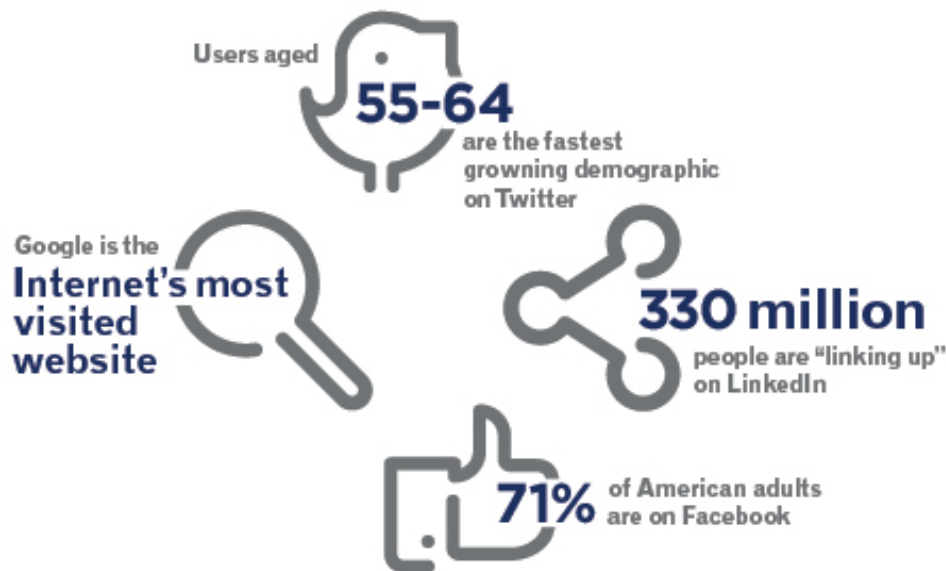


# Online vs. Real life

Why the blurring lines of personal connection are creating even more opportunities for your business

A visit to your website, a “like” on a Facebook post, a new connection on LinkedIn, those 140 (or less) little characters that make up a tweet. They might not seem like much, but they can amount to a lot when it comes to strengthening your existing client relationships and helping cultivate new ones. After all, we live in a digital world:



Sources: Pew Research Center, GlobalWebIndex, LinkedIn

The web and social media are prominent, powerful and have the potential to make a big impact on businesses. That's why it's important to consider the role your digital presence – or lack thereof – is playing in yours.

As a financial advisor in a bank or credit union, referrals are a critical piece of your ongoing growth, and in the digital age the Internet has become an integral part of the referral process. For Raymond James advisors, referrals represent 90% of new business, and 90% of those referrals use Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, professional websites and more to “vet” a recommended advisor before ever making contact directly. Online presences are the new first impressions, helping to engender confidence in your abilities and even trust long before a discovery meeting, and perhaps the most important presence you can develop online is your website.

More than just an online brochure or business card, your website should be used as a digital extension of your “storefront,” establishing or reaffirming your credibility for clients and prospects. It’s an opportunity to feature every facet of your brand – save for the face to face – in one place. With a visit to your website, a prospect can learn your unique value proposition, assess your knowledge and expertise, decide if they fit into one of your client niches, access regularly updated content like expert commentary and newsletters, read about your community involvement, log in to their client accounts, and get familiar with your personality through the website’s look and feel or even a self-penned blog.

While your website can serve as the “flagship” of your online presence, social media has become a way to lend even more legitimacy to your business’s technological and social savvy – in addition, of course, to creating paths to drive traffic back to your website. Each social network offers distinct levels of connection. You can congratulate a client on a grandchild’s graduation on Facebook. Share timely, topical news on Twitter. And ask for a key introduction from a LinkedIn connection. Overall, a strong social media presence will enable you to:

#### **Make new connections**

- Professionally through LinkedIn
- Personally through Facebook

#### **Build your brand**

- Impact search results
- Ensure visual and tonal consistency across platforms
- Convey your personality – photos, news, etc.

#### **Engage clients**

- Cultivate a sense of camaraderie and inclusion – share photos and stories from client events
- Create “wow” moments – pay attention to clients’ and connections’ posts so you can celebrate their successes and proactively address changes in their situations

Ultimately, there’s no substitute for the real thing when it comes to strengthening your relationships with clients and prospects – nothing is more powerful than a face-to-face conversation. But it’s important not to forget the impact a strong online presence can make in the real world of your business.