
SOCIAL VS REAL WORLD: HOW NETWORKS DEFINE SEARCH SUCCESS

Since the turn of the millennium, the impact of technology on the Finance professional's career has been profound, and while accounting packages, Business Intelligence systems, analytics tools and systems integrations have become increasingly vital to the impact of Finance teams on businesses, personal tech has also helped transform another aspect of the career journey.

When Partner Financial delivered its first CFO assignment in 2007, the first iPhone was still months away from hitting the shops (Apple has just launched its 11th and 12th models), Twitter was less than a year old (today, there are approximately 200 billion tweets sent per day) and LinkedIn had only recently secured its 20 millionth member (it now boasts more than 300 million from more than 200 territories and countries). As of 2013, it was estimated that 89% of active job seekers were using social media on a regular basis; nor is this trend likely to reverse any time soon with a maturing millennial generation beginning to control the social media world and flood the job market.

While the job market as a whole is becoming more heavily-influenced by social media, the executive search tier has remained largely immune from digital media developments. Online job boards may have replaced print-media listings and the days of keeping contact with search professionals by leafing through a select few business cards have, by and large, gone, but the majority of senior executive roles still value the input of the search industry.

This presents future generations of senior Finance executives with an interesting dilemma. For those who grow up with entry and development-level roles sourced through social media, their own engagement with networks that can assist them in breaking through to senior appointments may be underdeveloped in comparison to others who have taken the time to build and develop those networks earlier. Similarly, the soft skills required to demonstrate consensus-building leadership capabilities and organisational cultural fit - skills which search professionals are frequently well-positioned

to help candidates exhibit more effectively - may not be so readily apparent among those who haven't needed to engage

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with more traditional search methods at the earlier stages of their careers.

Even at the most senior levels, of course, social media has a role to play. The ability to showcase particular experience via professional sites such as LinkedIn is valuable and many senior executives are increasingly confident in using Twitter's microblogging abilities to increase engagement. It is imperative, though, not to assume that social media expertise is an effective substitute for traditional networking and relationship building; while the skills learned in one may support the other, both have a role to play in the new, digitally-connected age.

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GUIDANCE FOR EXECUTIVES:

- Use social networks to maintain professional connections and ensure that LinkedIn, in particular, is up-to-date when conducting a career search
- Maintain a select network of search and selection professionals 'offline' and use these to help advise and guide thoughts on career development
- Do not ignore traditional channels when considering external career moves - for many businesses, social media is not an active candidate acquisition channel, especially for core corporate functions

New developments in social and digital media are unlikely to slow in their rate of expansion and both current and future senior executives should be aware of the role their digital presence might play in influencing future career development. Similarly, the next development is always just around the corner and a general awareness of trends in social media can be of significant benefit when engaged within a considered manner.

These benefits have not fundamentally shifted the paradigm of executive search, however, we would reiterate the importance of Finance professionals maintaining relationships with the search profession, particularly as they move into executive ranks and the C-Suite where the strength and reliability of one's offline network still outweighs its online counterpart.

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