Chapter 14

Building a Professional Ethos on LinkedIn

Christy Oslund
Michigan Technological University, USA

ABSTRACT

In the face of increasing use of digitally mediated contexts, teachers and students on all levels are expected to be familiar with creating content appropriate for the World Wide Web, and their professional lives are affected by the digital content they create. The professional online networking site LinkedIn, for example, is a group of communities where professionals can create an ethos that will benefit them in both searching for work and maintaining their current working status. In such venues, both students and teachers still need guidance on how to create a profile and presence that will establish a positive, approachable ethos. Specific examples show how the author accomplished this in the $50 billion per year pet industry. These examples clarify both what to do and what to avoid in creating a profile and presence in a professional online community.

INTRODUCTION

LinkedIn began as a professional networking site when launched in May 2003 (“About Us,” 2012). Employers, employees, and businesses seeking clients all use the site to connect with represented professionals, who range from dog walkers to Wall Street executives. With 2 million company members, 161 million individual members, including member executives from each Fortune 500 company, LinkedIn is currently the largest online professional networking site (“About Us,” 2012). Membership in LinkedIn and participation in one of the more than a million groups on LinkedIn is a free, accessible, and immediate way to begin building a public profile and ethos amongst a professional community. Though paid Premium Subscription membership earnings are up “91 percent year-over-year” (“About Us,” 2012), it is still possible to belong to LinkedIn, participate in communities, and submit resumés to companies for no cost to the user. More than 102.5 million unique individual views from around the world
were made in the first quarter of 2012; with more than 20 million members who are students or recent college graduates ("About Us," 2012), it is evident to a growing number of people entering the job market that LinkedIn is a tool for helping develop a professional reputation and profile. LinkedIn is rapidly growing, and in one year moved from the 54th most visited web site to the 31st most visited ("About Us," 2012). The popularity of this site continues as the number of page views increases, and the number of members participating in the LinkedIn communities.

By watching the site it is also evident that what is not clear to all users is the difference between building a visible profile and building a visible, credible profile that increases personal value to potential employers and clients. LinkedIn provides opportunities to build a global profile; this same site, if used thoughtlessly, can help ruin a reputation in each computer-literate industry and nation. How people build their profile and comment in communities directly affects the ethos and reputation they establish amongst the LinkedIn audience. Being deliberate and careful can make the difference between creating a positive or negative impression on potential professional connections.

As Daniel Keller (2007) reminded us, the same rhetorical concepts are at work in digital spaces as are at work in traditional rhetoric, those being "appeals that address an audience’s emotions (pathos), rest on a logical argument (logos), or appeal to an understanding of ethical behavior (ethos)" (p. 49). This means that while using LinkedIn can help create a positive ethos, failure to make the right traditional rhetorical moves in LinkedIn communities can create a negative reputation that will follow a person across time and space.

### Digitally Compose to Create a Positive Online Ethos

In a college context, teaching writing has traditionally been the work of compositionists. Somewhere between composition and technical communication classes, most students will be asked to develop a resumé and perhaps learn something about the etiquette of writing and submitting cover letters. Connecting with clients and employers in a digital age, however, means that knowing the formats for paper-based communication is no longer sufficient for a person entering the workforce. As Stuart Selber has pointed out (2004, 2010), teachers in general have not been fully prepared for the new era of digitally mediated composing and writing and could use some support in teaching in this area. Cynthia Selfe’s *Multimodal Composition* (2007) was a step in the direction of providing concrete guidance for composition teachers and included ideas for using technology in the classroom. What is still lacking, however, is thick support for teachers and students on how to write and make rhetorical moves in situated technological contexts like LinkedIn, where it is not just the technology that needs to be considered but also the professional implications of the communication moves made within the particular environment. As Selfe (2004) identified, composition teachers often feel "inadequate to the task of teaching students about new media texts and the emerging literacies associated with these texts" (p. 67). The purpose of this chapter is to offer some specific guidance to those seeking to create a positive online ethos by building a profile and presence on LinkedIn, and while those strategies must be specific to that particular context to be effective, the moves I discuss should spur rhetorical ideas that could be adapted in other contexts as well.

I appreciate Moe Folk’s (2009) definition of digital composition as “the production of texts that are computer-mediated and draw heavily from the technologies and social practices associated with networked computers” (pp. 2-3). I also appreciate the distinction that Folk made between the more “scholarly tradition” associated with “composing” and what most of us take part in when we are writing in our everyday use of digital mediated contexts, whether that be emailing, texting, tweeting, blogging etc. I will thus follow