

You and the Internet, Part II: Places to Go, People to See

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In my last article, [How to Waste Time and Influence People](#), we covered productive ways to wander on the Internet. You also can benefit from harnessing the Internet as it relates to your advisory practice.

As a professional service provider for advisors, I have a business model that shares much in common with yours. There are three overlapping areas in which I use the Internet to see and be seen:

1. **Research** — remaining abreast with the latest ideas about wealth and investing
2. **Presence** — managing Internet appearances to reflect the “me” I try to be
3. **Networking** — connecting with key audiences, including clients, prospective clients, industry colleagues, service providers and appropriate media outlets

The Internet for information

If you're like me on this (and, if you're an investment advisor I hope you are), you find endless fascination in all things investing. Of course there are print publications worth keeping an eye on, but I mostly use the Internet to remain informed. And fascinated.

You can't read everything. To remain abreast with the swift current, without getting lost in it::

- Scan headlines and then dig deeper if it's a subject or author of interest. A scan offers an efficient way to find lots of good stuff, and by spotting patterns among various sources, you can get a reading on major issues of concern.
- Seek articles and conversational threads among those with whom you agree and those who challenge your thoughts. (I read far more conversations than I actively participate in, but here's a related [article](#) for engaging in constructive, online critique of your own.)
- Prefer forums that offer fact-based, respectful conversations instead of emotional name-calling. Seek these qualities in both the articles and the comments, since some of the best material is in the conversation threads.



I could easily numb you with all the possible information sources, and you probably already have many favorites of your own, but here are a few financial news sources that I routinely track:

- **Passive Investment Professionals LinkedIn group** – a must-have for any passively minded advisor
- **Trade publications** (and their e-blasts, LinkedIn groups, Facebook pages or tweets): [Investment News](#), [RIABiz](#), [Financial Advisor](#) and of course [Advisor Perspectives](#).
- **News blogs** – CBS MoneyWatch [Wise Investing](#) (Larry Swedroe), The Wall Street Journal [Intelligent Investor](#) (Jason Zweig), The New York Times, [Bucks blog](#) (Carl Richards and others)
- **Specialty resources** – Some of my favorites: [Ramit Sethi](#) for younger generation investors; [Vanguard Diehards](#), for the often-interesting debate and discussion on the evolution of passive investing, and [The Coffeehouse Investor](#)

Again, these are like a few random pinecones in the vast forests of knowledge (as we might say here in beautiful Oregon), but perhaps it will serve as an entry point to help you explore new resources beyond your usual favorites.

Perfecting your presence

At the same time you're watching people on the Internet, they're watching you. If you've taken intentional steps to establish an Internet presence, you've probably already discussed your goals and strategies with a web-marketing professional, and considered issues like search engine optimization, contemporary website design and social media opportunities. You can read some of my ideas in these areas on my [blog](#).

But even if you've remained the strong, silent type, there are directories and resources out there posting your and your firm's information without your consent or involvement. Are those appearances helping or hurting you? If you haven't done so lately, it's worth taking a look to see how you look.

- Do a few Google searches on your name and your firm's name along with various combinations that might lead to you, and see what pops up.
- Visit the relatively new [Brightscope advisor search database](#) and check whether your profile is relatively accurate.
- Consider setting up Google Analytics, which sends you notices when your company name or other important keywords appear on Google's radar screen.

There also are advisor directories in which you can voluntarily appear. Frankly, you want to proceed with caution here. Some of these gather contact information and sell it for less-than-kosher purposes. Others charge a fee and promise you improved Web presence by serving as a one-stop portal to your various appearances. I haven't seen evidence that



these offerings tangibly improve on numerous free strategies you can use to develop your Internet presence more naturally (and cheaply). But there are a few legitimate directories I've seen advisors use effectively, such as:

- [NAPFA](#) (if you are a NAPFA member)
- [FIGuide](#)
- [Google places](#), if you want to be a presence in your local community

Networking by any other name

Last but not least is the melding of watching and being watched. In the world of international politics, that's called espionage. On the Internet, it's networking.

As a business person (and probably a people person), you already know the personal and professional advantages networking has to offer as well as the drain it can be on your time.

I see more advisors moving hesitantly into networking, citing compliance concerns and their clients' lack of interest. If you ask me, even the SEC can't shove that champagne cork back into the bottle, and your client base is already at least taking sips when nobody's looking. It doesn't mean you should disregard compliance, but there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy a glass of networking bubbly without being branded a lush.

- If you've not yet set up a LinkedIn profile, get one — with your picture — and start connecting some dots.
- Facebook and Twitter seem less prevalent in our industry, but their use is growing. If you're not on those sites yet, at least keep an eye on them. And never say never.
- If you find it enjoyable, participate in some of the Internet forums described above by posting well-reasoned comments. I know of instances in which good postings have led to media interviews.

You may like, love, hate or yawn at the Internet. But when it comes down to it, it's simply the latest "pencil" — another way for us to communicate with one another. No doubt it too will be replaced by something else, sooner or later. Recently I read a quote from Richard Bach (author of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*), which applies well to the ways of technology: "What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly."

Fly, my friend, fly.



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