

# Social Networking for Insurance Professionals



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## Introduction

The business world is in the midst of a communications -- based transformation. The age of centralizing and attempting to control communications regarding a company's operations/products/services is dying quickly with each new blog post and twitter account. This revolution is worldwide and represents an opportunity for alternative means of networking and connecting with potential clients for insurance professionals.

Fundamentally, the major issue is solving people's problems. Traditional corporate communications based on shameless self-promotion of the company is poorly received by potential customers. The more evolved approach is to anticipate and address questions and concerns your potential customers have with the products and services you sell.

In particular, in the case of insurance agents, virtually everything you do is intangible -- making it more important to show value and provide validation that you are a worthwhile provider to consider. Customer testimonials, interviews with insurance company executives, and well-crafted examples of success stories are three tools for successful social networking for insurance agents.

A separate discipline is search engine optimization -- to achieve higher rankings and relevancy for the major search engines. This is still a mix of art and science, but the current algorithms of search engines prefer videos and white papers when properly tagged. The key is executing each small step in your website design and tagging, and doing so on a consistent basis that gradually yields higher ranking results for your agency.

More effective means of communication dovetails nicely with current SEO practices. Video blogging, in particular, can be efficient, cost-effective, and result in higher search engine rankings.

You must operate with two fundamental principles: what is your passion for your business and what are your strengths as a communicator? If you are a good writer -- then write. If you enjoy radio as a medium then consider audio podcasts. For example, you could interview top-performing CEOs with whom your agency currently works, and later expand it to CEOs with whom you would like to work.

If video is your thing, great!, it's probably the most effective medium for communicating today. However, it is also a more evolved process, using more sophisticated and expensive tools than writing or audio podcasts. If it is done poorly it will also expose your weaknesses more quickly.

Regardless of which of the three forms of blogging you choose, including Twitter posts, you should start with your own list of themes and topics that you are confident you can address. Contained in this white paper is information about setting up a LinkedIn profile, a Facebook page, or a Twitter account. For the moment let's assume you have successfully set these up. Let's also assume you have set up your professional blog as a

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separate page, or incorporated into your agency website. How do you plan on being effective?

Simple, what are the problems/questions you are frequently asked to address by customers? If you specialize in an industry niche, as so many insurance agents do, your expertise will run even deeper. Common themes include --

- Why do I need a particular form of coverage?
- Why does this particular insurance cost so much?
- What's the difference between one insurance company and the next? In fact, how do I evaluate any insurance company for that matter.
- What are the trends in claims and litigation that might affect my business?

This guide will help you develop your tools and strategy, but the key is to solve other people's problems!

## LinkedIn

**LinkedIn** is the world's largest professional network with over 65 million members. LinkedIn connects you to your trusted contacts and helps you exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals.

### ***Types of LinkedIn Accounts***

Besides the free basic account, LinkedIn also offers a variety of premium accounts. These accounts give you more ways to reach or be reached by the right people on LinkedIn. Premium accounts offer options for better communication, more powerful search tools, enhanced access to decision makers and access to other resources on LinkedIn. (Members may compare account features with other subscription offerings by going to "Compare Account Types" after clicking "Settings" found at the top right area of the home page.)

### ***Getting Started***

Access LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) ...this will take you to the LinkedIn homepage.

To join LinkedIn, sign up below ... it's free!

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

New Password:

6 or more characters

\*

You can set up you own account by typing in the 'Join LinkedIn Today' box:

- First name
- Last name
- Email address
- Password of your choosing
- Complete the additional steps as prompted.

You should then set up your profile so that it represents you. List your current and past positions and your tenure there.

- List your education and time there
- Add a profile photo

- Add a summary paragraph

The “Settings” section provides links to various settings pages and describes the current status of some of these settings. These links and descriptions are grouped under some of the following main headings:

- Profile Settings – Allows you to manage profile information, profile photo visibility, public profile information, status visibility and member feed visibility.
- Email Notifications - Allows you to manage contact settings, how you want to receive messages, notifications and Invitations.
- Home Page Settings - Allows you to manage Network updates and News on your home page.
- RSS Settings - Allows you to enable or disable your private RSS feeds.
- Groups - Allows you to control Invitations from Groups.
- Network Updates - Allows you to show which type of Network Updates you'd like to see and control how many you want to show on your home page.
- Personal Information - Allows you to manage your name, location, display name, account holder icon settings, email addresses, passwords and a link to close your account.
- Privacy Settings - Allows you to manage settings for research surveys, connections list visibility, profile views, turn on/off ability to see another members profile picture, profile and status updates, service provider directory, partner advertising, and authorized applications.
- My Network - Allows you to tell us how you want to use your LinkedIn network.

### ***Getting Connected***

Add connections to your account:

- Use webmail import to see all the people you know who are already on LinkedIn
- Select who you wish to invite to join your trusted network
- Upload a contacts file from Outlook, Palm, ACT! Or MacAddress
- View LinkedIn’s list of your colleagues and classmates that are already on LinkedIn

### ***How to Get the Most from LinkedIn***

Now that you are connected you will find many uses besides just being connected to friends and colleagues by leveraging the power of your LinkedIn network.

- Post a question on Answers and tap into the experts you’re connected to and the entire LinkedIn network. With a professional community of 65+ million, this is the perfect place for those tough questions.

- Look up someone's profile before you meet with them. Learn their background and see who you know in common to get off to a fast start.
- Search for Service Providers and select based on trusted recommendations from people in your network. Anonymous web searches to find providers are a thing of the past.

### ***Creating and Joining Groups***

To join a group on LinkedIn, the membership of the group is determined by the specific group's manager. You must be approved by the group's manager in order to join the group.

You may find a group to join by searching in the 'Groups Directory' or clicking on a group logo seen on another member's Profile. To search the 'Groups Directory':

- Click on 'Groups Directory' from the 'Groups' dropdown menu (found in the top navigation bar of the home page). This should take you to the 'Groups Directory' page.
- Find 'Search Groups' box on left side of the page.
- Type in the group name, a keyword, a group 'Category', or a language from the drop down window.
- Click on 'Search'.

If you receive an invitation to join a group, you may be pre-approved to join. To ensure that you are automatically approved to join the group, you should make sure that the email address you received the invitation at is one of your confirmed email addresses on your account. Go to 'Settings' from the header of the home page, and click 'Email Addresses' to view, add or delete an email address.

To create a group (of which you will be the owner) you take the following steps:

- Click on "Create a Group" from the "Groups" dropdown menu (found in the top navigation bar of the home page).
- Follow the instructions to browse and upload a group logo.
- Enter your official group name.
- Choose your group type from the drop down list.
  - Alumni Group - membership often composed of former members of schools, universities, fraternities or sororities.
  - Corporate Group - membership often composed of current or past employees from the same company.
  - Conference Group - membership often composed of people attending the same (or similar) trade shows or conferences.
  - Networking Group - membership often composed of people with networking as one of its primary goals.
  - Non-Profit Group - membership often composed of people in support of a similar cause or value.

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- Professional Group - membership often composed of people with similar industry interests.
- Other - groups that fall outside of one of the above group types.
- Enter a brief summary of your group and its purpose for display in the Groups Directory. Information here is limited to 300 characters and will be visible by group and non-group members.
- Enter a full description of your group for display on the group page. Information here is limited to 2000 characters and will be visible by group and non-group members.
- Enter the website for your group.
- Enter the group owner email address which may be used for potential members to contact you.
- Check the box if you would like to display your group in the Groups Directory.
- Check the box if you would like group members to be able to display the group logo on their profiles.
- Check the Location box if your group is based in a single geographic location.
- Check the box to confirm you have read and accept the Terms of Service.
- Click on 'Create Group' to complete the process.

## Twitter

**Twitter** is a social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as *followers*. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow open access. Since late 2009, users can follow lists of authors instead of following individual authors. All users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS), or external applications. While the service itself costs nothing to use, accessing it through SMS may incur phone service provider fees. The website currently has more than 100 million users worldwide.

Twitter is also a communication platform that helps businesses stay connected to their customers. As a business, you can use it to quickly share information with people interested in your company, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and other people who care about your company.

### ***Types of Twitter Accounts***

When you sign up for Twitter, you have the option of keeping your account public (the default account setting) or protecting the account to keep your updates private. Public accounts have profile pages that are visible to everyone, and anyone can follow public updates without approval from the account owner.

Protected accounts receive a follow request each time someone wants to follow them, and only approved followers are able to see the profile page. If the idea of strangers reading your Twitter updates makes you feel a little weird, try protecting your profile at first. You can always change your mind later.

Please note: If your account is protected, it is assumed that you only want your followers to see your updates. @replies sent to people who aren't following you will not be seen. If you want to interact with everyone on Twitter, you should not protect your account.

### ***Getting Started***

Access Twitter at <http://twitter.com> ...this will take you to their home page and click on 'Sign Up Now'.

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Full name  → enter your first and last name  
Your full name will appear on your public profile

Username   
Your public profile: <http://twitter.com/ USERNAME>

Password

Email

Let others find me by my email address  
Note: Email will not be publicly displayed

Terms of Service [Printable version](#)

Terms of Service

These Terms of Service ("Terms") govern your access to and use of the services and Twitter's websites (the "Services"), and any information, text, graphics, or

By clicking on "Create my account" below, you are agreeing to the [Terms of Service](#) above and the [Privacy Policy](#).

Here's how to get started:

- Fill out the four fields. If you're creating a company account, use the "Full name" field to type in your company name. That'll help people find your company on Twitter. (You can add your own name in the Bio field, as described below.)
- The Username is the handle by which you'll be known on Twitter, like *ComcastCares*. Choose the shortest name that best describes your company or this particular account. Tip: They don't allow name squatting on Twitter. So if somebody who doesn't work for your company is holding or using your brand name inappropriately, contact them to get it sorted out.
- After you've signed up, the site walks you through a couple of screens to help you find people on Twitter you know or might be interested in. The process is quick, but if you want to jump directly to your account page, just head to the bottom of each page and click "Skip this step."
- When you first arrive on your account page, it'll look something like the picture on the right. Before you do anything else, click Settings to get a page where you can fill out a few more details to help people recognize your company. Most of the fields are self-explanatory. Pay special attention to the Bio, which gives you 160 characters; this is a great place to list the person or people twittering for your organization (if individual staffers have their own Twitter accounts, you can list their @usernames here).

- Before you leave Settings, check out the Picture tab, which is the place to add your company logo or photo of yourself. On the Design tab, you can upload a background image for your Twitter home page and tweak the page colors. Tip: Because the Bio gives you just 160 characters, companies often use the background image to share additional contact info.
- If you signed up for a new account and you're not able to log in, check your email to be sure that you received our welcome message. If you did not receive a welcome message from Twitter, either your account sign up was not successful or your email address is refusing email we are sending to you. Try signing up again or try visiting the profile page of the account you created: <http://twitter.com/<your username here>> to be sure you see a profile.

### ***Find Relevant People and Companies to Follow***

Whether or not you chose to follow anyone in the sign-up process, now's a good time to search for people and companies of specific interest to you. Use the search box on your Twitter home page to look not only for people talking about your company, brands and products, but also for partners and mentions of key terms in your sector. When you find interesting messages, consider following those accounts. Also look at the Find People section.

Tip: By default when someone follows you, you'll get an email from Twitter saying so with some basic information about the user. Anyone can turn off those notifications, though (under Settings > Notices), so don't assume people will know you're on Twitter just because you've followed them.

### ***Post your First Message***

On your Twitter home page, in the box at the top, type in a message. As you type, the counter on the upper-right corner of the box guides you down from 140 characters. When you've got a message ready to go, hit Update to post it (pressing Enter does NOT post it).

### ***Key Terms***

- **Following** - To receive messages on Twitter, you follow other people and companies you're interested in—which means you get their messages as they post (put another way, their messages show up in your incoming timeline on your Twitter home page). Conversely, people get your messages by following you.
- **Tweet** - Users refer to an individual message as a tweet, as in, “Check out this tweet about our CEO dancing on the sidelines of the Phoenix Suns game.” People sometimes use it as a verb, too, as in, “I tweeted about the stimulus package this morning.” If “tweet” is hard for you to use with a straight face in a business context, try “twittering” as a verb instead. Alternatives include “post,” “message” and “update.”

- **@username** - For companies, one of the most useful things about Twitter is that it lets you exchange public messages with individual users. Simply start a message with @username of the person you want to reach, like this:
  - “@Ev Glad you liked our cookies. Thanks for twittering about ‘em!”
  - If Ev is following your account, your message will appear directly on his Twitter home page. (If he’s not following your account, your message will appear in his folder of @username mentions.) People who are following both you and Ev will also see the message on their Twitter home page. Finally, the message will appear in search results, and people who come to your Twitter home page will see it among the messages in your outgoing timeline.
  - Tip: On Twitter, @username automatically becomes a link to that person’s account—helping people discover each other on the system. Put another way: when you see an @username, you can always click through to that person’s Twitter page and learn whether you want to follow them.
  - To find the public messages that are directed to you (i.e., those that start with your @BusinessName) or that mention you (i.e., those that include your @BusinessName elsewhere in the tweet), head to your Twitter home page, and then on the right side of the screen, click the tab labeled your @BusinessName. For businesses, it’s a good idea to keep a close eye on incoming @mentions, because they’re often sent by customers or potential customers expecting a reply.
  - Tip: To reply easily from the Twitter website, mouse over a message, and then look on the right end for the “Reply arrow”. Click the arrow to start a new message addressed to the original user.
- **DM, or direct message** - are Twitter’s private messaging channel. These tweets appear on your home page under the Direct Messages tab, and if you’ve got email notifications turned on, you’ll also get an email message when somebody DMs you. DMs don’t appear in either person’s public timeline or in search results. No one but you can see your DMs.
  - The one tricky concept with DMs is that you can send them only to people who are following you. Conversely, you can receive them only from people you’re following.
  - You can easily send DMs from the Direct Messages tab by using the pull-down menu to choose a recipient and then typing in your note. To send a DM from your home page, start your message with “d username,” like this:
    - “d Ev Sorry those cookies gave you food poisoning! Would you prefer a refund or a new batch?”
    - Tip: If you’re communicating with a customer about something potentially sensitive—including personal information, account numbers, email addresses, phone numbers, street addresses, etc.—be sure to encourage them to DM or email you. As we mentioned earlier, @mentions are public, so anyone can see them.
- **RT, or retweet** - To help share cool ideas via Twitter and to give a shout-out to people you respect, you can repost their messages and give them credit.

People call that retweeting (or RT), and it usually looks something like this: “RT @Username: Original message, often with a link.” Retweeting is common, and it’s a form of conversation on Twitter. It’s also a powerful way to spread messages and ideas across Twitter quickly. So when you do it, you’re engaging in a way people recognize and usually like—making it a good way to connect.

- **Trending Topics** - On the right side of your screen and on the Twitter search page, you’ll see ten Trending Topics, which are the most-mentioned terms on Twitter at that moment. The topics update continually, reflecting the real-time nature of Twitter and true shifts in what people are paying attention to. A key feature of Twitter, Trending Topics aggregate many tweets at once and often break news ahead of the mainstream media. (Note that the trends often include hashtags, described below.)
- **Hashtag (#)** - Twitter messages don’t have a field where you can categorize them. So people have created the hashtag—which is just the # symbol followed by a term describing or naming the topic—that you add to a post as a way of saying, “This message is about the same thing as other messages from other people who include the same hashtag.” Then, when somebody searches for that hashtag, they’ll get all of the related messages.
  - For instance, let’s say you post, “Voted sixty times in tonight’s showdown. #AmericanIdol.” Your message would then be part of Twitter search results for “#AmericanIdol,” and if enough people use the same hashtag at once, the term will appear in Twitter’s Trending Topics.
  - Companies often use hashtags as part of a product launch (like #FordFiesta), and conferences and events frequently have hashtags associated with them (like #TED).
- **Tweetup** - A tweetup is simply an in-person gathering organized via Twitter, often spontaneous. Companies use them for things like hosting launch parties, connecting with customers and introducing like-minded followers to each other.

### ***Build Relationships***

Instead of approaching Twitter as a place to broadcast information about your company, think of it as a place to build relationships. Put into practice, that means you could do things like:

- Include in your Bio and/or custom background the names (or @usernames) of the people twittering from your company account. It’s also a good idea to include additional contact info, like email addresses.
- Listen regularly for comments about your company, brand and products—and be prepared to address concerns, offer customer service or thank people for praise.
- Tip: In addition to keeping an eye on your @messages, you can use our **Saved Searches** feature to easily track mentions of your product, brand, company, etc. From your Twitter home page, simply run a search, and then at the top of

your results page, click “Save this search.” A link with your search term will appear on the right side of your page, and whenever you click it, you’ll get real-time results for that query. To delete a search, just head to the top of your results and click “Remove this search.”

- Use a casual, friendly tone in your messages.
- While you shouldn’t feel compelled to follow everyone who follows you, do respond to some questions or comments addressed to you.
- If you like a particular message, retweet it. People often appreciate the sharing and amplification of their ideas, so look to retweet cool stuff.
- Post links to articles and sites you think folks would find interesting—even if they’re not your sites or about your company.
- Make sure your tweets provide some real value. You know better than we do what is valuable, but here are few examples to spark ideas:
  - Take people behind the scenes of your company
  - Post pictures from your offices, stores, warehouses, etc.
  - Share sneak peeks of projects or events in development
- Don’t spam people. Twitter’s following model means that you have to respect the interests and desires of other people here or they’ll unfollow you. The most common way to run afoul of that understanding—and to thus look like a spammer—is to send unsolicited @messages or DMs, particularly when you include a promotional link.
- Of course, if you run an account that focuses explicitly on sharing exclusive coupon codes or sale information, you’re probably just fine posting promos. But tread carefully, and consider explaining in your bio or background how the account works.
- To make sure you’re not spamming folks, we also suggest you avoid the following:
  - Posting duplicate updates to an account: Posting the same update over and over throughout the day is considered spammy and a possible violation of our terms of service.
  - Cross-posting duplicate updates to multiple accounts: If you post the same update to multiple accounts, you could violate our terms of service.
  - Following churn: Following and unfollowing the same people repeatedly, as well as following and unfollowing those who don’t follow back, are both violations of our terms of service.
  - Tip: Think you’ve encountered a spammer? Let us know, and we’ll look into the account. You can alert us to spam profiles by sending a direct message to @spam! In addition, you can block the spammer by heading to their account page, and on the right side, clicking the block link (they won’t know you’ve blocked them).

### ***Understand Twitter***

Messages on Twitter are short, quick and able to reach people wherever they happen to be. That combination makes it an instantaneous medium, which has a couple of implications for businesses:

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- You can ask questions, float ideas and solicit feedback on Twitter—and expect pretty quick replies most of the time.
- If you've just launched a product, ask users what they think or search for real-time tweets from people talking about your product. You can also ask or search for feedback on new ad campaigns you've launched, stores you've opened or murky issues you have to handle.
- When people raise customer service issues on Twitter, they generally expect a quick reply—within a day, if not within a few hours, depending on the nature of your business. Keep an eye on your @mentions.

### ***Twitter on your Blackberry***

Twitter and Blackberry now go hand in hand. You may have noticed a new Twitter application on your Blackberry mobile device. Should you need to troubleshoot any issues, problems, or errors with your Blackberry's Twitter application, you will need to reach out to Blackberry for support.

Twitter's support staff can troubleshoot any login or Twitter account problems but are unable to troubleshoot for the Blackberry Application itself.

## Facebook

**Facebook** is a social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organized by workplace, school, or college.

Facebook is a free site and does not require that you pay to use the site. You do, however, have the option of purchasing Facebook credits, which can be used to send gifts or to purchase items on applications or games. If you choose to use Facebook from your mobile device, please note that you will be responsible for any fees associated with internet usage and/or text messaging as determined by your mobile service provider.

### ***Getting Started***

Visit Facebook and click on "Register" to get started.

**Sign Up**  
It's free and anyone can join

First Name:

Last Name:

Your Email:

New Password:

I am:

Birthday:

[Why do I need to provide this?](#)

[Create a Page for a celebrity, band or business.](#)

- Before you sign up, you can "Take the Tour" or look for friends or colleagues.
- Fill in your name, email address and birthday. You will also be asked to select if you're in college, at a company, in high school or none of those. What you select will determine your main network.
- Check your email. A confirmation will arrive with a link to confirm your email. If you don't see it right away, check you spam or junk mail folder.

## ***Join a Network***

Log in to Facebook with your email address and password. On your first log in, you will land on a page with directions for joining a network.

- Join a regional network. Under "Join a Regional Network," type in your city and state. The box should auto-complete your entry. Facebook will let you know the network closest to you. Select the [radio](#) button next to the region you want to join.
- Connect with co-workers. You must enter a verifiable email address from an approved company to join the corresponding network.
- Set up your profile and look for friends. Once you have joined Facebook, you can start adding friends and coworkers. Fill in as much detail as possible on your profile so people can find you easily.

## ***Tips and Warnings***

- Verify your account to avoid constant security checks. On your homepage after login, just enter your mobile number in the correct box and hit "Confirm." A code will be sent to your cell phone as a text message. Return to Facebook with that code to verify your identity.
- If you run into problems registering, visit the Facebook Help section.
- If you want to keep your profile as private as possible, avoid joining a regional network, which is open to anyone.
- Choose a password with a combination of numbers and letters. Your Facebook account holds a lot of personal information about you, so you don't want your password to be easy to guess.

## ***Make Facebook Useful: Find 'Friends'***

Most of Facebook's features depend on the idea that there are people in your life that you like to stay in touch and connect with. Whether these people are best friends, family, coworkers, or acquaintances, once you connect to them, they are considered Facebook friends. We've created a few ways for you to easily find your friends.

- Friend Finder asks you for your email address and password. Facebook then runs a check of the emails in your address book to see if any of the addresses match people who currently have profiles on Facebook. You can select which people you would like to send friend requests; friendships on Facebook need to be confirmed by both people before they become official.
- Additionally, since we believe that Facebook is most useful when all of your friends are here, Friend Finder will prompt you to invite your contacts to join. You will be able to select which contacts, if any, you'd like to invite.
- To get to Friend Finder, roll over "Friends" in the top menu and select "Find Friends."

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- Coworker search is an easy way to find people you know from your current or former job. You can find Coworker Search in the same page as Classmate Search.
- Once you get to the Coworker Search page, simply enter a company and hit search. You might want to enter a name if you're looking for someone in particular, but it's not required.
- At any time, no matter where you are on Facebook, you can use the quick search box (at the top right corner of the top menu) to search for your friends by name. Simply type in the name you are looking for and hit enter.
- If you get no results, check to make sure you didn't misspell or use a former name. If not, you can try searching by that person's email address if you know it.

### ***Connect with your Friends***

Visit your Friends page by clicking the big "Friends" link on the top of any Facebook page to see recent activity from your friends, organize people into lists for messaging, and see people's statuses.

Go to your friends' profiles. You can see what's been going on with them on their Walls. There you can see their recent status posts about what they've been doing, photo albums of recent adventures, and what their friends have been saying to them.

Whenever you land on your home page (which you can get to by clicking "Home" in the upper left hand corner), you'll see a live stream of posts your friends have made—interesting links, thoughts, photos, and tidbits from their lives. This helps you keep up with things your friends are doing in their everyday lives. To filter the information on your home page, select a filter from the main menu on the left side of the page.

You've already filled out your profile, but the most interesting part is what you're sharing right now. The publisher—the box that sits on top of your profile and home page—allows you to share links, photos, notes, and short status posts that reflect what you're reading, watching, thinking about or feeling. Your friends can understand a lot more about you knowing what's going on in your life.

### ***Share Common Interests***

Browse some of the groups in your area. If you find ones that have similar interests as you, get involved in the discussion.

### ***Promote your Facebook page***

Once you've published your page, you will need to let people know to get the momentum moving.

- Copy and paste the URL ([http://facebook.com\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](http://facebook.com_____))
- Add it on the back of your business cards

***Facebook on your BlackBerry***

Like Twitter, Facebook has an app for your BlackBerry.

## Blogging with WordPress

"**Blog**" is an abbreviated version of "weblog," which is a term used to describe web sites that maintain an ongoing chronicle of information. A blog features diary-type commentary and links to articles on other Web sites, usually presented as a list of entries in reverse chronological order. Blogs range from the personal to the political, and can focus on one narrow subject or a whole range of subjects.

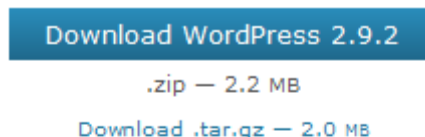
**WordPress** is an open source CMS (Content Management System), often used as a blog publishing application powered by PHP and MySQL. It has many features including a plugin architecture and a templating system. WordPress is the most popular blog software in use today. Its focus is on ease of use, speed and great user experience.

Generally speaking (although there are exceptions), blogs tend to have a few things in common:

- A main content area with articles listed chronologically, newest on top. Often, the articles are organized into categories.
- An archive of older articles.
- A way for people to leave comments about the articles.
- A list of links to other related sites, sometimes called a "blogroll".
- One or more "feeds" like RSS, Atom or RDF files.

### ***Getting Started with WordPress***

The following is a quick version of the download instructions:



#### **Release Notification**

We've got a handy mailing list that we send a friendly message to whenever there's a new stable release for you to enjoy.

 [WordPress Releases RSS](#)

- Download and unzip the WordPress package.

- Create a database for WordPress on your web server, as well as a [MySQL](#) user who has all privileges for accessing and modifying it.
- Rename the `wp-config-sample.php` file to `wp-config.php`.
- Open `wp-config.php` in your favorite [text editor](#) and [fill in your database details](#) as explained in [Editing wp-config.php](#) to generate and use your secret key password.
- Place the WordPress files in the desired location on your web server:
- If you want to integrate WordPress into the root of your domain (e.g. `http://example.com/`), move or upload all contents of the unzipped WordPress directory (but excluding the directory itself) into the root directory of your web server.
- If you want to have your WordPress installation in its own subdirectory on your web site (e.g. `http://example.com/blog/`), rename the directory `wordpress` to the name you'd like the subdirectory to have and move or upload it to your web server. For example if you want the WordPress installation in a subdirectory called "blog", you should rename the directory called "wordpress" to "blog" and upload it to the root directory of your web server.
- **Hint:** If your FTP transfer is too slow read how to avoid FTPing at : [Step 1: Download and Extract](#).
- Run the WordPress installation script by accessing `wp-admin/install.php` in your favorite web browser.
- If you installed WordPress in the root directory, you should visit:  
`http://example.com/wp-admin/install.php`
- If you installed WordPress in its own subdirectory called `blog`, for example, you should visit: `http://example.com/blog/wp-admin/install.php`

WordPress should now be installed.

### ***First Steps with WordPress***

Let's take a step-by-step tour through your WordPress site and learn about how all the different functions work and how to make your new site your own.

- Begin by logging into the Administration Panel. This is the brain behind your website. This is where the organization of your site begins.
- Choose View Site.
- The layout you are looking at is called a Theme. It is the Presentation of your website, styling the look of the site.
  - The default WordPress Theme features a blue "header" at the top with the title placeholder of your site.
  - Along the side you will see some titles and links. This is your "sidebar menu."
  - Within the main middle section of the page is the "post." At the bottom of the page is the "footer."

- Let's look at the post for a moment. There is a title, and below the title is some information. This is called the *post meta data* and contains information about the post such as the date and time the post was made, the author, and the categories the post is in.
- Scroll down the page and notice the bar at the end of the page. This is called the "footer," and for now it says "(your blog) is proudly powered by WordPress."
- Back to the sidebar, you will see different sections with information. Among these you may find a list of Pages, Categories, Archives, Calendar, and Dates. This is part of the menu or navigation panel that people will use to move around your site, visiting posts from different categories or time periods.
- Click on the **Users** tab. The screen will change and you will see the panel called Profile. This is where you will enter information about you, the author and administrator of the site. In the next tab called Authors and Users you can set up more authors. Let's stick with you for right now. Fill in the information and click **Update Profile** when done.

### ***Writing and Managing Posts***

Simply fill in the blanks, one by one, in the post beginning with the title and then write a little test message in the post window. This is just for a test, so you can write anything you want. When you are done, click **PUBLISH** below the post entry window and it is done. You will then see a blank Write a Post screen and you're ready to write another one.

Now that you have gotten the feel for writing posts, you can view your posts by clicking View Site at the top of the screen.

Do you want comments on your posts? Comments on posts come in a variety of forums, from *pats on the back* (*Good job! Like the post!*) to extensive conversations and commentary about the posts turning into long chats.

Responding to comments and moderating them can also take up a lot of time. If they are critical to your site, then include them and consider how you want them presented. Go back to your test site; the first post created at the time of installation includes a sample comment. You can even make a few comments yourself on the posts you created. Take a look at how they are laid out and consider how you might want them to look to fit into the design and layout of your site.

## Using GoDaddy to Buy your Domain

**Go Daddy** is an Internet domain registrar and web hosting company that also sells e-business related software and services. In 2010, it reached more than 40 million domain names under management. Go Daddy is currently the largest ICANN-accredited registrar in the world, and is three times the size of its closest competitor.

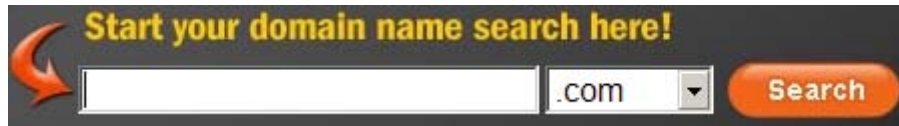
### ***What is a Domain Name?***

A domain name represents a physical point on the Internet — an IP address. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) governs coordination of the links between IP addresses and domain names across the Internet. With this standardized coordination, you can find websites on the Internet by entering domain names instead of IP addresses into your Web browser.

### ***Getting Started***

To get started, you need to check if the domain name you want is available. To Check a Domain's Availability

- Go to Go Daddy's Home Page.
- In the **Domain Name Search** field, enter the domain you want to register, and then select the domain extension from the list.
- Click **Go**.



If the domain you requested is taken, Go Daddy presents you with available alternatives. For example, you may be able to select a .INFO or .WS domain extension, rather than a .COM. For example, you could register [www.coolexample.info](http://www.coolexample.info), instead of [www.coolexample.com](http://www.coolexample.com).

If the domain is available, follow the instructions to complete the checkout process. As you complete your registration, include valid contact information for each contact. ICANN, the governing body for domain names, requires valid information for your contact information (Registrant, Technical, Billing, and Administrative). If you enter false information, your domain is cancelled.

Your contact information is public and accessible through the Whois databases of most registrars. However, you can protect your privacy by registering your domain with us using our private domain name registration services.

When you purchase our private domain registration services, the Whois directory lists Domains By Proxy's name, postal address, and phone number instead of yours. Although Domains By Proxy is the registrant of your domain name registration, **you still retain the full benefits of domain registration.** You can:

- Cancel, sell, or transfer your domain registration.
- Revert the registrant listing for your domain registration back to you.
- Renew your domain registration when it expires.
- Designate the nameservers for your domain.
- Resolve claims arising out of a dispute involving your domain registration.

If your domain is available, you can register it for a period of time that you specify during the checkout process. You can use your domain to build your business and assist you in creating a dynamic online identity. You may also want to consider registering multiple domain names to:

- Keep your competition from registering a domain name that draws customers to them instead of you.
- Promote the different products and services you offer.
- Drive more traffic to your website.
- Enjoy more opportunities to market to, and be listed on, search engines.
- Create distinct advertising strategies that reach different target markets.
- Provide customers more ways to find you when searching the Internet.
- Capture common misspellings of your domain name, instead of sending visitors to an error page.
- Protect your brand and online identity from those who may have unsavory purposes.

## ***Domain Extensions***

A top-level domain (TLD) is the part of the domain name located to the right of the dot ("."). The most common TLDs are .com, .net, and .org. Some others are .biz, .info, and .ws. These common TLDs all have certain guidelines, but are generally available to any registrant, anywhere in the world. The following are the top-level domains (TLDs) that are currently offered:

.com	.biz	.info	.jobs	.tv	.us	.ws	.ag
.net	.com.ag	.net.ag	.org.ag	.at	.be	.cc	.de
.org	.fm	.in	.mx	.nl	.co.in	.net.in	.co.in
	.net.in	.org.in	.firm.in	.gen.in	.ind.in	.jp	.ms
	.com.mx	.co.nz	.net.nz	.or.nz	.tc	.tw	.com.tw
	.org.tw	.idv.tw	.co.uk	.me.uk	.org.uk	.asia	.vg
	.bz	.com.bz	.net.bz				

## Podcasting

Podcasting is one of those web ideas that became way more complex than it needed to be. The original idea was to be able to create and publish audio files that would be updated regularly and streamed to an audience eager for the content. People could (and still can) subscribe to your audio messages so that they didn't have to go anywhere special to hear them---they just click on a link in an email and there you are.

There was a time when almost no lay person could figure out all the steps needed to create and manage one. But time (and technology) marches on, and we now have the novice podcaster's best friend, the free and easy way to set up your podcast---  
<http://podbean.com>

Podbean makes it very simple for you to upload, manage and promote your podcasts to a wider audience than just your own website. Of course you can still host the audio files on your site, and podbean helps make this very easy as well. They can also do Vodcast, or video podcasting. Check them out.

All you need to do is record your audio messages in your computer. Since this is audio only, I would suggest that you purchase a decent microphone and hook it up to your computer. You'll find a small audio-in jack somewhere on the side or the back of your PC. Here's what to look for in a microphone.

1. Make sure the mic is uni-directional instead of omni directional. This will make sure the microphone picks up your voice in high fidelity, and not the surrounding room or background noises.
2. Look for a frequency response of at least 100 Hz to 8 kHz. I know that's technical information, but any mic worth purchasing will have this stat.
3. If you're going to use a headset microphone, be sure to get stereo.

There are many free audio recording/editing programs out there. I recommend the audacity recorder available for download at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/>

## Video Blogging

Video blogging is a rapidly spreading phenomenon that has been generating tremendous results for those who do it right. It's a great way to serve your current customers and expand your reach to an entire new universe of potential clients.

It's very important to realize that everyone has their own personality and presentation style. Some will take to it like they've been doing it for years, and others will begin slowly. It doesn't matter. Practice makes perfect, and as you warm up to the idea of becoming the 'star' of your own blog, you'll discover by trial and error what works and what doesn't. The point is to make the commitment to take this on as a normal part of doing business---the rest will flow naturally as you become accustomed to the technology and your role as a person who has something to say.

### ***The Basics***

Chances are that 99% of you already have them in your desktop or laptop computer. We have outlined various options and add-ons you can get, but the simplest way to get started is to experiment with your computer's built-in hardware (camera and microphone) and software program for capturing video.

If you own a PC, you need to search in the computer maker's (Dell, Toshiba, etc) folder for "video" or "video recording" or "webcam". Each manufacturer has their own program for using their camera to record video. Save it as an MPeg4 video file.

If you're on a Mac, just open iMovie and click on the camera icon on the far left under the "Project Library" screen. Wait a sec and a window will open showing your computer's camera shot of you sitting at the computer. Click on "Capture" on that screen, record your video, and hit "Stop" when you're done. The Capture button becomes the Stop button so you don't have to move your mouse! Clever. Once you're satisfied, save it as an MPeg4 video file.

### ***Content***

It's a good idea to take a little time and make a list of blog ideas. You don't have to use them all, but if you sit down and come up with a list of 20 possibilities, you'll understand that there are indeed many topics that you can share. The key word is *relevance*. Choose blog subjects that give your audience something they need, something that expands their knowledge of a specific subject. Think about it---if you were to go to a blog post that asked the question, "Why private companies need D & O insurance" and then the blogger never really answered it, why would you, or anyone, ever return to that individual for information?

You know your clientele and what they're interested in---it won't take long until you have a list of topics, most of which probably come from your memories of questions and

conversations you've had. Unless you want to pontificate about the world situation, don't pick ideas that are too broad, such as "Why do you need insurance?" Keep them specific and simple.

Finally, don't be afraid to add humor or be entertaining in your blogs. Here's a great example of how one agent, John Moccia of Rollins/InnovationGuard does it!

<http://www.viddler.com/explore/rollinsiguard/videos/17/69.866/>

### **Script**

Okay, you've got your list of topics created and there's one that you know you can knock out of the park. Some of you will just talk off the top of your head and get it down after 3 or 4 takes, with no script and no prompter, but you're the rare exception. Most of us mere mortals need a script, or at least a good, solid outline to help us. There's nothing wrong with that, especially if a script helps us deliver a dynamic and memorable 'performance'. Yes, performance---because that's what anyone talking to a video camera is delivering. In this case, you're performing the role of an insurance expert, which presumably you are. More on that later.

Tips for writing a script:

- Start with an outline of key points you want to make. Unless you're doing something like "the 5 Things Most Underwriters Overlook", try to come up with three memorable take-aways that will be useful to the viewer. Study after study have shown that presentations based on just 3 key points are by far the most successful.
- Once you're satisfied with your outline, dive right in and write out what you're going to say. Don't hold anything back and let the words flow. There's an adage about how to structure a memorable presentation, which goes like this---Open by telling them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and finish by telling them what you told them. It sounds like a recipe for a very dull presentation, but it works---especially if you put some of your personality into it. Another possibility is to open with a short story, whether real or made up, for example: how a life sciences company shot themselves in the foot by ignoring a particularly important aspect of their liability and how it adversely affected them. Then the rest of the presentation is taking this specific example and making cogent, memorable generic points about the lessons learned. You may have your own ideas of how and what you want to say---that's fine. Just get something down on paper.
- Read it out loud. Once you've written it, read it aloud to yourself, or a trusted coworker, a friend, or your spouse. This accomplishes several important objectives. First, it lets you know how long it is. Almost everyone writes a script that is about twice as long as they think it is! The ideal time is one and a half to two minutes---long enough to say something, and short enough to keep the viewer engaged all the way through.

- Secondly, by reading aloud you will get a good understanding of the difference between the written and spoken word. Simply stated, writing engages the brain, while watching a video involves several senses at once, and when taken as a whole, gives a more visceral experience.
- And third, you'll hopefully get good feedback on how your ideas come across from your selected preview audience. Tell them you can take it if they give you a straight, no holds barred critique---even though that probably isn't true!
- Add some life to it. Every spoken presentation has key words that should be emphasized. It's a good idea to underline or capitalize them in your script. It'll help you remember. Here's a hint--- a lot of them will be adjectives. Well-chosen adjectives can help add critical and memorable emphasis. For example, you could say "they decided to go with inferior coverage" when you could have said "they decided to go with clearly inferior coverage."

John Love likes to say "write with vigorous English!" By that he means make sure you're enthusiastic about your topic, and then choose words that bring that enthusiasm out. Instead of saying "I'm here to bring you news about..." you can say "I'm excited to bring you critically important news about..."

## **Performance**

This is simple to achieve, and will become easier as you get more blogs under your belt. Practice, practice, practice.

Performance tips:

- Keep eye contact with the camera. This is critical, as it gives the impression that you are speaking directly, one to one, to the viewer. If you think about what an interview looks like, most of the time the subject is looking off camera and you get the feeling that this is being watched by lots of people. Eye contact establishes that personal connection that is so important in a video blog. Believe it or not, at some point a switch will go off in your head, when all of the sudden you're able to talk to a piece of technology, the camera, just like you are talking to a person. It's a great moment!
- Energy. As mentioned above, be energetic and enthused about your topic. One thing that's true about video presentations is that often if you push yourself just a little bit to be "over the top" in terms of your enthusiasm, it translates very well to the camera. If you're not satisfied with your delivery, give it a try.

## **Background**

Think about this, and choose a location that has an appropriate background. Most of you will probably start at your desk, which is fine, but take a look at your shot and 'dress' your set so that it is pleasing and professional to the eye. Plants work well, but don't have them placed directly behind you so that you appear to have branches growing out of your head! Bookshelves, degrees, awards are also prime candidates for inclusion in your set.

## **Lighting**

This is not critical as you get started, but somewhere down the line you'll most likely consider how to make it look better. Most people don't realize that what your eye sees, and what a camera 'sees' are two very different things. Our brain makes all sorts of subtle adjustments while processing visual information, but the camera just takes in what is there. Lighting may sound like a hassle, but a simple and inexpensive set up can give your video blogs a more polished look.

For a basic overview, go to: <http://www.mediacollege.com/lighting/three-point/>

## **Cameras**

Most video bloggers start with their computer-installed web cam, located above the top of the screen. But as in all things technical, there are options that will increase your flexibility as you progress in your new career. A key differentiator is the ability to record in hi def. The same is true for audio, and I'll get to that below. From the simplest to the most complex, they include:

- Economy webcam, that sits atop, below or beside you computer and attach to it via USB or Firewire. They are now offering hi def shooting capability and can be priced at around \$30 and up. Like your computer's built-in camera, these are not very practical for anything but shooting at your computer.
- Flip Cams These are the latest, greatest hand held cameras and are usually priced under \$200. They offer hi def video, so you could theoretically shoot a feature film on one of these. There are a variety of flip cams on the market with built-in microphones, but I recommend the Kodak Zi8, because it offers the option of attaching an external microphone, which gives superior sound over the built in mics. Flip cams are about the size of a big cell phone and can be used anywhere.
- Mid Range All of the major players are making very sophisticated, bargain-priced mid-range hi def cameras like the Canon Vixia. They range from \$300 up, and will soon become your favorite camera for all of your video needs.
- Hi End Professional These cost around \$2,000 and up, and come with a lot of features that you'll never use and can be technically daunting. Unless you're going to open your own professional studio (and who knows?), I'd stay away from these.

## **Audio**

Along with lighting, audio is the most overlooked component in video blogging. Built-in computer or even camera microphones often make the speakers sound like they're in a closet or a cave. Again, for your beginning efforts they will work just fine. But you'll probably move to an external mic at some point and here's what to look for:

## Social Networking for Insurance Professionals

1. Make sure the Mic is uni-directional instead of omni directional. This will make sure the microphone picks up your voice in high fidelity, and not the surrounding room.
2. Look for a frequency response of at least 100 Hz to 8 kHz. I know that's technical information, but any mic worth purchasing will have this stat.
3. If you're going to use a headset microphone, which I don't recommend for aesthetic reasons, be sure to get stereo.

### **Teleprompter**

So you're really getting into your performances and are tired of winging it, memorizing, or looking at off-camera cue cards or notes---the solution? A teleprompter! Before you start thinking that this is way too much technology for a simple video blog, take a look at the facts.

A teleprompter mounts seamlessly right in front of the lens of your camera. Through a very clever arrangement of mirrors and see-thru glass, your script will scroll by for you to read while you are looking straight into the camera. You could easily produce 5 blogs at one sitting! While once a luxury that only professional film and television studios could afford, like everything else in the tech-enabled world we live in, teleprompters have become *very* affordable and a breeze to set up and use.

I have very specific recommendations here, having seen and tested the latest at this year's NAB (National Association of Broadcasters) event in Las Vegas.

SeeEye2Eye For around \$ 60, you can purchase the ingenious SeeEye2Eye teleprompter from Bodelin technologies. It's made only for built-in computer cameras and fits on just about any computer screen---desktop or laptop. You can also purchase prompter software from Bodelin or take advantage of the rapidly proliferating free, web-based prompter applications available on the web.

The ProPrompter HDi Also from Bodelin Technologies, this state-of-the-art teleprompter turns an Ipad into a prompter for use with consumer and professional video cameras. It's an amazing and very innovative use of the Ipad's screen, and is available at online outlets for as low as \$ 900. This allows you to tape on-location blogs anywhere you take your camera.

### **Editing**

Most video blogs are done in one continuous take. It may take you 10 times to get that one seamless take, but once you've got it, you're finished with the recording part of the process. But what if you'd like to add more bells and whistles? That's where editing comes in. You can easily add titles, insert images, and use other simple techniques that will take your blog to the next level.

There are several basic editing platforms that are free and very easy to master. For Windows users, *Movie Maker* is available for download on the Microsoft site for XP and all later operating systems. Macs come with *iMovie* already installed and ready to go. I recommend the “Idiot’s Guide to....” books for both of these. They’re available in just about any bookstore.

Editing might sound like a lot of work, but it’s fun, creative, and can add a lot to your pieces. When you’re ready, give it a go.

### ***Establishing your Blog Online***

If you’ll be hosting your video blog on a company website, speak to your web master or IT person about setting up a page for that, as well as an archive for the many topics you’ll be recording over time. He or she will also be able to help you put ‘tags’ on your videos, which will make them more likely to be found by search engines.

If you’re going to set up your own dedicated video blog site, I would also suggest you speak with a web designer/developer who is familiar with the concept. If you want to do it yourself, please go to [http://www.ehow.com/videos-on\\_136\\_set-up-video-blog.html](http://www.ehow.com/videos-on_136_set-up-video-blog.html)

You’ll find a helpful variety of ‘how to’ videos on getting your blog set up online and other helpful blogging ideas.

## Green Screen Video

### ***But First, Today's Weather Report***

You're all familiar with green screen video----or at the very least, you've seen its visual magic on television. Your local television weather reporter uses this innovative technological trick every day! It works like this: The weather reporter is standing in front of a uniformly green wall while reporting the weather. The maps and animations of storms passing through, etc are all electronically 'matted' to appear behind the reporter. While to the untrained viewer the reporter appears to look at the map occasionally, actually he or she is looking off camera to monitors that show the total effect, so that they are pointing at the right spots on the map. And if you take notice next time you watch the weather, you'll see that the reporter is holding a small remote in one hand that's used to change and otherwise manipulate the map images being shown.

### ***That's fine, but what has that got to do with my success as an insurance agent?***

It's important to understand, first and foremost, that the Internet is going to video. That's not a prediction, it's a reality. And that means that intelligent use of video on your website is going to become a necessary and vital part of your success---as an individual and as an agency.

Imagine having easy access to a fully-outfitted, professional video production facility whenever you needed it---with their beautiful sets, high end cameras, teleprompters and editing capabilities. If necessary, you could drop in and record a video blog, a news update, an explanation of a complex coverage issue---basically, anything that you need for your video enabled website. You could record your piece, and within an hour or two have your video up on your site, looking like it was shot in your own private studio on a set that cost tens of thousands of dollars. That's what today's green screen production makes possible. And the best part is that green screen production can save you over 80% of normal video production costs.

You'll be using video to give your website a personality, with avatars that welcome and explain navigation to visitors. You'll be using it to create a video blog that draw new customers, you'll be using it for your YouTube and Facebook channels, you'll be using it to present compelling customer testimonials on your site---and you'll be using video in ways that haven't even been created yet.

*Greenworks Video* is a production company that has mastered the art (and science) of professional green screen production. Hopefully, there will soon be a *Greenworks Video* franchise in your area, but until then please contact us directly and we will handle your local green screen studio scheduling.

We look forward to hearing from you. [brian@gwvideo.com](mailto:brian@gwvideo.com) 303-728-9574

## Social Networking for Insurance Professionals

Greenworks Video is a new service designed to make corporate video for the web easy and affordable. This white paper was written for professionals in the insurance industry. Please contact Greenwork's Brian Doubleday at [brian@gwvideo.com](mailto:brian@gwvideo.com) if you have any questions or would like assistance with adding video to your agency's website or presentations.

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