left managing a costly and embarrassing public relations crisis.

For candidates, that means your social media record can be a reputational risk factor, diminishing your employability if not managed appropriately.

Conversely, an impressive digital presence – or, at the very least, a neutral one – can confirm for hiring managers that you're

an exceptional talent who will be a valuable addition to their organization. As the data shows, such a presence can be the fuel that accelerates you forward in the hiring process.

If a digital search reveals a profile at odds with the image you've presented, don't be surprised if risk-averse organizations back away. (Keep in mind: the very nature of social networks makes it easy to post in the heat of the moment, so it's easier than you'd think to develop a questionable presence).

Having no online presence can also raise eyebrows; if you don't have a LinkedIn profile at the minimum, some companies assume a lack of digital savvy and may even disqualify candidates from the hiring process on this basis.

So how do you get started? Fortunately, it's not difficult. Check out the tips that follow – plus the handy red flags you must avoid.



According to The Manifest, that's why:

98%

Of employers do online background research on candidates

79%

Of HR professionals have disqualified candidates as a result of what they've found on social media

90%

Look at social media profiles as part of the candidate assessment process



Kick off the process with a mini audit

Like any exercise that requires objectively evaluating yourself, digging through your own digital profile can feel a little awkward. That's natural – but it's not a reason to delay. Instead, jumpstart your efforts with a very simple Google search of your name – and click on each result to see exactly what it says.

What comes up when you check out the first two pages of results? Although [75 percent](#) of people don't look beyond the first page, it's still smart to know what's out there. Put yourself in the shoes of a hiring manager. What would they conclude after they scanned your list of search results?

Here's how to assess your findings:

- **Visibility matters.** Examine your search results carefully. Do you even come up? In the modern working world, it's normal to have at least a few hits in search results – a LinkedIn profile, for example, or a link to a conference presentation. But if your results show nothing pertinent to you, it makes the vetting process more difficult.
- **Too much information can be an issue.** What happens when results surface that may be too much? Perhaps they disclose more personal information than you'd want to share with a professional contact or showcase a time or moment in your life that isn't reflective of who you are now. Make a note of these. You may want to delete them (in the case of, say, a Facebook photo) or prepare an explanation if needed.
- **Difficult to discern.** Do you have a common name? If so, you might share search results with a variety of "Susan Smiths" or "John Browns." That's not necessarily a bad thing – but it does mean you'll just need to work a little harder to set yourself apart from your digital

doppelgangers. You do this by adding new content that can rank higher in search results or, if time allows, build your own website. We'll have more on this later!

- **Not quite on target.** Your search results might be perfectly straightforward and accurate – but do they showcase the right mix of experience, skills and personality? As a first step, update your LinkedIn profile.
- **Wholly inaccurate.** If you find something that could be damaging to your professional brand, know that many countries (although not the US) have privacy requirements that include the ability to have inaccurate content removed from websites upon request. Searching for resources around the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are a useful place to start.

8 Bright Red Flags That Say “Don’t Hire Me”

What makes hiring managers and Human Resources professionals turn away from candidates who might otherwise be promising? When it comes to sharing content or shaping the messaging for your personal brand on social media platforms, these eight red flags should be avoided at all costs.

1. Extreme political views
2. Offensive content (e.g., racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ableist, anti-LGBTQIA+) in all forms, including comments, memes, shared articles, videos, pictures and posts
3. Grammar and spelling issues – if in doubt, type into a Word document and spell check it first before copying and pasting it online
4. Obvious drug use or promotion of drug use
5. Regular use of profanity and other pejoratives
6. Falsehoods
7. Illegal activity
8. Content that could be construed as poor judgment
9. Unnecessarily negative or petty commentary (e.g., over-the-top criticism of customer service, pointing out another’s grammatical error)





What's your story?

Now that you've established your baseline – how you show up in that first cursory search – you can get to work. This is the fun part: freshening up what's out there so it reflects the real you. It's a great opportunity to tell your story the way it should be told.

Jump-start the process by identifying the most meaningful elements that support the next act in your professional arc. If you're a developer, perhaps you'd highlight the latest coding languages you've learned and update the projects you've led on your GitHub profile. Graphic designer? Build or update an online portfolio to showcase your aesthetic sensibility and how it translates to projects that drive results for clients. If you're in management, think through the moments in your career

that exemplified your leadership ability. Did you substantially and consistently exceed revenue targets or turn around a flagging customer satisfaction score? Those are great wins to highlight.

You can build your personal narrative around one or more of these core elements:

Experience

Experience tells a hiring manager you've got what it takes to deliver excellence consistently. Imagine you're the hiring manager for the next job you want. What experiences on your resume will inspire them to see you in the role? Make sure those are prominently reflected wherever you're updating your story, whether it's LinkedIn or a personal website.

Remember: there's a reason "show" comes first in "show and tell." It's not enough to say, "I'm experienced in advertising after a 15-year career." or "I have completed a lot of diverse projects with good results." Demonstrate that with succinct and specific results. Make sure your examples address:

The problem or challenge plus why it mattered

Customers couldn't figure out our new help desk system.

Your role in handling the issue

I pulled together a 10-person, cross-functional team to explore solutions and led them in implementing a new user experience journey to make the help desk intuitive for customers.

The results

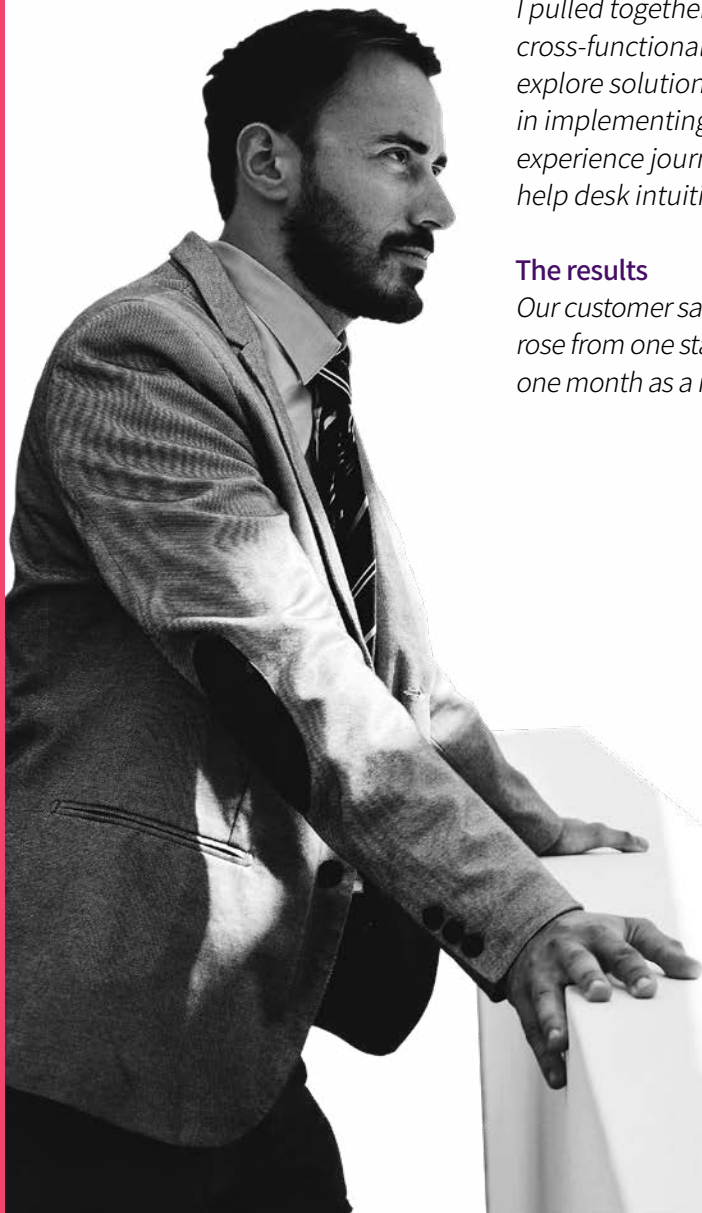
Our customer satisfaction score rose from one star to five stars in one month as a result.

Education and New Skills

Companies like candidates who have spent time enriching and building on their skill sets. This commitment to self-development demonstrates a learning mindset, rather than complacency. It suggests intellectual curiosity, a good work ethic, and desire for continuous growth; qualities generally possessed by exceptional employees.

Remember: you don't need to have a new degree or skill-based certificate to demonstrate your commitment to building skills or deepening your expertise. Classes through resources like LinkedIn Learning, Udacity, Udemy, Coursera or your local community college are also great examples.

But don't forget to take an expansive view. Other activities count too: attending and presenting at industry conferences, starting your own professional book club, organizing or giving talks at an internal lunch-and-learn series; using your professional skills in a voluntary capacity to solve a unique challenge, etc.



Leadership Ability

Leadership ability might be difficult to quantify, but it's something that matters deeply to organizations. Great leaders are excellent communicators, team builders and motivators, powerful strategy developers, and exceptional executors.

Remember: like showcasing your experience, providing proof of your leadership acumen is important. Instead of saying, "I'm a leader who was responsible for hundreds of employees," think about what you did for those employees. Were you able to get great results from them that drove some business objective forward? Help them grow in their jobs? Mentor someone to success? Coach others who were struggling to achieve better performance? Provide enough detail to demonstrate what your leadership ability looks like in action (but, again, make it succinct).

Technical Acumen

Not every job requires technical skill but increasingly many do. Whether it's data analysis or coding, Excel or InDesign, showing you understand and use the relevant technical tools and programs for your field can reinforce your suitability as a candidate.

Remember: demonstrating your technical acumen – versus just listing the technical skills you

have – will catch the eye of a hiring manager. Links to projects, online portfolios, and even simple PDFs of technical work you've done can all serve as compelling proof points.

Your positioning or branding statement

Once you have a firm sense of what you'll emphasize, craft your positioning or branding statement (sometimes referred to as your "elevator pitch"). This is truly the epitome of "short and sweet." Focus it on the top three things you'd want a hiring manager to remember about you (and keep in mind people's attention spans are notoriously short: literally less than a goldfish's!).

Here's what you need to know about a branding statement (or elevator pitch):

- **It needs to work in both worlds:** in written form and in conversation. (As an aside, practice it out loud in advance of an interview. Your pitch will make a great response to the classic interview opener, "Tell us a little bit about yourself.")
- Keep it simple, informative and memorable.

Bad: I'm Kylie. I'm an experienced sales executive and a people person. I graduated from the University of Texas in 2005.

Good: In the past 16 years as a sales executive, I've exceeded my quota every single quarter – but that's not what makes me exceptional at my job. In that same period, my customer satisfaction scores were consistently at the top of my organization, reflecting the effort I take to build real customer intimacy. That's why I earned Top Salesperson of the Year for twelve of those years, including last year.

- It should be personal. Not overly so, but don't be afraid to tailor your pitch so it feels genuine to your personality and congruent with the job opportunity you're targeting. Think about tone. Does a conversational tone make more sense than a formal one? What level of personal detail feels right? Are you detailed enough to provide credibility – but high-level enough to maintain interest?



Can Companies Legitimately Check You Out on Social?

Many candidates wonder if companies can check them out on social media – and make decisions based on what they find.

In a word, yes.

According to [the Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\)](#), employers can use social media as part of the typical background check process. But the same legal protections apply. They cannot legally use what they find to disqualify candidates based on “protected characteristics” like race, age, religion or belief, disability, etc.

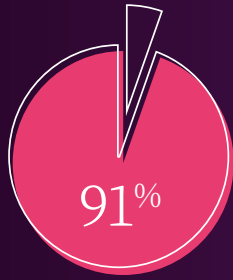
As part of the process, [the National Law Review](#) advises that companies should not ask you for your social media passwords – it’s actually illegal in some states – but instead rely on what’s public. Some may ask you or attempt to friend you, but you’re not required to allow them more in-depth access.



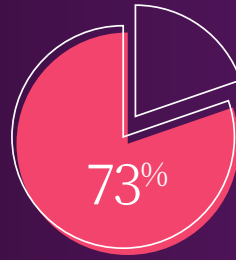
Social Hiring at-a-Glance

Social professional networks are the **#1 source** of quality hires (LinkedIn Business Solutions Hiring Statistics)

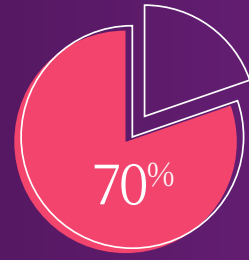




of companies use social media to recruit and hire talent ([CareerArc](#))



of 18- to 34-year-olds found their last job through a social network ([Aberdeen Group](#))



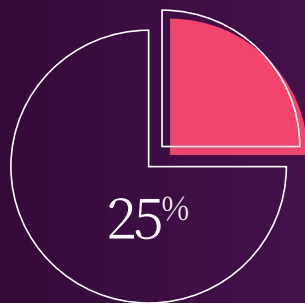
of employers use social networks to research job candidates – and 57% have found content that made them reject applicants. ([CareerBuilder](#))

Top three kinds of objectionable social content ([CareerBuilder](#)):

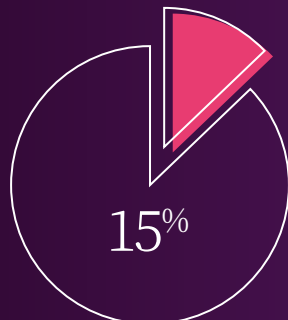
#1 Provocative or inappropriate photos or videos

#2 Drinking or drug use

#3 Discriminatory comments on race, gender, religion



of recent hires got their jobs by networking online ([Clutch](#))



of job seekers used social media to find their next job ([Clutch](#))

Kick off the process with a mini audit

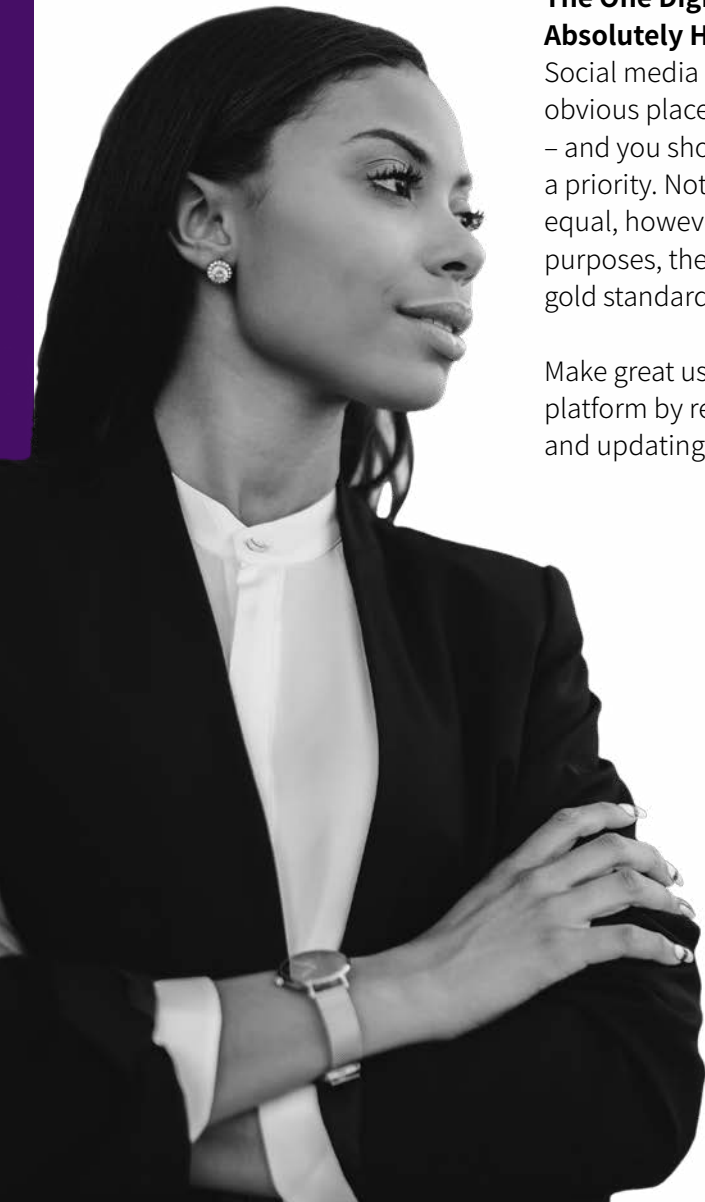
You know what's out there about you. You know what you want to say about yourself. Now where do you say it?

The One Digital Place You Absolutely Have to Be

Social media platforms are the obvious place to concentrate – and you should make them a priority. Not all are created equal, however. For professional purposes, the one to nail is the gold standard: LinkedIn.

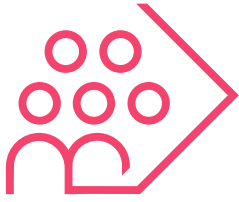
Make great use of this critical platform by regularly refreshing and updating your profile:

- Visuals take a story from good to great. An exceptional profile always includes the right profile picture. Choose a photo that looks like you. Your face should take up 60% of the frame and no one else should be in the picture. Wear something simple and professional – save the crazy patterns and stick to one or two colors. Look friendly and approachable. Don't forget to switch up the banner graphic behind your headshot, which is customizable. Use that real estate to showcase something relevant to your field; check out free graphic sites like Unsplash.com for options.
- Include a headline that draws interest. You'll find your headline right under your name. This is the perfect place to distill your personal elevator pitch to a couple of punchy, short phrases. In the "About" section just below, you can expound on the headline in a few memorable sentences, adding in some proof points.





- Ensure your profile is always current and complete. As you scan your LinkedIn profile, make sure it's not missing any new information and totally up to date, from fully representing all your relevant positions to adding in examples of your work in the "Featured" section.
- Recommendations add that something extra. No recommendations on your profile – or only ones that reflect older positions? No problem. Just ask a couple of trusted colleagues or former managers to share their perspective on your performance and potential. If you know precisely what you'd like them to include, feel free to make a recommendation to them in a light-touch way ("I recall our work together on this project and would love to highlight the good results we achieved.").
- Build community. Community comes from participation, from engagement that shows thought, courtesy, intellectual curiosity, and a genuine interest in others. Spend time each week doing the simple things that build community and strengthen your network:
 - Follow, like, comment on, and share others' content. Just make sure to keep it professional – from what you say to what you share. You don't have to do this every day, either. A few times a week is a great initial cadence to set as your goal.
 - Post content yourself. See a great news article about industry trends? Share it with a few words on what this means in your view. Just achieve a new professional certification? Sounds like a reason to update your network.
- Join LinkedIn Groups. There is power in community and the Groups functionality on LinkedIn makes it possible to join conversations with like-minded professionals. You can elevate your expertise on various topics, build out your professional network, and learn along the way.
- Consider writing. LinkedIn offers the ability to publish articles you author. These longer-form posts are an excellent way to emphasize your expertise on specific topics. But they must answer a key question every reader has: "What's in it for me?" So, make sure if you write, it's always worth their time. It almost goes without saying – but proofread carefully. Grammatical errors, stylistic issues, and spelling problems will undercut the great points you're making.



Stake a Claim Elsewhere on Social

LinkedIn might be the exemplar of professional social media platforms but that doesn't mean there aren't others to consider.

Twitter and Medium are two that should be at the top of your list. With Twitter, you don't necessarily need to tweet all the time – but a basic profile allows you to follow the companies, leaders, influencers, recruiters and job-related hashtags of interest to you. And it helps you stay on top of company news, so you'll be well informed as you start having conversations with hiring managers. Make it easy for yourself: repurpose some of your LinkedIn profile content for the profile pic, headshot and bio.

Medium is another great option. Much like LinkedIn articles, Medium offers a place to publish long-form content. But it's not a requirement to write. It's more than enough to create a simple profile and adopt the same “follow, like, comment, share” strategy for both LinkedIn and Twitter. Follow people relevant to your career, like good content

they've written, comment thoughtfully, and share it so others can benefit from reading it too.

Job Aggregators

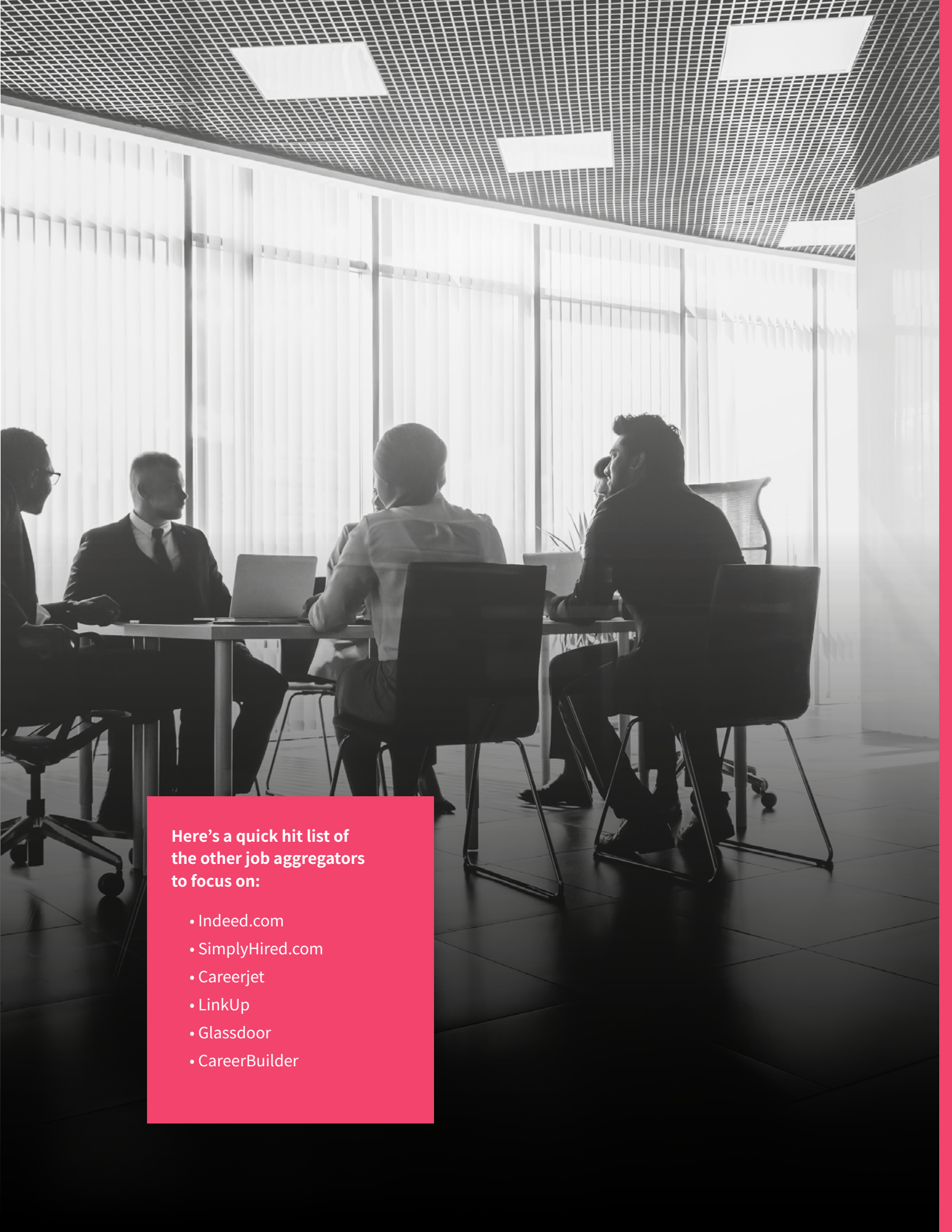
Job aggregator sites are one-stop-shops for job opportunities, pulling available jobs from various places across the Web and making them easily accessible. Most have options to upload your resume or create profiles that make it easier for hiring managers to find you – so take advantage of the option if it fits your strategy. But be aware: this will limit your ability to customize your resume for specific opportunities.

LinkedIn Jobs is the biggest fish in this pond – and probably the best one to use if you have limited time. It's very simple. Search for jobs just by typing in the position type in the search field on the homepage – or use the LinkedIn Jobs page (www.linkedin.com/jobs).

When you use the latter, you can search by job title, company, skill and location. Set up alerts

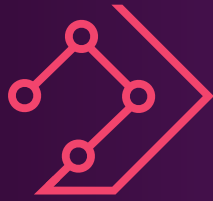
so when the right opportunities become available, you'll get notified by email (and through notifications on the site) so you can apply quickly. Don't forget to save the jobs that look interesting so you can easily find them and apply when you're ready.

As you're looking at job descriptions, notice the key words and make sure they're reflected in your LinkedIn profile. As recruiters search for talent on LinkedIn, these key words will help make you searchable and findable so your profile surfaces for consideration.



**Here's a quick hit list of
the other job aggregators
to focus on:**

- [Indeed.com](#)
- [SimplyHired.com](#)
- [Careerjet](#)
- [LinkUp](#)
- [Glassdoor](#)
- [CareerBuilder](#)



Build a Quick Personal Website

There is one way to generate a new hit on your search results that aligns precisely with your professional career narrative – building a personal website.

Even a simple site will:

Set you apart from other candidates

Serve as an easily updated, dynamic reflection of your skills, experience and focus areas as they are today

Underscore your creativity and professional savvy

If you're web savvy, you can do this yourself by purchasing a domain through Squarespace, GoDaddy and other providers – then build it from there. But there are plenty of free options – with easy-to-populate templates – that exist too. About.me is one easy way to get this done. Although it's geared toward entrepreneurs and consultants, anyone can put up a free page about themselves in short order (note: you can pay to augment your content with additional features like a portfolio or testimonials).

Use the work you did establishing your personal narrative as the foundation for your website – and go from there. Look for ways to integrate strong visuals, a good headshot, work samples, recommendations, and even video to make your site – and you – stand out in a field crowded with competitors.



The way forward

People get hired in new positions every single day. They get promoted. They change careers. They chase – and realize – new dreams. What common denominator ties these successful transitions together? Positioning experience, skills and talents in one compelling package using all relevant digital options.

Employers are online because that's where the talent is: exceptional, experienced, engaged professionals like you. With the digital resources available, you can ensure what they find reflects the real you. And the effort will pay dividends in new opportunities for career growth and success.

Get started today!



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