

## Case Study

The purpose of this hypothetical case study is to provide an example that enables you to reflect upon your own online presence and use of social media as an emerging professional. The example is not intended to be prescriptive nor is it intended to identify all of the online spaces you might consider engaging with.

In this example “Joe” is an undergraduate student at the University of Edinburgh in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of their course. In reviewing Joe’s digital footprint it becomes obvious that there are a number of tracks and traces, both old and new.

### Joe’s current online presence

**Facebook:** Joe primarily uses Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family. Joe has a lot of Facebook ‘friends’ from school, many of whom are people that would still be considered ‘real friends’.

**LinkedIn:** Joe set up LinkedIn as part of a 6<sup>th</sup> year school project several years ago but because it has been left dormant for a few years, Joe now wonders what to do with the profile.

**Pinterest:** Joe has an anonymous Pinterest account and finds visual pin boarding useful for both personal and professional-related material.

**Twitter:** Joe signed up for Twitter this year and the relative ‘new-user’ status is fairly apparent. Joe doesn’t have a profile picture (it is the default egg image). At the moment Joe combines both study-related and personal tweets concerning sport and music interests. Joe’s approach to Twitter is informal and sometimes that can mean comments are misconstrued. Following an inhospitable hotel stay last year, Joe posted an irate and colourful accommodation review on Twitter. The comment has been shared (retweeted), although Joe isn’t aware how much it has been shared.

**Academia.edu:** Joe appears inadvertently associated with someone else’s research interests due to being involved in a collaborative project, but despite this Joe is yet to define their research/project area or particular area of professional interest.

**Google:** when someone searches for Joe, two other people with the same name appear in the search. One is in a related field of study and this could be confusing. The other has a very large prominent profile but does not have the same research or personal interests as Joe.

### Joe’s Action plan

Using a variety of tools (refer to the Digital Footprint website) Joe’s digital footprint reveals some mixed messages. Joe also has the opportunity to choose a number of different career paths. Joe consults the professional bodies’ social media guidelines (found via [www.ed.ac.uk/iad/digitalfootprint](http://www.ed.ac.uk/iad/digitalfootprint) and through a web search). Joe creates a clearer distinction between professional and personal<sup>1</sup> social media usage as a result of the

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that in some circumstances or due to personal choice, you may decide not to separate your professional and personal profiles. The critical issue is to decide what is best for you.

professional bodies guidelines. Joe then reviews and makes a plan for managing their online presence as follows:

**Facebook:** Kept for maintaining personal contact but Joe ‘unfriends’ contacts who are no longer in regular communication. This group is mainly old school peers who Joe doesn’t have close connections with and/or no longer shares common life/interests with. Joe also thinks about the types of connection who will/will not be approved in future and decides only to approve requests from those people whose name or face Joe recognizes (sometimes in the past Joe has added people without being sure of the connection).

**LinkedIn:** Joe retrieves the password from an old email account and updates the LinkedIn profile to showcase current skills, experience, and interests using the [University of Edinburgh careers service advice](#). Joe also connects with colleagues from past student projects and adds appropriate student society activities to begin building a relevant network of contacts.

**Pinterest:** Joe decides to keep this as both a professional and personal account and clearly tags/identifies images accordingly. Joe may consider creating a separate professional profile in the future, but at the moment it is easier to separate posts by tags and particular boards, rather than maintain two Pinterest accounts.

**Twitter:** Joe uploads a profile image and creates a clear and relevant profile and bio, which states that ‘views are my own’. Joe also indicates the type of topics that might be tweeted about. In writing the bio Joe decides to keep this as a combined personal and professional account for now. Joe addresses the hotel review problem by outweighing that one problematic tweet with better content – sharing relevant articles and information, following key people Joe wishes to professionally connect with, etc.

Joe also considers creating a second Twitter account for a long term collaborative student project as Joe thinks this separation might be a useful way to collaborate with peers, and thinks that this might be manageable through tools like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite which would allow monitoring and scheduling to several accounts at once.

**Academia:** Joe thinks the account might be useful and so updates the account with a profile and bio that is consistent with presences on LinkedIn and Twitter, and adds an accurate and up to date list of study/research interests.

### **Professional vs Personal**

Joe decides to emphasise the personal/professional distinction by using a single photograph for all professional accounts and another image for personal accounts. Joe also reviews other professionals in Joe’s area of study and uses this to inform postings and comments to these newly updated accounts. Having read all of the relevant professional guidance Joe also ensures that all active presences align with the appropriate professional practice around conduct, presentation of self, etc.

Lastly, Joe decides to conduct a digital footprint review on a quarterly basis, running a search on their name via Google or DuckDuckGo and using this as a trigger to update or amend any online presences to ensure that Joe’s online presence is and remains effective, and is a presence which meets the expectations of future employers and collaborators, as well as adhering to the professional bodies’ guidelines of Joe’s preferred career path.