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Social media or social minefield? Surviving in the new cyberspace era

Ariane Ollier-Malaterre [a,*], Nancy P. Rothbard [b,1]

[a] University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM), Case postale 6192, succursale Centre-Ville, Montréal, Québec, H3C 4R2, Canada
[b] The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 3620 Locust Walk, Suite 2000 SH-DH, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6370, USA

''Social media - more like social minefield, difference being if you step out of bounds, it's recorded for posterity, interestingly if you don't use it you'll still be judged negatively.'' Independent Business Owner

SOCIAL MEDIA IS TRANSFORMING OUR CAREERS

Online social media represents a new social space where professional reputations can be built and destroyed. Survey after survey demonstrates that social media is transforming the way we assess people's employability and career potential. In a recent CareerBuilder survey of 2300 hiring managers, nearly 40 percent of respondents said they used social media to screen potential hires and examine cultural fit with their organization. On the one hand, nearly 30 percent found reasons to hire candidates who appeared well-rounded or showed a wide range of interests and creativity. Moreover, more than half of employers noticed that those candidates conveyed a professional image — in other words, they used a consistent and relevant strategy on social media. On the other hand, nearly half of hiring managers rejected candidates after viewing provocative or inappropriate photos and comments, or because of candidates' drinking or drug use, bad-mouthing a previous employer, making discriminatory comments or lying about their qualifications. Another survey by the Society of Human Resource Management reported an even higher proportion (56 percent) of employers who used social media to screen candidates. While most of them used LinkedIn, which is entirely professional, 58 percent and 42 percent used Facebook and Twitter, both of which are networks that mix the professional and the personal.

To better understand how people craft social media strategies and what the key success factors are for doing so, we

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 514 953 9781.
  E-mail addresses: ollier.ariane@uqam.ca (A. Ollier-Malaterre),
nrothbard@wharton.upenn.edu (N.P. Rothbard).
  [1] Tel.: +1 215 898 1102.

interviewed top managers and executives, middle managers, entry-level employees, graduate students entering the job market and self-employed individuals. We then conducted surveys on social media behaviors and analyzed over 450 public comments that were made in response to a blog that cited some of our work on online boundaries that appeared on a public LinkedIn post, *Psychology Today,* and the *Huffington Post.*

Successful Social Media Strategies

We start with some examples of successful social media strategies. Anand Mahindra, the chairman and managing director of the multinational automobile manufacturer Mahindra Group, was recently listed by Evan LePage as one of five non-tech chief executive officers (CEOs) using social media to drive business results. Mahindra has over 844,000 Twitter followers. His posts are both professional and personal: he posts about his company, but also about cinema and American politics. Recent posts include ''There are times you meet someone & your only emotion is one of gratitude for being blessed. Archbishop Tutu, thank you for being in our midst,'' ''1.5 hrs in Mumbai traffic to a wedding; 1 min to wave to the couple; 1 hr drive home. Incontrovertible evidence that Homo Sapiens is irrational,'' ''Sunset at a vineyard near Capetown. Colours that would have stretched the imagination of a renaissance painter…'' and ''The ultimate irony? Anti nuclear activists building explosive devices to express their protest. This is a strange world.'' As Mr LePage puts it, ''Mahindra is a great example for executives to follow as he is one of the rare CEOs who publicly shows his true colors. Followers love him for it.''

Doug Conant, former CEO of Campbell Soup, is also cited by Evan LePage. Unlike Mahindra, whose comments range from the professional to the personal, Conant's social media presence is focused on business and leadership. Conant tweets up to ten times a day and is said to tweet in person and to thank followers who retweet him. He has a well furbished Facebook profile featuring leadership articles, blog entries, and a photo with Warren Bennis.

Less Successful Social Media Strategies

While Anand Mahindra and Doug Conant's professional reputations seem to thrive on social media, Bob Parsons, a Vietnam veteran, celebrated American entrepreneur and founder of the GoDaddy group of companies, had a very different experience with social media. His 2011 tweet of a video in which he shoots and kills an elephant in Zimbabwe made the top of the 15 Social Media Disasters of 2011 ranking. After PETA responded by shutting down its GoDaddy account and asking others to do the same, Parsons had to quit as CEO.

Like Bob Parsons, Gary Stein, a U.S. Marine sergeant and an Iraq veteran, may bitterly regret his social media strategy. He had been a Marine for nine years and was based at Camp Pendleton when the Marine Corps administrative board recommended that he be dismissed with an other-than-honorable discharge and his security clearance be taken away. Veteran Stein had created an Armed Forces Tea Party Facebook page, where he had criticized President Obama. Ignoring warnings from his superiors that he was violating the Pentagon policy that limits the free speech rights of service members, he also posted on Facebook pages where he could influence junior Marines. He allegedly put the president's face on a ''Jackass'' movie poster, wrote that Obama was the domestic enemy and declared on Facebook that he would not follow orders from Obama. He later clarified that statement, saying he would not follow unlawful orders prejudicial to good order and discipline. Despite support from his lawyers as well as former Marine congressmen, Stein was given a desk job with no access to computers. The military issued directions for troops on how they could stay social media savvy during the election season. Stein, who risked having his career wiped out for ''15 words on Facebook,'' is turning to appeal courts outside the military.

WHY IS SOCIAL MEDIA SO POWERFUL IN BOTH ACCELERATING SUCCESS AND CRASHING CAREERS?

A key challenge that individuals face in managing their careers is navigating the opportunities and pitfalls presented by social media. This new communication medium has the ability to disseminate information widely and in a way that gives a broad audience access to the individual. However, as illustrated by the above examples, taking advantage of the opportunities provided may not be straightforward. There are several reasons why social media may have such a powerful influence on either promoting or crashing careers.

The Collision between Professional and Personal Worlds

First, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Google+, or Twitter are social spaces where the lines between the personal and the professional are often blurred in that information disclosure and interactions can be personal as well as professional. For instance, Mahindra Group Chairman, Anand Mahindra, shares his political views quite often on social media, revealing his personal side to the public. This results in a potential collision of professional and personal worlds that can open up opportunities as well as create challenges for business executives and employees alike. On-line social networks that are personal or semi-personal in nature essentially put people in one large, invisible room with ''friends'' or connections from various social worlds. People have, on average, 130 connections on Facebook and are connected to an average of 16 co-workers.

Non-Tailored Information Sharing

Second, interactions on social media differ from off-line interactions in new ways. In face-to-face and other individualized interactions such as phone calls, disclosure is tailored to the other party. We usually reveal more of our personal selves to friends than to colleagues, and we dress in different ways when attending professional meetings than when enjoying down time with our families. Moreover, we fine-tune the amount and nature of personal information we disclose to professional contacts over time, according to the particular relationships we have built with each individual.

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By contrast, information shared on social media is not tailored to a particular relationship.

GoDaddy CEO Bob Parsons would not have brought up elephant shooting in a talk where he had spotted PETA members. U.S. Marine Gary Stein might have tamed his political opinions when in the physical presence of his superiors. Even e-mails sent to individuals are more tailored than on-line social media, in that the audience (i.e., the individual you are sending the email to) is more salient as you craft the message. In sum, social media can create a false impression of intimacy that leads people to disclose more than they should.

As one of our survey respondents put it: "It encourages "oversharing" — there are details about people's lives that I would not otherwise know, and I don't feel that I should know. For some reason, on Facebook people feel that it's okay for the whole world to know these things."

A Flood of Searchable Information

Third, the information we share on social media platforms is persistent in time, presenting new connections with a flood of information that was not meant for this particular relationship and may have lost its original meaning. The Marine Corps administrative board was influenced in part by the accumulation of decontextualized pieces of information that, taken together, told a worse story than Gary Stein likely imagined when posting each individual piece. The experience of accessing a great deal of untailored information about a professional contact seems to be unique to interactions in online social networks.

What is worse, such information may be easily searchable and retrievable using search engines that collect available information on a given individual. A Google search on Bob Parsons brings up his Twitter feed, LinkedIn profile, and personal blog and also, as the first result, a Wikipedia entry about the elephant shooting controversy.

Lack of Social Scripts and the Invisible Audience

Fourth, we "interact" with others on social media platforms without seeing the visible social cues such as facial expressions, vocal tone, and body language that normally help provide critical information about how one should behave. While we usually have five to ten people in mind when we post a status update, we very often forget the *invisible audience* that is all the other people, perhaps including professional contacts, who see it. One of our interviewees, Madison, was a respected chief financial officer (CFO) for a retail company. She forgot the invisible audience when she posted a "selfie" in a bathing suit during summer holidays. While she had always dressed professionally to impress the male board members, she realized they had all seen the picture at the next board meeting when one of them joked about her blue shirt matching the blue bathing suit. In fact, a vast range of information about us and our broader social networks — e.g., the comments we write, the links we share, the pages we "like," the groups we belong to, the people we are connected to and the ones who interact with us most, — is available to both the people we interact with as well as the invisible audience which we tend not to think about.

Lack of Social Control over Content

Last, social media platforms are public or semi-public spaces where our "friends" can also share information about us (e.g., upload pictures featuring us, comment on what we are posting). As one survey respondent explained: "It's hard to control the content others put up...This can make it stressful when you are looking for a job and a professional investigates your personal history." It is easy for either negative or simply unaware others to undermine our professional credibility.

One of our interviewees, Mark, a promising marketing professional, suffered reputational consequences when a jealous co-worker implied on Twitter that he did not in fact work very hard at all. Even though Mark's supervisor and closest professional acquaintances understood the context and knew better, for several months Mark felt that he needed to bring up and explain the story behind that tweet whenever he met with a professional contact. Employees could also be embarrassed by personal comments made by their friends and family members that their professional contacts also see.

Another interviewee, Emily, recalled when she had texted her best friend with the happy news that she had passed a certain civil service examination, and thus was going to quit her job in the private sector. She had not yet told her boss, and only realized that her friend had congratulated her on Facebook when she came face-to-face with an upset boss who had seen the post. Such unwanted disclosure can be hard to prevent or manage because interactions on social media are asynchronous and you may not be able to control them in time.

CONSEQUENCES OF INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

The strategies that individuals use to manage their social media disclosures have implications for how others view them. In particular, in our data we saw that these strategies have implications for people's overall professional reputations, and more specifically the degree to which they are respected and liked by their co-workers or potential co-workers.

Impact on Professional Reputations

As we have seen, employers check social media profiles. Co-workers may too, as may your boss, your subordinates, and your other professional acquaintances. This makes managing your professional reputation even more difficult because not all the information you may have shared was targeted to them, and they may also read it in a decontextualized way. When asked about challenges on social media, one survey respondent answered: "People reading too much into status updates. Making assumptions/conclusions." In fact, every piece of text, photo or video we share online, and every act such as liking a page or accepting a request can have long-lasting significance on social media and has consequences for our professional reputations.

Impact on Professional Respect and Liking

In particular, our social media strategy affects our relationships at work by influencing how much we are respected and liked by our colleagues. First, the information we share online (the "what") and the people we share it with (the "who") shape how much we are respected (i.e., viewed as competent or incompetent) by our co-workers, supervisors and other professional acquaintances. Second, our interactions on social media shape how well we are liked by our professional contacts — that is whether we are viewed as warm or cold.

Many individual outcomes in organizations depend on judgments of respect and liking, from hiring, promoting, and firing to performance evaluations, raises and the like. One's leadership potential is also related to how much people respect and like the leader — see for instance how Anand Mahindra's social media presence contributes to his charisma.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA AND NOT LET IT DAMAGE YOUR CAREER

Step 1 — Diagnose your online behavior: What is your online social networking strategy?

A critical first step to leveraging social media and protecting your professional reputation is to diagnose your social media strategy. Our research identified four archetypical strategies that people tend to employ: Open, Audience, Content, and Custom strategies. We describe each in turn and discuss the benefits and costs associated with each of these strategies.

"Open" strategies

One of our interviewees, Stacey, a 29-year old professional working for a not-for-profit organization, recalled feeling shocked and startled when her boss asked "Hey, are you on Facebook? I'm sending you an invitation to connect!" Feeling pressure, and for lack of a better answer, she mumbled "Sure." After all, he was sitting at the desk facing hers and she did not want to risk offending him. She frantically scanned her posts, deleted her comments about work and some pictures showcasing her partying skills, and reluctantly accepted his request. After which she stopped using Facebook until much later, when she had changed jobs.

Prior to her boss's request, Stacey was using a strategy that we identified in our research as an "Open" strategy. She aired her views and feelings, not filtering whether the content was appropriate for the audience that would see it. She shared both her positive and negative experiences and let everyone comment on her posts. In short, she was integrating professional and personal domains without monitoring the content that she posted. While this strategy worked at first, when she only had personal friends on Facebook, it suddenly became non-functional when her boss "friended" her. People like Stacey who embrace the Open strategy follow a philosophy of transparency. The benefits of this strategy are that others feel that they know the individual much more deeply and that they are authentic. The costs are that they may risk offending a subset of their audience by being so completely transparent.

What other strategies could Stacey have used? Table 1 illustrates the four online strategies people tend to use.

"Audience" strategies

In addition to the Open strategy, we identified a strategy we call the "Audience" strategy, which also allows people to express their views in an authentic way, but where people do more to control their audience, keeping professional and personal networks separate. Using this strategy, Stacey could have created a private Facebook account instead of the default public one. Or she could have told her boss that she was using LinkedIn as a professional platform. The audience strategy applies as well for YouTube, where you can choose to share videos with selected connections and prevent them from appearing in search results, and for protected Twitter accounts where you authorize others to follow you. Of course, Stacey's response would have conveyed that she viewed her boss as a professional rather than a personal connection, which in a not-for-profit organization that viewed itself as a large family could have offended her boss. That may be the reason why, in a recent survey by Millennial branding, 40 percent of respondents thought that it was "irresponsible" to ignore a friend request from a co-worker and felt compelled to accept such requests.

"Content" strategies

Alternatively, Stacey could have used a "Content" strategy, where individuals do not put a great deal of effort into managing the audiences they are connected with, but instead carefully monitor the content that they share. Thus, Stacey would have accepted her boss' request but would have monitored the information and photos she shared so that they helped improve her image in the eyes of her boss and her other professional contacts. Stacey could even have gone so far as to control who could tag her in Facebook photos so that her boss would not come across one of her infamous party photos, and monitor the comments her friends made on her Facebook profile or YouTube videos. This would have meant, however, that she could no longer use social media to candidly express her opinions with friends.

"Custom" strategies

Stacey could have taken yet a different approach that might have allowed her to both please her boss and keep her Facebook newsfeed personal and vibrant. She could have used what we call a "Custom" strategy, whereby individuals manage both their audience and content. By customizing her profile and creating professional and personal lists on Facebook for instance, or by setting up distinct Twitter and YouTube accounts like many journalists and public figures do, she would have separated her professional and personal audiences. This would enable her to look good in the eyes of her boss and colleagues, while still sharing positive and the negative events with friends. In other words, she would have mirrored the tailored nature of her offline relationships.

Step 2 — Choose your Goals on Social Media: Do you Want to Express Yourself or to Impress Others?

After diagnosing your social media strategy, it is important to understand what you want to use social media for and

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Table 1 Four online boundary management strategies.

Open	**Benefit: Self-expression** "My ability to create and express myself is of much greater value to me than my employment. I don't really care if someone posts a picture of me in a prom dress, because part of who I am is a guy who wore a prom dress to an event." **Benefit: Bridging the professional and the personal** "I know that people buy from people and that the number one trust builder is being and acting authentic." **Cost: Some may respect and like you less** "If someone doesn't want to hire me because I used a four-letter word in a comment feed, I don't want to work for them anyway."
Audience	**Benefit: Privacy** "I don't want any connection with people that I work with. It is too easy for them to get inside of my personal business." "There are a lot of reasons why someone would want to keep their personal life private from their professional one. Perhaps you belong to a non-mainstream religion, have unusual hobbies, or maybe just a lot of crazy friends who like to post flatulent dog videos on your Facebook wall." **Cost: Offending professional contacts. Not spanning boundaries** "I would be very hesitant to accept a friend request from someone who could potentially see something posted about me that would have an adverse effect on me. However...I would be more inclined not to reject them, as this might also have an adverse effect on my relationship with that person."
Content	**Benefit: Impression management** "I blend both my LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, sharing minimal personal information on all channels so an employer has little to infer about any of my social media. (...) Anyone who visits my channels sees only the good and none of the bad." **Cost: Coming across as inauthentic** "The biggest problem I have had has been having relatives comment.... But you can't block or de-friend them because they're your family and they would be offended."
Custom	**Benefit: Relatively safe self-expression** "As someone who has two LinkedIn profiles and two Facebook profiles, at the end of the day, who you are expressing yourself to is important. Hence the Facebook account I use as a networking tool for spiritual practices and the one I use for my close friends being VERY different from one another." "I might share a different side of my personality at work in my efforts to be professional and respectable and then I go home and goof off with my kids. These are all authentic parts of my personality, but I choose who to share them with." **Cost: Effort** "If you are not on Facebook, you feel left out of the loop, but, once you are on it, it's constantly changing and often you just want to quit maintaining [a separate] one [profile]".

consider whether your strategy is helping you meet those goals. Our research suggests that you should consider two factors in choosing a social media strategy. First, consider the degree to which it is important for you to express yourself authentically or instead to impress others by enhancing your image. Second, consider whether you want to separate your various social groups or to integrate them online.

Expressing yourself

It might be that authenticity is most important factor for you, as it is for a growing number of people and in particular younger generations. In that case, you have two options: either the "Open" approach where you mix your professional and personal audiences or the "Audience" approach where you keep them separate.

One clear benefit of the Open approach is that you can leverage social media to express your personality and values and that can be very satisfying, giving you a powerful voice well beyond your face-to-face contacts. As one survey respondent clearly stated, if you desire authenticity, being liked by others is less important than being true to yourself:

"I'll add just about anyone on Facebook. If they can't accept who I am then that is their problem. I don't try to hide anything". A second benefit is you can bridge the personal and the professional, which may help you build better business relationships. A third important benefit is that it is simple and hassle-free: you just post what you like without conducting a lot of boundary management.

Pitfalls of being authentic on social media

However, the Open strategy has its costs. It is the riskiest strategy in terms of garnering respect (e.g., posting content that might be considered inappropriate when viewed by colleagues) and liking (e.g., sharing opinions that may make some people in your network like you less). Consider Nathalie Blanchard, a 29 year-old Canadian IBMer who had taken long-term sick leave because of depression. Nathalie saw her payments dry up when the insurance company, Manulife, saw pictures of her on Facebook showing her enjoying herself during a male strip-tease show at a Chippendales bar, celebrating her birthday and bathing in the sun. Based on the pictures they assessed that she was no longer depressed.

While Manulife said they were not basing their health assessment solely on social media, they admitted to looking up participants' online profiles.

Even very ordinary incidents can have unintended reactions. For example, one of our interviewees was both a member of and employed by her Synagogue and had recently accepted her Rabbi's Facebook "friend request." When her Rabbi saw that she posted a picture of her son at his Soccer game on a Saturday, he took her aside and said that as an employee of the synagogue, she was also representing it, and suggested that she should not post pictures that showed that she was violating the expectation that she was observing Shabbat on Saturday (which did not involve kids' soccer games). Thus, what she perceived as a post highlighting her son engaging with friends in wholesome activity was perceived by her boss to be inappropriate given her role as a representative of the synagogue and its values and expectations. As a result of this incident she changed her online boundary management strategy to more of a content strategy. Moreover, while she kept her job, she ended up defriending the Rabbi on Facebook. In short, we can only recommend an Open strategy if you are comfortable with its consequences.

Costs and benefits of the audience strategy

So, is the Audience strategy, where you only connect with friends and friendly co-workers, safer? Yes, and that is a major benefit. Since only your personal contacts can view the information you disclose and can comment on it, an Audience strategy protects your professional reputation and your privacy. An Audience strategy, however, is more demanding than an Open strategy because you need to make many small individual decisions about who to accept as a connection. Also, it might offend some professional contacts whose connection request is ignored. It might also cause others to perceive you as having something to hide, in an era where the rhetoric of transparency is widespread. Another drawback is that an Audience strategy may be difficult to maintain over time. Consider for instance a College student who sets up a private YouTube account and shares authentic videos of all sorts. She is safe since recruiters cannot view these. However, two years later, some of her former peers may be conducting checks for their companies, or she may end up working for one of them. If she has not realized that and deleted the videos, even an Audience strategy could get her in trouble. Last, an audience strategy while guarding against loss of respect or liking may not be as helpful at taking advantage of the potential opportunities social media provides to connect to broad groups of colleagues.

Impressing others

Self-expression may not be your primary goal. Instead, it might be important for you to control your image. If this is the case, you might use social media to portray yourself in a positive light. You have two options: the Content strategy if you wish to integrate your professional and personal audiences or the Custom strategy if you prefer to segment them and tailor what you disclose to these different audiences.

Content strategy: Costs and benefits of managing your image on social media

A Content strategy has many benefits. Like Anand Mahindra, you can share both professional and personal content as long as you keep it positive, interesting and socially acceptable. The content strategy is likely to increase your respectability and likeability in the workplace, and is also easy to manage as you only need to maintain one profile or account.

The content strategy, however, comes with costs and risks as well. First, you restrict the way you benefit from social media. For example, you have access to less information and lose the ability to build richer relationships with professional contacts. Like our young professional Stacey, you need to filter what you share and what others share about you closely. There is much less of an opportunity to vent or express vulnerability. Second, your personal contacts may not understand your professional norms well. There is always the risk that one of them will accidentally post information, a picture or a video that is not entirely aligned with the image that you are maintaining, in which case you could come across as inauthentic.

One of our interviewees was an energetic human resources manager known by colleagues and friends alike to post about cutting-edge business practices and happy family outings. One day a personal friend of hers, unaware that she was posting on a semi-public space, posted a comment inquiring about her battle with depression and burnout. The cat was out of the bag, for all colleagues and friends, and she felt that this had created a misalignment that could ultimately damage how she was seen. So she changed her strategy to be more open and authentic and to include both positive and less positive posts. Such incidents explain why social media strategies often evolve with time, as people enter new career and life stages and need to adjust.

The custom strategy: Costs and benefits of the most sophisticated strategy

A Custom strategy, however, is preferable if you want to manage impressions and tend to segment your professional and your personal lives. For instance, you can only see positive professional content on Doug Conant's Facebook profile. This may because he only posts that content (Content strategy) or because he shares personal content on another platform, via another account or to a list he has created in the privacy settings.

Customizing is a direct attempt to address the need to tailor the content of our posts to our different audiences. As one blog commenter wrote: "What is inappropriate and offensive is often subjective in nature. Of course, most people know better than to post something profane or incriminating on their Facebook pages. Where most of us get into trouble is when we believe we are posting something innocuous and end up offending someone." This is exactly the problem our synagogue employee ran into. The more you tailor your online presence to your audiences, the less risk there is to embarrass or offend a connection.

The Custom strategy is the one most likely to increase respect and liking in the workplace. It enables people to go beyond a strictly professional relationship to encompass personal elements, building a richer relationship. However, since part of this strategy is about carefully managing one's image, respect is protected and liking increased.

The custom strategy is the most sophisticated of these strategies though and takes a lot of work, requiring an investment of time and effort because of the need for constant monitoring. It requires keeping up with ever-changing privacy

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settings to avoid mistakes such as posting to the wrong list of contacts. As an IT professional commented: these strategies can be "very oops prone." Like the content strategy, the custom strategy is prone to accidental over-disclosure when people forget about the 'invisible audience' or when their contacts share unwanted information or photos about them. "Friends" may cross our boundaries; they may in particular share personal information about us with our professional audience, or disclose our vulnerabilities.

Step 3 — Assess the Fit with your Professional Context

Beyond personal preference, you need to assess whether your preferred strategy fits with your professional environment. This may involve fit with an organization and its culture. It may also entail an assessment of the norms and expectations of a particular industry.

Industries and occupations where authenticity is preferred

In some industries such as Silicon Valley start-ups, or creative industries, it is generally accepted and even expected that people share personal information about themselves. The dress code is more often than not, casual, and bathing suits are not as far off from corporate attire. Sharing hobbies, disclosing a little eccentricity here or there or even the occasional political comment is common and may do no harm.

Customers of small business might also expect a certain degree of transparency on the part of business owners, as this entrepreneur explained: "In some businesses, such as mine, it is what actually is beyond the "boundaries" that clients are looking for, to establish trust and credibility. As a small software company, they want to know more because they trust me with their precious data. So a Facebook page and my real dancing dog, really goes a long way to making customers feel at ease."

Industries and occupations where discretion is more appropriate

However, not all professional milieus are like that. In fact, many are not: they socialize newcomers to strong workplace norms, ranging from adopting adequate attire and proper vocabulary to using discretion and ensuring data confidentiality. As a copywriter commented: "Not hiding who you are at your core (sexuality, atheism, political views, et al.) is a luxury you have. [It] depends on your employer, corporate culture."

Thus, a paralegal professional recalled the High Court case of Smith -v- Trafford Housing Trust in the UK: "Mr Smith brought a breach of contract claim after being demoted by the Trust for posting comments on Facebook expressing his personal views about gay marriage. Although he was ultimately successful in his claim, this case certainly gives food for thought in terms of how your employer could respond to a 'controversial' post if it offended any of your colleagues. If you're going to publicly list your employer on your Facebook page, I think it's certainly best to exercise caution in what you post!"

At the British Intelligence Service (MI6) for instance, security of officers and their families is paramount. As an experienced high-profile civil servant and UK's Permanent Representative to the UN for the past two years, Sir John Sawers was preparing to become the next Head of MI6 and he was of course well aware of these norms. It did him little good, however, when the British press disclosed that his wife Lady Sawers had shared details about their flat location, their three children and some of their friendships with high-end diplomats on Facebook... without setting up a private profile[1]. Patrick Mercer, chairman of the counter-terrorism sub-committee, expressed concerns about the possible security risk and he was not alone to point out that the taxpayers' money spent on protecting Sir Sawers' family privacy had been misemployed. It took Foreign Secretary David Miliband's joking that a picture of the head of the MI6 going swimming was really exciting and that "it is not a state secret that he wears Speedo swimming trunks" for the media storm to calm down.

Even if you are not working for intelligence services, there are many professional settings where being open on social media will not serve you well. A number of waitresses at AppleBee and Chili's, for instance, have been fired after complaining over customers' tips or insulting police officers on Facebook. Chili's issued a statement that "with the changing world of digital and social media, Chili's has Social Media Guidelines in place, asking our team members to always be respectful of our guests and to use proper judgement when discussing actions in the work place." Teachers have also lost their jobs due to posts that were deemed inappropriate for students — like a Christian school teacher's nude photos. Coaches have lost their licenses.

CONCLUSION

The ability to manage boundaries has become an important social skill for employees and managers as the workplace continues to move online. For global work teams, social media can help to build stronger bonds with long-distance colleagues because it allows them to share both professional and personal information. The fact that team members can interact with each other as whole people can help build trust as well as mutual knowledge of a colleague's modus operandi, best times to work together, best ways to communicate, and so forth. However, in an increasingly diverse set of industries and organizations, employers and institutions are taking steps to establish policies on social media ground rules and etiquette. Physicians are advised not to break the physician-patient boundary on social media. Employees of the Justice department are warned against connecting with judges, defense counsels, jurors, or witnesses and against discussing a case on social media. In addition, British citizens are now warned that contempt of court has now been expanded to any and all social media actions, since information shared on social media can interfere with fair trials taking place. To this end, the UK government's chief legal advisor, Attorney General Dominic Grieve, has just decided

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[1] BBC News. July 5 2009. MI6 boss in Facebook entry row ⟨http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8134807.stm⟩.

the time has come to provide free legal advice to Twitterers and Facebookers to help educate them on the responsibilities of using a "tool of mass communication."

As managers and executives, you can take action to craft online boundary management behaviors that will help you take advantage of the opportunities social media provides at work instead of having it backfire on you and the organization. As a Talent Acquisition officer commented: "For large enterprises that experience unwanted exposure or with limited impact-control due to scale, education on personality types — Integrators, Segmentors, Impressers and Expressers — could be a different educational tact to try." Here as well, taking a thoughful approach where you consider your organization's goals, your industry and occupational context, and your employees' skills, can improve your organization's online experience.

As individuals, you can take action to craft online boundary management behaviors that will help you at work instead of backfiring on you. A range of strategies exist to manage your audience and/or your content. None is perfect: the simplest ones may deprive you of the full benefits of connecting on social media while the most sophisticated ones require skill and effort and are not 100 percent foolproof. But taking a thoughtful appproach, in which you consider your goals, your context, and your skills, will allow you to better navigate the new world of social media.

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Acknowledgments

Ariane Ollier-Malaterre is a professor at University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM). Her research investigates how individuals articulate work and other life responsibilities and how organizations address changing career and work-family issues in different parts of the world (UQAM, Canada, Tel.: + 1 514 953 9781; email: ollier.ariane@uqam.ca).

Nancy P. Rothbard is the David Pottruck Professor of Management at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. Her research examines how factors outside the workplace influence people's engagement with their work and how people cope with these potential spill-overs by segmenting work and non-work roles (University of Pennsylvania, United States; email: nrothbard@wharton.upenn.edu).