

Building a Digital Footprint in 8 Easy Steps

"Where do I start?" More often than not, that is the first question many professionals have when it comes to dipping their toes into the digital channels. They simply have no idea how to begin... and then what to do after that.

Here are 8 easy steps to build your Digital Footprint:

1. Create a strategy. Far too often, people will hop on to [Facebook](#) with no set plan other than, "trying it out." There's nothing wrong with trying out any of the many digital channels, but it doesn't take long to jot down what you want to accomplish (and, more importantly, why you want to accomplish it) first - before filling out any online social networking profiles. If you uncover the strategy after you have already started, you may wind up having a couple of online profiles and spaces that really don't match your strategy. If someone comes by and sees those initial forays (that you have since abandoned), it might not be the ideal first digital impression of you.

2. Choose the type of content channels and online social networks that match your strategy. All too often we see people on [Twitter](#) who would be that much more interesting if they were Blogging. There are people doing things with text that might be better suited for creating images. It's best to focus on creating and publishing the type of content you are most comfortable with, and that you would enjoy creating the most. The amazing thing about these channels is that anyone can publish. The sad thing is, that some people forget that it's not just text. You can create audio, video and images as well (and many combinations).

3. Digital Footprint Audit. There are tons of free tools that enable you to listen and see what is being said about you, your company, your products and services. [Google News Alerts](#), [Technorati](#), [Twitter Search](#), and even doing some quick, generic searches on [Google](#), [Yahoo](#) and [Microsoft](#) can give you the overall temperature of who is saying what. In order to best manage these many tools, you should consider grabbing all of these feeds and unifying them in one singular space. Something like [Google Reader](#) or [Netvibes](#) is a great place to start.

4. Follow First. Without question, there is somebody (probably many people) already out there using all of these channels. From videos on [YouTube](#) to Blogs and Podcasts. Find out who your industry considers to be the top "voices" in the many online channels. Subscribe to their content in your reader and make it a point to read, listen and watch the content at some point everyday. By following those that are already respected, you will be better positioned to see where you can add your voice - both in their environments and on your own.

5. Add your voice. In a world where everyone can (and should) publish their thoughts, you might find it more interesting to either become a frequent commentator on the more popular spaces, or offer to become a contributor to some of the many multi-authored places online (this includes things like industry association Blogs or trade-specific publications). By adding your voice in places that are highly trafficked you can build your presence (and [Google Juice](#)) without the stress of maintaining your own. Places like [The Huffington Post](#) are prime example of non-

industry specific online outlets that are highly trafficked, highly indexed by the search engines and will give you incredible visibility to new people.

6. Start your own, but have a plan. Your overall strategy (step number one) will become your lighthouse. As you fall deeper down the rabbit hole, you'll always be able to fall back on your strategy to ensure that you are on course, but once you choose to publish your own thoughts on your own platform, you might have an easier time if you create some kind of plan to get started. Think about what goals you want your channel to accomplish, how often you will need to publish, how you will tweak the content as your community grows and what will happen if you were to stop publishing? A plan (even one that includes specific dates for when you should publish content) will help you focus, and it will also get you in the habit of contributing and publishing.

7. Stay active and aware. It's not just about your space, and it's not just about following and commenting in the other spaces. It's about being aware. From Twitter to [FriendFeed](#), there are many new types of publishing platforms being created all of the time. It's easy to sign-up for all of them and then to forget about them. Some of the channels may not even make any sense to you at the beginning (how many people do you know that still don't understand what Twitter is, or why anyone would care about that type of content?). It's also easy to forget about some of the channels that are not mentioned as frequently as the ones that are currently the topic du jour. Be aware of the new and older voices and platforms that are around and the new ones that are coming out.

8. Have fun. One of the primary reasons why people abandon either their own spaces or the ones they used to actively contribute to is because they were no longer having fun with it. It became a job. The trick is to always turn your job into work that you are passionate about. If you start out with the notion that you have to create, comment and participate because it's your job and that is what is expected of you, it's going to get ugly fast. There are so many channels out there. Find the ones you really enjoy and create the type of content that gives you the most pleasure. Find your muse.

What are some of the other ways people can dive in and start to explore how to build their own digital footprint?

Read more [here](#).

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