Keeping up-to-date using online networking

1. Introduction

An online networking tool is designed to allow you to interact with others. This helps to build social networks with others of similar personal or career interests, as well as collaborate on projects.

An important source of knowledge comes from the people you work with, those working within your sector, as well as others with differing experiences. With the rapid development of online networking tools has come greater opportunities to share, as well as tap into, others' knowledge and expertise. This can help you develop your personal point-of-view and potentially advance your career.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity you should:

- understand how to keep up to date with information through online networking
- be able to select appropriate networks for your needs.

2. Social networking

Microblogging tools

Microblogging is a type of blogging that involves sharing short posts or status updates. These posts usually have a set character limit and can include text, images, links, and videos.

They can be useful for individuals and businesses wanting to develop a following and to follow others.

Many microblogging sites allow you to have more than one account, which allows for separate accounts for different interests. You could have a personal and a business microblogging account, or accounts for different areas of your business.

X (formerly Twitter) is probably the most well-known microblogging platform, although many others exist. For example the Open University Library has an account on the microblogging site Bluesky: @oulibrary.bsky.social

Whilst microblogs are great for sharing information, they can also facilitate the rapid spread of disinformation. Always remember to look at who is posting and why.

Learn more

To learn more about how to use microblogging tools, consider trying the following Being Digital activities:

[Making the most of microblogging tools (X and others)](#)
[How to write an effective X post](#)

Examples

There are many other social networking tools to help you develop your online presence, whether you wish to build personal networks, or commercial networks.

Select the other tabs for a brief introduction to Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and YouTube.

Instagram

[Instagram](#) is a social networking app for mobile devices. Many individuals and companies have Instagram accounts, which they use to shoot, edit, and share photos with their community.

You can create multiple accounts, so you can focus your account on personal, interest or business reasons. You can grow networks by following other accounts, hashtags and commenting or reacting to the photos of others.

Take a look at the following Open University Instagram accounts:
- [theopenuniversity](#)
- [openunipsychology](#)

To learn more about how to use Instagram, consider watching the following playlist on YouTube:
[Instagram tutorials](#)

Facebook

[Facebook](#) is an online social networking site, aimed at connecting with friends and families, as well as businesses or companies. You can create a personal account, or company page, where you can post information using text, image, and video. By

adding contacts, you are developing what you see on your 'news feed', which provides a list of posts that your contacts have shared.

Features include:
- The Facebook Messenger app to send instant messages to your connections.
- Creating and managing public or private events.
- Facebook Live to live-stream or broadcast events.

Snapchat

You can download the app Snapchat to your mobile device. It is a multimedia messaging app for mobile devices. You can add to your network by searching for people you know, or by setting your current location so that the app searches for people nearby, perhaps attending the same event as you.

It is designed so that images are only available for a short time before they become inaccessible. Be mindful when you send images, even though they are only momentarily available to view, someone could still take a screen grab of it!

YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing platform, used by individuals and companies to provide informational and promotional content. You can create multiple YouTube accounts.

Due to the nature of creating and editing videos, YouTube may be more time-consuming to develop your account. You might consider using it to share educational videos, documentary-style videos and vlogs.

3. Professional networking

LinkedIn is an example of a professional networking tool. It focuses on creating professional contacts and communities. LinkedIn allows you to set up a profile featuring a mix of an online business card and a CV. You can link to others to form groups with shared professional/occupational interests and aims. You can rate or write recommendations for those in your network. LinkedIn is used by members to obtain information about present or potential employees and employers. In certain professions, it is a key way of finding a job.

As with any networking site, take care to check out proposed connections or collaborations to confirm they are reliable and safe. LinkedIn has a policy of only enabling connections between people who already know each other in real life.

Activity

What do you think are the main differences between LinkedIn and the other social networking sites we've looked at so far? Note down your thoughts.

Feedback

Here are some of the differences we've noted about LinkedIn:

- It's more focused on building your professional profile.
- You can showcase your key achievements within your job(s) and work.
- It emphasises building contacts based on your field/area of work.
- It's also used more frequently by employers for recruitment.

4. Project collaborations

Document collaboration

These networking opportunities may lead to you being required to connect with colleagues and other individuals, to work collaboratively on documents as part of projects. There are many tools available for working collaboratively to create and edit documents together, as well as meet virtually with colleagues. Some of these include:

- [Microsoft Teams](#): part of Office 365, you can have all project documents in one place as well as use it for meetings and chats.
- [Google's G Suite](#): you can use a range of apps to store documents, collaborate and meet with colleagues.

You might also consider tools to facilitate team meetings, such as Zoom or Skype.

Kanbans

Kanbans are used to manage work as it progresses, visualising both the process and tasks. You can create cards with intended outcomes, which list the tasks associated with the outcome. Teams can collaborate on one kanban, allowing for easy updating of progress.

Some popular online kanbans include:

- [Microsoft planner](#), which is part of Office 365;
- [Trello](#), which is freely available online.

5. Summary

In this activity you have been introduced to some networking tools, although there are others out there. Through these networks you can:

- develop and share your expertise and experience;
- communicate with others;
- collaborate on projects.

Next Steps

- Consider the tools we've looked at and evaluate which might be relevant to you.
- Explore setting up accounts and using these to develop your personal or business profile(s).