

Build Your Brand in Bits and Bytes

By William Arruda & Kirsten Dixson

Welcome to the Me Millennium.

YOU'RE BEING GOOGLED.

People are Googling you. People who matter: Hiring Managers. Executive Recruiters. Colleagues Clients. Business Partners. In fact, someone might be Googling you right now!

PAPER IS PAST. THE INTERNET IS PRESENT...AND FUTURE.

The Web has replaced traditional research resources and is often the first place we go for information, putting the phone book and the reference librarian on the endangered list. The Internet has impacted not only the way we do our jobs, but also the way that we look for jobs, network and manage our careers.

The World Wide Web is an indispensable tool for communicating your value as a professional, expressing your differentiation, networking and performing career research. Not only will you be researching opportunities online, others will be researching you.

“82% of candidates expect recruiters to look them up on line.”— *BusinessWeek*, June 26, 2006

PERSONAL GOOGLING IS THE NEW REFERENCE CHECK.

It's no secret that Google is the world's leading Internet search tool. It's used over 200 million times a day by people in virtually every country in the world. And, it's not just used to research companies. It's today's best resource for getting the untold story about people.

As personal branding strategists, we are intrigued by the power of this new phenomenon. The ramifications of being Googled are widespread when it comes to building and managing your personal brand. Being Googled reveals how visible you are on the Web, and visibility is critical to successful career management—regardless of where you are in your career or your business. Your Google results become useful for those who are looking to make decisions about you. So the prospect of being Googled brings up some interesting questions:

- ? **What does it say about you if you don't show up in Google?** Quantitatively speaking, you are somebody if your Google results cover multiple pages. You are a really unknown brand, however, if Google can't find you, or worse, if it finds your name only in a list of obituaries. So if you don't show up in Google, will you be dismissed?
- ? **Will being Googled replace reference checking in job interviews and client bids?** After all, Google provides a much more objective view than those whom you select to be references for you. Will your Google results be the determining factor in whether you get in to see a new client or are considered for a new job?
- ? **Will being Googled change the way we name our kids?** Having a common name can be a challenge when seeking an accurate Google assessment. You know this all too well if your name is John Smith. Google doesn't discern between John Smith, the upstanding CEO of Acme, Inc., and John Smith, the serial killer who escaped from prison and is on the run. Just as the trend in company and product naming has moved to creating names for originality and to ensure domain name availability (think Altria, Yahoo! and Avaya), will parents in the future be creating one-of-a-kind names for their children to ensure accurate Google results?

We don't have all the answers to these questions. But we are fascinated with 'personal Googling' and all that it means for our career-focused clients, not to mention our own personal brands. And we focus all our professional energies on helping professionals make the most of the Web.

Personal Googling v. the act of learning about someone by performing a Web search.

IF YOU DON'T SHOW UP IN GOOGLE, YOU DON'T EXIST.

A recent Harris Interactive poll showed that 23% of people search the names of business associates or colleagues on the Internet before meeting them; and 83% of executive recruiters are using search engines to uncover information about candidates according to a 2007 survey by ExecuNet.

There are classes for HR professionals about Googling candidates, and profiles on sites like Friendster, LinkedIn and ZoomInfo are even being reviewed in the recruiting process. In fact, 20% of the Fortune 500 seeking candidates are using ZoomInfo, a unique service that automatically creates profiles from aggregated professional information found online.

If you are meeting with a customer, applying for a new job inside or outside your company or running for a board position, you can count on being Googled. Impressions will be made based on what is found.

DETERMINE YOUR GQ (GOOGLE QUOTIENT).

Accenture included the total number of relevant Google results as one of the three measures they used to develop their list of the World's Top 50 Most Influential Leaders.

Calculate your virtual value.

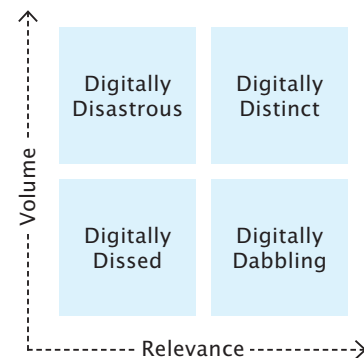
Right now, open a new browser window, go to Google.com, type your name into the search box and see what the world's most popular search engine says about you. Surprised? Delighted? Depressed?

TIP: Type your name in quotes (like this: "William Arruda") so you will get the most accurate results.

To determine your baseline Google Quotient (GQ) use our complimentary Online ID Calculator™ at www.careerdistinction.com/onlineid

Place yourself on the digital scale.

Once you have used our Online ID Calculator,™ you will have a better understanding of where your results lie on the digital scale. To look into it a little deeper, refer to this four-box model which describes potential scenarios for your online identity.



The Y axis deals with the volume of information about you on the Web. The X axis describes the relevance of the information to your personal brand. Looking at your Google results, ask yourself:

Does it say what you want it to say? Is it consistent? Is it easy for someone to understand what you stand for? What separates you from your peers?

DECIDE WHETHER YOU'RE DIGITALLY DISASTROUS OR DIGITALLY DISTINCT.

What's your number of relevant results? Are the results communicating your personal brand—your unique promise of value? With your Online ID Calculator score, you know where your current online profile stands.

Digitally Disguised	Digitally Dissed	Digitally Disastrous	Digitally Dabbling	Digitally Distinct
There is absolutely nothing about you on the Web. It doesn't mean you don't exist, but it means that you remain hidden from those who may be researching you. This is easy to remedy.	There is little on the Web about you, and what is there is either negative or inconsistent with how you want to be known. Fortunately, just a small number of on-brand entries will help you improve your digital identity.	There is a lot of information about you on the Web, but it has little relevance to what you want to express about yourself. It will take a concerted effort to augment these results with enough highly ranked, relevant results to ensure that your personal brand is being clearly communicated.	There is already some on-brand information on the Web about you. Although the volume of results is not high, the material that is there is relevant and consistent with your personal brand. This is a great start.	This is nirvana in the world of online identity. Essentially, there are lots of results about you and most, if not all, reinforce your personal brand. Bravo! But don't rest on your laurels, your Google results can change as fast as the weather in New England.

Understanding your baseline online identity is important even if it's not where you want it to be. Wherever you are on the scale, you can always improve. The dynamic nature of the Web affords an incredible opportunity to have the online profile you need to express your personal brand and reach your goals.

TAKE THE ROAD TO DIGITAL DISTINCTION.

First, steer clear of digital dirt.

Digital Dirt is negative, unflattering or inappropriate information about you that is easily found online. In the same ExecuNet survey we referenced earlier, 45% of recruiters eliminate candidates based on what they find in search engines. So, if you do have digital dirt, you'll have to clean up your virtual act.

Perhaps what Google reveals does not convey the image you want to share with the world. That was the case for Susan, a marketing executive who had been fired by the board of her company. The meeting minutes detailing her firing were posted on the Web and when anyone performed a Google search using her name, the first item displayed was the summary of those meeting minutes. She didn't understand why she couldn't get any job interviews until an executive recruiter told her about her Google results. Prior to that, she had no idea she had been digitally dissed.

The moral of the story: Google yourself. It's called self-googling, narcissurfing or ego-surfing—and you should be doing it regularly. To those who don't know you personally, you are your Google results. Knowing what Google says about you is important; and influencing what Google reveals is essential. According to BusinessWeek, 33% of job candidates have never ego-surfed. Maybe some of them are having the same experience as Susan.

TIP: Google yourself every Monday morning, and keep track of the changes to your Google results.

If you do discover that you have digital dirt on Web pages that you cannot edit, you have two options: vacuum it up or sweep it under the rug. You can request that the site owner take down the offending information, or you can create highly ranking, on-brand entries that will push the negative ones to page 32 of your Google results. People who are really digging will still be able to find this informa-

tion, but most will not take the time to go past page three. If your reputation is damaged by an article that appears in a major, high-ranking publication, both of these options will be difficult, and you may need to call in the experts.

BEGIN WITH YOUR BRAND.

“The [past] 10 years have seen everything from the rise of online Job Boards to the Brand Called You, the birth of blogs to offshoring. All of these developments have had a significant impact on the way we manage our careers—and the next 10 years promise to be just as dramatic.” Fast Company, March 2006

Don't be a jack of all trades.

Before you start expressing yourself online, you need to know what you want to say. So you must first gain clarity about your personal brand. An online identity that makes you look like Mr. or Ms. Multiple Personality is going to work against you. People need to know who you are, what you stand for and what makes you stand out. Success in the new world of work requires that you differentiate yourself from myriad others who seemingly do what you do. You need to understand and express your unique value. Therefore, before you embark on an online identity, you need to extract your personal brand. This will help you understand your goals, strengths and what will make you compelling to those you want to influence.

So that you don't confuse people who are Googling you, here are four steps to get started with branding:

1. Read *Career Distinction: Stand Out by Building Your Brand* (Wiley, June 2007), and use the 360°Reach tool (you get free access to this leading personal brand assessment with instructions in book) to get the clearest understanding of your current reputation.
2. See where your brand stands today with this quick quiz.
3. Describe your own brand with this complimentary personal profiler.
4. Watch this comprehensive introduction to personal branding.

Get other resources to support your branding at www.reachbrandingclub.com.

And, if you are currently in job search mode, go to www.reachbrandingclub.com/jobsearch

The new century is defined by fusion,
in which consumers fuse a dizzying array
of disparate choices.

BE VIRTUALLY VISIBLE.

Enter the virtual estate™ market.

Real Estate is one of the best investments you can make in the real world. Virtual Estate is just as important an investment in your career. Once you have a clear understanding of your personal brand (and you have documented your personal brand statement), you can get to work on building a powerful online profile. Here's a checklist to help you get started:

- > Perform a baseline Google assessment using our Online ID Calculator. Are you Digitally Dissed? Dabbling? Disastrous? Or are you Distinct?
- > Buy your domain name—e.g., www.kirstendixson.com (you can get one at godaddy.com for \$8.95).
- > Decide which tools you are going to use to build your brand online. Your own website or blog will give you the most control over your brand, and your Reach-Certified Online Identity Strategist can help you decide the best approach for your goals and connect you with the other professionals you'll need.
- > Call in the professionals. This includes: a photographer for your head shot; a talented designer for your website or Blog; a programmer who can make sure your site will display well in all major browsers on both Mac and PC; a ghost writer or editor for your copy; a career/personal brand strategist to help with positioning; and a search engine optimization expert to help you get high rankings.
- > Get going right away. Those who start now will be ahead of the pack. According to a Jobster April 2007 survey, 20% of executives have taken proactive steps to create a positive Web presence.
- > Don't stop. As William's coach always says, you must work on this "ongoingly."

Call in the professionals—use an agent.

Just as a real estate agent will help you find the right investment, when you are ready to find your own place on the World Wide Web, consult the pros. A low-quality website is worse for your brand than no website at all. Unless you are Web designer or online identity expert, get experienced support to send the right message. Here's some criteria to help you choose the right partner:

- > Ensure the company has a team of individuals skilled in personal branding, career management, design, writing and Web technologies.
- > Ask to see examples of sites using each of the technologies you are considering. Any service worth its salt should offer audio, video, Flash, blogs, podcasts, screencasts, optimized PDFs, etc.
- > Ensure that your provider understands Web usability rules and tests your site.
- > Avoid any service that suggests having audio that automatically plays when your home page loads. They clearly have no clue about job-search etiquette.
- > Remember, technology for technology's sake is pointless. When it comes to video, no one wants to watch a talking head hyping a site or bragging about herself.
- > Ask if they provide SEO services to better position you in search engines. Basic tactics are often all you will need. If they guarantee a #1 listing in search engines, be wary.

“Promoting yourself online is the best, easiest, fastest way to build your personal brand.”—Boris Mann, *Web 2.0 and Personal Brand Development*

Rent, sublet, squat, get a time share.

Having your own Website or blog is just one tool in your online ID toolkit. You will also you also want to add to your virtual estate portfolio. We call these tools the Six Ps of Online ID:

- 1 Publishing** | Write articles or whitepapers, and get them published on websites that are relevant to your target audience. Conduct research to determine guidelines and editorial calendars. You can also post articles to article banks for online syndication.
- 2 Posting** | Write reviews of relevant books at Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com. If cooking isn't a part of your day job, don't write a cookbook review because it could confuse your brand.
- 3 Pontificating** | Post thoughtful, on-brand comments to blogs that are relevant to your area of expertise. Be sure to proofread your comments because you can't edit them once they are posted. You can link your comments back to your blog or Website which also gives you a valuable inbound link, especially if the blog on which you are commenting is popular. Be careful not to keep popping up everywhere too frequently, though. People might conclude that you have nothing better to do with your time.
- 4 Publicizing** | Write press releases, and post them to sites like prweb.com and prnewswire.com.
- 5 Partnering** | This is all about networking, and you will need to give before you receive. We call this Career Karma. Get other people to write about you in their articles and blogs and leverage online social networking sites like LinkedIn, ecademy, Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube.
- 6 Profiling** | Use Web profile services to create or expand your online identity quickly with a basic listing that is template-based. Resources include Ziggs, ZoomInfo, Naymz, Ziki and ClaimID. You can also use LinkedIn for this purpose if you choose to make your profile public.

KNOW THE DOS AND DON'TS OF BUILDING YOUR ONLINE IDENTITY.

Follow the rules.

As with other valuable tools for managing your career, you must follow the proven rules to gain the most from your efforts. Here's some of our guidance to help you make the most of the Web:

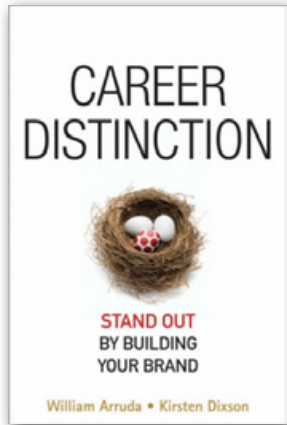
- 1 Take a stand.** Strong brands have something to say, and they say it with passion and conviction. If you build a me-too site, no one is going to pay attention. The goal is to stand out—not to blend in.
- 2 Steer clear of dirt.** Avoid visiting and commenting at sites that contain questionable material. Don't build an online identity that could come back to haunt you.
- 3 Go for quality over quantity.** If you can only invest a small amount of money and time in your own Website, go for fewer pages with quality images, stellar copy and easy navigation. It's OK to leave them wanting more, just don't turn them off.
- 4 Make the link.** Ensure that all of your postings, articles, comments, reviews, etc. point back to your Website with your contact details. Don't forget your call to action!
- 5 Build it over time.** If you write and e-publish one article every other month, you will have six by the end of the year. Again, shoot for quality.
- 6 Be consistent.** To build a solid reputation, you must be known for something, not a hundred things. So build your online identity around who you are and what makes you relevant and compelling to those people who need to know about you. Don't try to be all things to all people.
- 7 Watch your mouth.** Be careful about what you put in your blog. Badmouthing your current employer or revealing corporate information could get you sacked.

“An industry will soon evolve to help you manage that public persona—optimizing your Google search, giving you control over your digitized public identity.”—Faith Popcorn

- 1 Call in the professionals.** If you don't have the skills to build a quality Website or blog, get someone who can.
- 2 Lead with your strengths.** Use your creativity, understanding of your subject area, communications skills, etc. to showcase your true professional prowess.
- 3 Show 'em your mug.** Get a professionally taken photograph that exudes your brand. Don't use a picture that your mother took of you five years ago at the family picnic. A high-quality head shot will speak volumes about your brand.

START NOW!

These days, when the average job only lasts 3.5 years, you will be Googled frequently in the recruitment process. And if you are an entrepreneur, people are expecting you to have a professional online identity. In a world that is becoming more and more virtual, your online identity is becoming a key element in your personal branding plan. When you make a steadfast effort to expand your online presence, increasing your visibility and credibility, you'll be on a direct route to digital distinction. The time to start is now! 📌



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Arruda & Dixon's [Career Distinction](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Arruda is a brand strategist, public speaker and author. In addition to twenty years' corporate branding, William is the founder of [Reach](#), the global leader in personal branding. [Kirsten Dixon](#) is an authority on building credible online identities for career and business success. She founded Brandego® and is a partner in Reach, where she established an online identity certification program for career management professionals. She delivers keynote presentations and serves as a media resource on career technology topics. This manifesto was adapted from William and Kirsten's book, [Career Distinction: Stand Out by Building Your Brand](#) (Wiley, June 2007).

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