

DEVELOP YOUR NETWORK

How to use social media to gain contracts





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How to use social media to gain contracts

Contracting is a people business – your success depends on your ability to form and nurture relationships with former and potential employers.

Face-to-face contact is still very important, but all contractors should now also harness the power of social media channels to present the most polished, knowledgeable and engaging version of themselves possible.

Most of the working population now uses LinkedIn as an online resume and professional networking tool – in fact the network has nearly 400 million users. It's a powerful platform, but the challenge for contractors is that most of the jobs and headhunters on the network are geared towards full-timers, meaning those seeking contract work get lost in the mix.

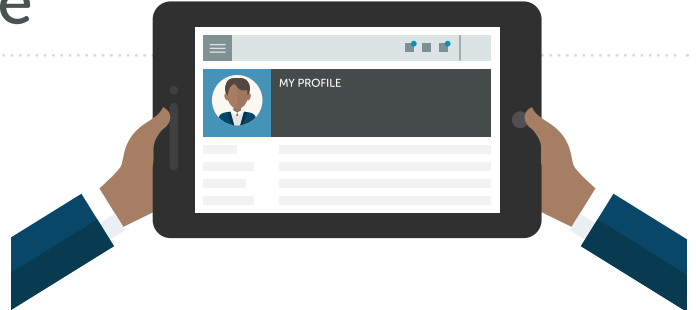
Now, thanks to iContract, there is a dedicated online community just for contractors. Employers and recruiters can easily find contractors whose profiles and availability meet their needs while contractors are able to search and apply for their next ideal role. iContract brings a sense of community to contractors, encourages people to connect with one another both through the platform and through events held offline.



Creating your own profile

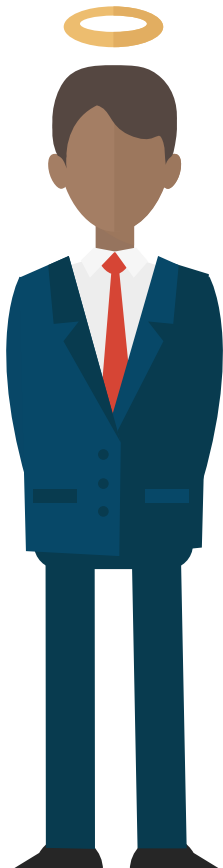
Social media is very give-and-take – you will find that if you put in the effort, you will reap the rewards.

In order to successfully gain work through iContract, the very first step is to create a profile that will quickly catch the attention of employers and recruiters and will immediately highlight all your relevant skills and experience.



Put your best foot forward

iContract is completely free for contractors – all you need is a username and password. When you sign up, you'll be asked a few basic questions and will then be asked to create a profile. You can either do this from scratch, or, if you want to save time, by uploading information from your LinkedIn profile.



While it can be as quick as a few clicks, setting aside some distraction-free time to complete the iContract profile at the start of the process will save you the labour-intensive exercise of copy-pasting chunks of previous resumes into job application fields further down the track. Once you've filled out all applicable fields, you will be able to convert the information from your iContract profile to an iContract resume.

We urge you to spend some time thinking about how you want to portray yourself, rather than just importing your LinkedIn or resume information. Social media, much like any resume, is a place to put the best version of yourself forward, but also to offer a little more about who you are as a person. Your summary section is like a cover letter, but don't be afraid to let your personality shine through and keep the tone conversational. Read your summary out loud to check it comes across as you intended.

It's a good exercise to refresh your iContract profile regularly and we would encourage you to look critically at the way you have described your work experience before you save your profile, just to ensure it's as relevant and snappy as possible.

The iContract resource library and blog have plenty of fresh advice specific to contractors, so make sure you regularly read the latest articles and incorporate any new tips into your profile.



Be concise and relevant

Too many jobseekers think the more information they share in their resume, the better, when in fact the opposite is true.

Resumes, like any first impression, can scare others off if they offer too much information, too soon. Job seeking is very much like dating, in that you reveal measured amounts of information at each date. Just as you wouldn't publish your entire life story on your dating profile, you don't need to document every day of your working life on your iContract profile.

Your iContract profile is no place to lie, or even to overstate the truth, but it is a place to highlight the most impressive parts of your career history and quickly skim over the rest. So if your first job as an office administration assistant involved making coffees, shredding paper and fetching your manager's dry-cleaning, but you have now risen up the ranks and are looking for a legal contracting role, you might like to roll all of your experience into a statement such as "working closely with the regional manager to ensure the smooth

running of the office". Your dry-cleaning pick-up skills are great, but they are not relevant to the legal role you now want. Leave it out and instead bulk up the parts of your career history you would want an interviewer to focus on.

Keep your descriptions punchy and even in bullet point form. Only drill down to the specific client accounts or projects you worked on if they are recognisable outside the organisation. Otherwise you risk filling up your profile with names and terms the prospective employer doesn't recognise, which is likely to make them automatically switch off and move to the next candidate.

Likewise, if you are looking for a legal contracting gig and have legal experience, you do not need to mention that you paid your way through university by giving out food samples at supermarkets. This has no relevance to your legal skills and has been superseded by your experience in the legal sector. Focus on this. A legal practice reading your profile is only looking for experience that will help their business, so keep all elements of your profile relevant to the job you want.





A picture tells a thousand words

Before you reach for your mobile and preen yourself for a selfie to upload to your iContract profile, think about what you want to convey about yourself.

Anyone in a high-ranking position of an organisation, particularly one that involves representing the company at external events, will have a professional business photo.

These professional shots are easily distinguishable from a regular selfie due to the angle, lighting, clothing and most importantly, background used. You'll notice professional photographs do not allow any elements into the frame that do not reinforce the subject's professional profile. For example, a journalist who reviews cars for a living might use an image of himself sitting in what is obviously a car. But someone who is working in finance for a sector that has absolutely nothing to do with cars should not. Selfies that are obviously taken in cars seem to be very popular on social media, but these should not be used as your

professional photo if your industry has nothing to do with cars, transport or seatbelts.

As a rule, the less going on in the background the better, as it gives your prospective employer less opportunity to judge you before they meet you. For example, even if you are a working mother, your professional photograph should not be one of you standing in the park with the kids hanging off you. Yes, your role as a mother defines who you are as a person, but it should not give employers any reason to discriminate against you before you have a chance to tell them that you keep your professional life very separate to your parenting life. By instead submitting a clean image of you dressed for business success, you eliminate the potential for employers to skim past your profile without even speaking to you, simply because the image of you with all your children had them automatically thinking that you wouldn't be any good in the role because you would be too busy juggling your parent responsibilities.





Optimise with connections and recommendations

Once you are happy with the wording and detail of your profile, you should explore iContract's features to boost your ranking. Just like building a web of networks offline, the more links you weave through your iContract profile, the higher your potential to secure contracts that suit you.

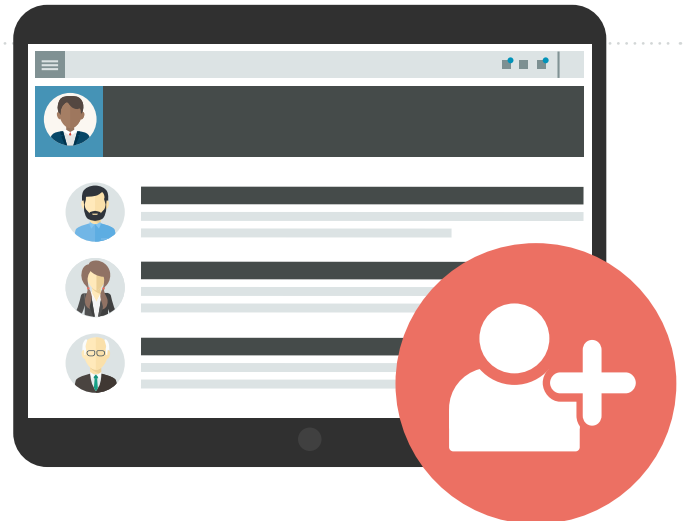
You'll firstly need to tag the right industry, subsector and skills. The most sought-after contractors are specialists in their field, so you'll want to make sure you have highlighted the areas you excel in to boost your chances of being found, matched and hired for a job that fits this.

Then you'll want to make sure you are connected to the right people in the business. Successful contractors often pick up work through former employers, former colleagues and other people in the industry they have met either through their jobs, friends or in professional networking situations.

iContract allows you to take those connections online, and to easily keep those people updated on your career movements, to ensure you remain front-of-mind when they need your skill set for a job. To complete the connections part of your profile, simply search your former contacts by name under the "my connections" section of the site.

Remember, the aim of building connections is to establish an online network of professionals to help your career, not for you to appear popular. You'll want to apply some strategy to your connections, approaching those who you would walk up and say hello to if you saw them offline and people who you know have professional integrity. This is career networking and just like the words you use to describe your work experience, and the clothes you wear to an interview, the people you associate with help form the first impression prospective employers will form of you.

Next you'll want to get your professional contacts on board to help vouch for your skills. Online networking cuts out so much interview time (which could be earning time) as a prospective employer is able to read career endorsements on a candidate's profile, without having to go through the long process of reference checking phone calls. We all know the feeling of your life being put on hold while the recruiter plays phone tag with



one of your former employers you have provided as a reference for your CV. iContract allows you to send endorsement requests to the former colleagues, managers, clients or contacts you are connected to on the site.

You can do this by sending out a recommendation message under each role under your work experience section on your profile. The recommendation should relate to this role only. Your connection will receive your recommendation request and it's up to them to decide whether or not to respond. If they do respond, you will receive their recommendation as a message and it's then up to you to decide whether or not to publish it on your profile.

By adding these to your profile, prospective employers can not only see that others in the industry vouch for your professional skills, but can also click on the endorser's profile to verify their connection to you and their status in the industry. In a people industry like contracting, word of mouth is everything, so you should really strive for high-quality endorsements. Just remember though, social media makes life incredibly transparent, and it's going to be very obvious if you are just getting your best friends in the office to write nice things about you in exchange for you doing the same for their profile. An endorsement from someone more senior, particularly someone who directly managed you, is going to be a lot more credible.

You should be regularly updating your iContract profile, both to add new roles and to indicate your availability to take on new contracts through the calendar function.



Go forth and secure contracts

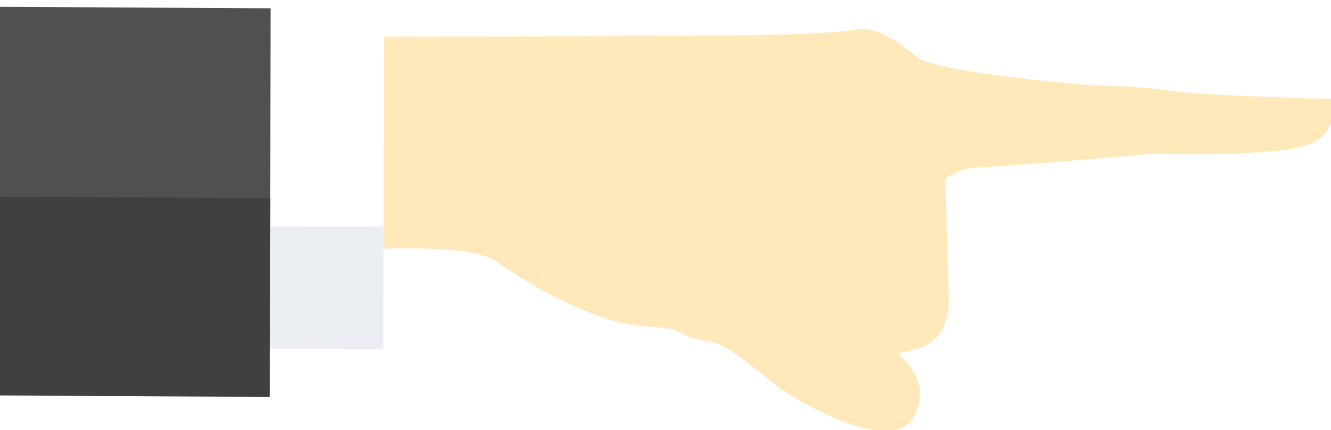
iContract will suggest contracts to you based on the information in your profile, and recruiters may also connect with, and approach you directly, but you can also proactively browse the contracts that are available on the site. Simply fill in the criteria you are looking for, such as your skills, rate, your available timing and location and a list of results will appear right away.

Applying couldn't be more simple – just click the "Apply" button and your profile will be sent directly to the recruiter. Alternatively, you can make direct contact with the recruiter, by simply clicking the "chat" icon beneath their profile picture. This is a

particularly strong tactic if you would like to stand out from the mass of applicants and to show how serious you are about the role by asking questions.

Once you have applied for a job, you can check your status through the site (under My Applications – Current Applications) where you can see which stage of the recruitment process the employer is in.

If the employer makes an offer, you will be notified directly and will receive the contract rate, duration, start date and other terms for your review. You can either accept this, or reply with a counter-offer, just like you would if you were negotiating offline.





Other social media outlets for professional networking

LinkedIn

iContract is a dedicated networking space for the contracting community, but LinkedIn is still an important place to connect with other professionals in your sector.

Just as you update your CV with each new job, you should update your online professional profile on both iContract and LinkedIn. There are two reasons for doing regular spring cleans of your LinkedIn profile. The first is that most employers hit Google before they hire anyone (and actually, usually before they even interview them), and your LinkedIn profile is likely to be one of the first search results. You'll need to make sure that you are consistent about how you promote yourself across all platforms. If your iContract profile says you are available to take on contracts, but your LinkedIn profile says you are still employed full-time, alarm bells may sound. LinkedIn is also an important way of keeping up-to-date with the latest news and

developments in your sector. As a contractor, you are marketing yourself as an expert in your field, so you need to make sure you are ahead of the game should a prospective employer quiz you on your opinion of the latest industry discussion point. If you are already writing articles or blog posts related to the industry, make sure you share them with your LinkedIn audience.

The iContract resource library and blog feature plenty of fresh advice specific to contractors, so make sure you regularly read the latest articles and incorporate any new tips into your profile.

Make sure you are connected to the news of leading companies and professionals in your sector so that their announcements and any articles they publish or share appear in your newsfeed. Joining the iContract special interest groups on LinkedIn and follow iContract's news to remain plugged into a community of like-minded contracting professionals.





Twitter

Twitter basically allows you to customise a news feed of discussion and links to topics you are interested in. From a professional perspective, Twitter is a very time-efficient way of keeping up to date with the latest industry news and discussion, which can only help build your specialist knowledge in your field.

Start by identifying the movers and shakers in your industry and following what they have to say. You can interact with their updates by retweeting or liking what they say and also by responding. Your intelligent interactions with these people will usually spark their curiosity and it's likely they will start following you. In this way, you can start establishing yourself as an industry voice, and can use trending and industry hashtags to weigh in on topical discussions.

If you're looking for a place to start, you could begin by sharing some of the articles from iContract's resource library and blog, to show your followers you are plugged into the latest developments in contracting.

Remember – social media conversation is an art and your posts should be intelligent and professional. While your ultimate aim is to build up contacts that will benefit your career, you should network only very subtly. Your presence should add to the atmosphere, through relevant insights and conversations, so that people think following you will make their own feed more interesting. Avoid being negative in any way and whatever you do, make sure you're not coming across as too pushy – bad social media etiquette can be worse than no social media presence at all.

Facebook

If iContract and LinkedIn are where you "work hard", then most people would think of Facebook as where you go to "play hard". People exercise a lot more freedom in their Facebook activity than on professional networks, and in most industries, you would not ask your manager to be your friend on Facebook unless you were actually really good friends outside the office. The lines blur as your professional life becomes so much more intertwined with your personal life, but as a general rule, Facebook is not a place to stalk business contacts. It is, however, a place to join special interest groups, and you might like to catch up with the iContract

community on Facebook, to join discussions and to read the latest contracting news.

Depending on whether you have your privacy settings on lockdown or not, if anyone decides to put your name into Google, your Facebook page will come up high in search rankings. Organisations are increasingly aware that any one of their employee's rogue antics on social media could greatly harm their reputation, so it's very normal for them to search you on Facebook before offering any sort of contract.

Before you apply for any role, either online or offline, you should do an audit of your Facebook page. Use the View As function to see what the general public has access to on your page, as this is what a prospective employer would be able to use to make a judgement call. If they can see photos you are tagged in that show you blind drunk, or if they can see that you belong to causes or groups that do not align with the values of their organisation, they are likely to decide you would not be the right fit for their organisation.

As Facebook use spans generations, industries and home and work life, a general rule is that you should only share what you wouldn't mind your mother, your children and your boss seeing. So before you do anything, make sure you adjust your privacy settings so that prospective employers can only see what prospective employers should be able to see.

That doesn't mean you have to make everything on your page invisible to outsiders – it could be worth selecting a few posts you would be more than happy for an employer to find to make viewable to the "public". Examples are things like work achievements, awards or promotions, or a blog you have written that is relevant to your industry.

Other networks

Unless you are in a very creative industry and role, it's unlikely employers will be interested in your Instagram, Snapchat or Pinterest accounts, but the same vetting as applied to your Facebook account should apply. You don't want some flyaway comment that's left behind on your online footprint to cost you your dream opportunity, so the best thing you can do is clean up all of your profiles and increase all of your privacy settings to ensure employers cannot dredge up any nasty surprises.



How to harness blogging to bring business to you

To really prove that you are a specialist in your field, who will add value to an organisation, you should be able to hold an interesting conversation about what's happening in the industry. It's even better if you can spark conversation online, through thought-provoking blog posts.

Previously, business people turned to the newspaper or trade magazines for all their industry news and commentary, as they featured interviews and columns from industry leaders. Now that people get more of their news from industry blogs, industry thought leaders at varying levels of seniority are picking up strong followings online.

By offering your insight into the latest technological development affecting your industry, or offering tips for businesses dealing with a common legal gripe that you are well versed in, you can stand out from the crowd as a contractor who will really add value to a business. You should share links to your insights through your Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook accounts and should provide a link to your blog on your iContract profile.

Linking to studies or commentary by other leaders in your sector can help to further strengthen your network, particularly if they pick up your piece and link to it through their own social media accounts. It can be difficult to find the time to maintain a blog, but you should factor it into your week as both a learning and business development exercise. Keep your posts relevant to your industry and keep them current to help boost your chances of being found through keyword searches. Make sure your blog contains an "About" section that outlines your credentials and the fact that you are a contractor available for hire. You could also link to your iContract profile so prospective employers can see your calendar of availability.

Top contractors know that their social media identity is only half the equation of their success, as face-to-face interactions will always be the most powerful measure of your reputation. Of course you need to take all your people skills with you to work every day when you are on an assignment, but when you wrap up a contract, you need to apply just as much effort to managing your online profile, across all your business and personal social networks.





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