

Leveraging Social Media in a Nonprofit Job Search

Q&A with Beth Kanter, Author of *Beth's Blog*

Nonprofits increasingly are incorporating social media channels, such as [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#), into their marketing, fundraising, advocacy, and recruiting efforts. For this reason, many professionals seeking nonprofit job opportunities are beginning to incorporate the same tools in their job search efforts. To better understand the role that social networking is playing and should play in a professional's search for a nonprofit management position, we talked with Beth Kanter, author of the popular and influential *Beth's Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media*, which she has been publishing since 2003.

A frequent contributor to nonprofit technology websites and magazines, Kanter in 2009 was named one of the most influential women in technology by *Fast Company* magazine and one of *BusinessWeek's* "Voices of Innovation for Social Media." Here she shares her advice on how to most effectively leverage social media in a nonprofit job search.

Can online social networking replace face-to-face networking or should it simply become another weapon in a job hunter's arsenal?

Beth Kanter: Will it replace it in the next 10 years? No. In the next 20? Possibly. But I think it is another weapon in the arsenal. It can enhance your job search, and it can also help you be more prepared. It can put old-fashioned networking on steroids.

How does social networking help you be better prepared? Do you mean in terms of doing research about organizations or reaching people at the organizations you're targeting?

Kanter: Both. For example, let's look at the social networking site LinkedIn. I use LinkedIn to help me find sources to write about. I have a really good network on LinkedIn, but frequently I'm not linked to the person I need to talk to. LinkedIn is great for showing me that Marie knows John, and I can ask Marie for an introduction. I don't have to go through my Rolodex and try to figure out, "Does So-and-So know this person?"

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If a person has not used social networking sites as part of a job search before, how should s/he get started?

Kanter: It sounds odd, but I would start by purchasing two really good books. The first is by Dan Schawbel, who is a powerhouse young leader. He has a book called *Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success*, which is kind of the bible of how to use social networking and social media to improve your career. It's written for 20-somethings, so if you're older than that, take some things with a grain of salt. But there's a lot of great tactical, practical advice.

Secondly, I would tell people to get a great book called *I'm on LinkedIn, Now What?* by Jason Alba. It gives you all the tricks and tips about using LinkedIn. A couple of big things about LinkedIn are that you need to fill out your profile completely and strategically—so it clearly describes not only what you've done, but where you want to go. (Chris Brogan has some excellent tips on this at <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/write-your-linkedin-profile-for-your-future/>.) You need to get people to recommend you. He explains that all the basic things involved in putting your resume together apply on LinkedIn, such as “be honest.” The point is that this is your social networking foot in the door, and you want to make a good impression and make sure you present yourself in a professional way, even in your profile picture. For example, my profile picture shows me teaching, leading a workshop. It shows that this is the kind of work I want to do. It's like showing up for an interview; you think about what you're going to wear. Would you show up to an interview dressed in your sweatpants and t-shirt? Probably not, so dress your social networking profile for success.

What are the most effective online tools a professional seeking a nonprofit management position can use in his/her job search? An online resume? A LinkedIn account? Something else?

Kanter: LinkedIn does give you an online resume and you can choose to make it public. I know that a lot of nonprofits use that for their CEOs [chief executive officers] as part of their press kits. If you have the skills for it and the comfort with it, you could create a blog. You'd need to write every day, or at least regularly. For instance, if I was out there looking for a job and I enjoyed writing, I'd set up a blog and write about the topic area I wanted to be employed in. And then I'd use that as a way to research different organizations by writing about them. Let's say I wanted to get a job as a special media strategist. I might take a look at the potential organizations I wanted to work for and I might write a profile about each of them—write about what they're doing in social media so if I get the interview, I'd be prepared.

So, is a blog a tool for job seekers to do research or is it a way of getting potential employers' attention?

Kanter: It's a tool for research, but if the employers are listening, it could get their attention. I remember Marnie Webb, who is the co-CEO of [TechSoup Global](#), telling me once that some of her best hires were people who were commenting on her blog. They came through her social media network and probably wouldn't have come to her attention otherwise.

Can you recommend some social networking resources that are specific to the nonprofit sector?

Kanter: [Idealist.org](#) is a good one. I'd also follow the [Change.org's](#) career advice and job listings. If you're transitioning from a for-profit and you're looking to volunteer first, there's [VolunteerMatch](#). There is also a new site called [All for Good](#), which is streaming all of the volunteer opportunities in the nonprofit sector across different platforms, including Idealist and VolunteerMatch.

There are also specific communities that are nonprofit oriented. They're not necessarily for job seeking, but they're by topic. I'm thinking of [WiserEarth](#), which is kind of LinkedIn for sustainability. So, if I was looking for an executive position that focused on the environment or sustainability, I would hang out there and be part of the conversation. It would be a great place to research organizations, meet people, and expand your network.

Once you're comfortable using all these tools, I think your basic networking skills are the same as for traditional networking. It's not just about following people [online], you're cultivating them, you're commenting on their profile, you're being helpful. You're not being a pest.

How often should you be blogging or sending out job hunting updates? Where do you draw the line between keeping your network informed and becoming a pest?

Kanter: The focus shouldn't be on, "Hey, I'm looking for a job, hire me!" because that's a sure way to become a pest. It's more that you're saying, "This is my area of passion, and I'm writing about that, and I'm sending it to you because you're working in that area and you might have an interest in X, Y, or Z." Think of it like a job seeker's two-minute "[elevator pitch](#)." You don't want to run around cold just giving your elevator pitch to everyone you meet. You want to talk to them first, ask a few questions about what they do, make a connection, get your contact information exchanged, and do something for follow-up.

What do you suggest a professional seeking a nonprofit management position put into his/her online profile?

Kanter: You want to have your profile completely filled out with your accurate job history. You want a decent photo. Put your credentials up and have your profile clearly demonstrate your expertise, don't just say you have expertise in a particular area. For example, in my LinkedIn profile I have a link to all the presentations that I do. That way people can see that I'm presenting on a particular topic. I post my schedule and the actual presentations. I've actually gotten recruited for jobs through that. If you look at my site, I have a [Wiki portfolio](#): my bio's up there, my resume, my social media profile, what people are saying about Beth, a link to all of my interviews and video interviews, and all of my slide shows.

Many nonprofit organizations have begun using Twitter as an outreach method. Can Twitter also be used effectively to find a nonprofit management position, and if so, how should a job hunter use it?

Kanter: Sure. I know one person who started her own company and is networking on it constantly. You can follow up with emails. You could do some research on Twitter by checking to see if a person or an organization has a Twitter presence and start tracking them. Then it's a matter of getting to know who they are, listening to what they're Tweeting about, seeing if you have any mutual connections, maybe get an introduction. You should listen for a while first to see what other people are saying about a topic. There are a number of really powerful search tools on Twitter. You can do keyword searches, and there are places where you can search by user profile. There's also a feed on Twitter called [NPTECH Jobs](#), which posts jobs in technology for nonprofits.

In addition to Twitter, are there any new tools that experienced social networkers are using that seem to be effective?

Kanter: One thing is a program called [BatchBook](#); it's a social content management system for individuals. It works well with Gmail. You can put in all of your contacts, their Twitter IDs or Facebook addresses—all of their social presence information. By just typing your name in my address book, I could see what your last Tweet was, and I could see what your last Facebook update was or what your LinkedIn address was. That way, if you're somebody I haven't contacted for a while, I could look at your posts and figure out some way I could connect with you based on what you're doing or saying. It's like having a peek at someone's calendar or peeking over their shoulder at their desk. You can see what meetings they've been to and what they're saying.

How can job seekers protect their privacy while still making it easy for potential employers or good contacts to connect with them?

Kanter: You can choose what you put out there. There are privacy tools and settings on the different networks where you can control who has access to what. For example, on Facebook you can control whether things are seen by just your friends or by their friends. I categorize all my friends because I have a very public profile. So, I might throw a picture of my kid up there or some of my weekend photography because it makes me look human. But I'm not going to put on my status line, "I just had a fight with my husband." You can also allow people to only see the public version of your profile and not allow them to post or interact.

If you make use of a variety of tools, social networking can become very time consuming. How much time should nonprofit job seekers devote to keeping their social media accounts and other electronic tools up to date? And what about people who are employed but seeking a new job?

Kanter: If you're unemployed, you have the capacity to invest deeper on a higher number of channels. You could spend half of your day, or even your whole day on social media. Then, of course, you need to follow up by getting out there doing face-to-face types of networking, phone calls, and meet-ups. For example, Twitter users meet up in person in a lot of cities; they're called Tweet Ups. A lot of social networking tools have these offline or face-to-face meet-ups, and you can spend time doing those as well. If you're using a tool daily, you're getting more comfortable and you're getting quicker. In the end, it can save you time.

If you're somebody who's looking while working, I think you have to go with a selective strategy. You need to go deeper on fewer channels—by channels I mean things like blogging, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter. You have to find the channels that are going to have the greatest density of people you want to reach. Sometimes that requires doing a little bit of setting up and seeing who's there and deciding if that channel is worth your time. If I were at a senior level and wasn't that comfortable yet, I would take a selective strategy to get started. Pick one channel and become expert at that before you move on to the next one.

Bridgestar (www.bridgestar.org), an initiative of the Bridgespan Group, provides a nonprofit management job board, content, and tools designed to help nonprofit organizations build strong leadership teams and individuals pursue career paths as nonprofit leaders.